3. You have been contracted by UNICEF to undertake the role of a consultant in a project (joint partnership between them and the Ministry of Gender and Children) a program that gives direct funds to families staying with orphaned children, to plan a monitoring system for the same.

a) What are the advantages of participatory evaluation methods?

**Abstract**

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. (Guijt, I. (2014). Participatory Approaches, *Methodological Briefs: Impact Evaluation 5*, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.).

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 analyzing quantitative data or in overseeing the work of technical experts. (Guijt, I. (2014). Participatory Approaches, *Methodological Briefs: Impact Evaluation 5*, UNICEF Office of Research, Florence.).

**Introduction.**

Participatory evaluation is an approach that involves the stakeholders of a programme or policy in the evaluation process. This involvement can occur at any stage of the evaluation process, from the evaluation design to the data collection and analysis and the reporting of the study. A participatory approach can be taken with any impact evaluation design, and with quantitative and qualitative data. However, the type and level of stakeholder involvement will necessarily vary between different types, for example between a local level impact evaluation and an evaluation of policy changes (Gujit 2014, p.1). It is important to consider the purpose of involving stakeholders, and which stakeholders should be involved, in order to maximize the effectiveness of the approach.

Since the late 1960’s, "community development" and "participation" have become almost inseparable terms. In fact, one sees the term "participatory community development" almost as often as one sees the term "community development. Many institutions and development agencies have made participation in development a matter of policy. The United States Congress, through the Foreign Assistance Act of 1966, mandated the "participation of the poor majority in the development process as a central concern in [USAID] programs, if not always yet in their activities" (Cohen & Uphoff, 1977, p. ix). Unfortunately, the "effective participation of the rural poor in the development process is more easily mandated in programming documents than achieved in the real world of program

implementation" (Korten, 1984a, p. 176).

The kind of participation envisioned by the United States Congress was not

made explicit in their mandate to USAID. However, a six week conference was

held at Massachusetts Institute of Technology during the summer of 1968 to discuss the implementation of the Congressional mandate. Three areas in which the

participation of the potential beneficiaries in future development work should be

incorporated were identified and emphasized at the conference: decision-making,

implementation, and benefits. To these, Cohen and Uphoff (1977) added a fourth

area: "participation in evaluation" (p. 7). As community development work which is facilitated by outside change agents has become more participatory—shifting from a "top-down" approach towards development to a more "bottom-up" or "grass roots" approach—the incongruity of the continued use of outside evaluation "experts" schooled in the positivist paradigm of evaluation, has become more evident. As a result, Cohen and Uphoff (1977) have concluded that "unless specifically provided for in the project design there will be no evaluation in which local people or local leaders can participate" (p. 57).

Many development agencies and community development workers have been

advocating more participatory methodologies. Singh (1988) contends that, "People’s participation in development ... is not as universal as it is sometimes claimed.

Participation is still most common at the stage of implementation, where people are

recipients and is least in the evaluation stage of the programme" (pp. 35-36). The type of evaluation, how it is carried out, who is involved, and who determines what to evaluate and for what purpose, become critical questions. These questions need to be addressed jointly by the community, the community development worker, and the funding agencies involved, in order to ensure that the control of the evaluation process rests in the hands of the community. It has been generally recognized that the participation of the community in its own development process is not only desirable, but also necessary for sustainable community-controlled development. Development ideology and practice has slowly evolved from merely asking the proposed beneficiaries to participate in the implementation phase of community development programs, to including their participation in planning and evaluation as well. Beginning in the early 1970’s, as a result of the increased emphasis on participation.

Participatory Research (PR) struggled with the question of the ownership of development work and social research. Although local communities and groups were the proposed beneficiaries and participants in the development/research process, the ownership the power and authority over these programs continued to rest solidly in the hands of the donor agencies. Decrying this situation as neo-colonialism, PR sought to shift the ownership of community development and social research back into hands of the local people. An important contribution of PR to development work has been the recognition of the importance of indigenous knowledge. As indigenous knowledge and indigenous practices were recovered during PR and community development, it soon became evident that the Western model of development and its emphasis on Western technological knowledge was often insufficient, inappropriate, or culturally unacceptable. Although PR helped open the door for the investigation and recovery of indigenous knowledge and practices, evaluation research has been slow to follow. Despite an effort by evaluation practitioners to increase the participation of the local community in the evaluation of community development, PE has often been limited to: participation in evaluation. Ownership of the evaluation process has often stayed within the hands of the donor agencies and evaluation "experts", using Western evaluation models.

Experienced community builders know that involving stakeholders (the people directly connected to and affected by their projects) in their work is tremendously important. It gives them the information they need to design, and to adjust or change, what they do to best meet the needs of the community and of the particular populations that an intervention or initiative is meant to benefit. This is particularly true in relation to evaluation. As we have previously dis ity-based participatory research can be employed in describing the community, assessing community issues and needs, finding and choosing best practices, and/or evaluation. (Module 2 notes on participatory evaluation).

**Why do participatory evaluation?**

Participatory approaches require the commitment and valuable time of many. Yet, the benefits are far-reaching. Participatory evaluation allows groups to. (U.S. Agency for International Development, 1996 and Institute of Development Studies, 1998)

**Identify locally relevant evaluation questions**

Participatory evaluation ensures that the evaluation focuses on locally relevant questions that meet the needs of program planners and beneficiaries. Participatory approaches allow local stakeholders to determine the most important evaluation questions that will affect and improve their work.

**Improve program performance**

Participatory evaluation is reflective and action-oriented. It provides stakeholders, including beneficiaries, with the opportunity to reflect on project progress and generate knowledge that results in being able to apply the lessons learned. It provides opportunities for groups to take corrective action and make mid-course improvements.

**Empower participants**

A participatory approach is empowering because it claims the right for local people to control and own the process of making evaluation decisions and implementing them. Participating in an evaluation from start to finish can give stakeholders a sense of ownership over the results. Recognizing local talents and expertise builds confidence and pride in the community, and among participants.

**Build capacity**

Conducting a participatory evaluation promotes participant learning and is an opportunity to introduce and strengthen evaluation skills. Active participation by stakeholders can result in new knowledge and a better understanding of their environment. This, in turn, enables groups to identify action steps and advocate for policy changes. It can provide participants with tools to transform their environments.

**Develop leaders and build teams**

Participatory evaluation builds teams and participant commitment through collaborative inquiry. Inviting a broad range of stakeholders to participate and lead different parts of the process can develop and celebrate local leadership skills. It can lead to stronger, more organized groups, strengthening the community’s resources and networks.

**Sustain organizational learning and growth**

Finally, a participatory evaluation is not just interested in findings; it is focused on creating a learning process. It creates a knowledge base among local people and organizations, which can be applied to other programs and projects. The techniques and skills acquired can lead to self-sustained action.

**What are the challenges?**

(U.S. Agency for International Development, 1996 and Institute of Development Studies, 1998)

**Time and commitment**

A participatory approach requires time and commitment from many players. It involves coordinating, training and building the skills of diverse participants with varying backgrounds, skills and interest levels in the evaluation. It may be challenging to fully adopt a participatory approach on complex projects with many components. However, the participatory model doesn’t have to be an all-or-nothing

approach. It can be used for smaller parts of on overall evaluation and can be combined with more traditional evaluation methods.

**Resources**

Since the evaluation process requires the involvement of many people, it is important to consider and allocate funds and resources realistically. This includes

budgeting for adequate staff and time required of consultants and community residents.

**Conflict**

Participatory evaluations require planning for conflict resolution among the individuals involved. Conflicts can arise because of cultural, language, class and other differences that exist among and within groups. These conflicts can hinder the successful teamwork required for participatory evaluation. Thus, decision-making and conflict resolution processes need to be established and used on an

ongoing basis. Two important questions to address are: Who will make decisions? And, how will the group address conflict?

**How do you do it?**

**Step 1: Decide if a participatory evaluation approach is appropriate.**

Because of the intensity of effort, it is important to weigh the costs and benefits of using this approach. Many evaluations combine participatory and conventional approaches. The chart on page five lays out the differences between participatory and more conventional evaluations.

**Step 2: Identify who should and wants to be involved.**

Determine who will participate and what roles they will play. How will project members be invited to participate? What will keep them involved? Depending on the project, it may be appropriate to create a small working group representative of project stakeholders. Two important steps are to ask for broad participation and to hold a meeting to discuss the process and what it requires.

**Step 3: Collaborate on creating an evaluation plan.**

Collectively, the group defines the priorities for the evaluation. Activities include: identifying key objectives or outcomes; selecting relevant indicators that document change or show evidence of progress; agreeing on appropriate ways to collect information; and creating plans for data collection, analysis and action. Selecting indicators and data collection methods is not always easy. There is a balancing act between choosing locally-relevant factors and those that can be applied more widely (Institute of Development Studies (IDS) 1998). There is the issue of balancing what is considered to be credible and valid data with what is “good enough” for the task at hand. Participatory evaluations often require adapting data collection strategies to fit the skills of local participants and the local resources available. This approach may challenge what people consider rigorous data collection. Adopting participatory approaches requires accepting new, less rigid

standards of what is relevant and valid data. (Institute of Development Studies (IDS) 1998)

Participatory evaluations often use rapid appraisal techniques which are simpler, quicker and less costly than other traditional data collection methods. Using multiple methods helps ensure the validity and reliability of findings. Often, it is best to choose methods that neighborhood members and others can easily carry out, take short amounts of time to accomplish, and appeal to participants. Tasks like drawing, mapping or sorting photographs can create energy and enthusiasm that can appeal to participants’ sense of what is important to them. (Institute of Development Studies (IDS) 1998)

**Step 4: Gather information, analyze it and build consensus on results, collectively.**

Once data are gathered, the group collectively analyzes the data to build a common body of knowledge. Then, facilitators can work with participants to reach consensus on findings, conclusions and recommendations.

**Step 5: Agree on findings and how they will be used.**

In this step, the group develops a common understanding of the results and, based on the findings, develops and commits to an action plan.

**Conclusion**

Participatory evaluation approaches can be empowering, educational tools for community partnerships that can be used to ensure that evaluations address locally relevant questions, contribute to improving program performance, and support the development of sustainable partnerships. More importantly, the approach is focused on building the capacity of individuals and teams to carry out all steps in an evaluation process. In this respect, participatory evaluation can contribute to empowering communities to act and create change within their neighborhoods, community organizations and local governmental institutions.

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b) Formulate the steps in planning a monitoring system.

Kusek and Rist (2004) suggest that building an M&E system that responds to the results in an organization’s strategy is a 10-step process, as summarized below.

**Step One: Conducting a Readiness Assessment**to determine the capacity and willingness of the government/organization and its development partners to construct a results-based M&E system. This assessment addresses such issues as the presence or absence of champions, the barriers to building a system, who will own it, and who will oppose the M&E system.

**Step Two: Agreeing on Outcomes to Monitor and Evaluate**addresses the key requirement of developing strategic outcomes that then focus and drive resource allocation and activities. These outcomes should be derived from the strategic priorities (goals).

**Step Three: Developing Key Indicators to Monitor Outcomes**, so the degree to which the outcomes are being achieved can be assessed. Developing indicators is a core activity in building an M&E system and drives all subsequent data collection, analysis, and reporting. Both the political and methodological issues in creating credible and appropriate indicators are not to be underestimated.

**Step Four: Gathering Baseline Data on Indicators**involves describing and measuring the initial conditions being addressed by the outcomes. It is the first measurement of the indicators and defines the starting point.

**Step Five: Planning for Improvements**requires setting realistic targets and recognizes that most outcomes are long-term, complex, and not quickly achieved. It is helpful to establish interim targets that specify how much progress towards an outcome is to be achieved each year (or other time period) and the resources needed. Measuring results against targets can involve both direct and proxy indicators and use of both quantitative and qualitative data.

**Step Six: Monitoring for Results**is the administrative and institutional task of establishing data collection, analysis and reporting guidelines; designating who will be responsible for activities; establishing quality control processes; establishing timelines and costs; working through roles and responsibilities; and establishing guidelines on transparency and dissemination of the information and analysis. It is emphasized that, in constructing an M&E system, the challenges of ownership, management, maintenance, and credibility need to be addressed clearly.

**Step Seven: Evaluative Information to Support Decision Making**focuses on the contributions that evaluation studies and analyses can make throughout this process to assess results and move towards outcomes. Analysis of program theory, evaluability assessments, process evaluations, outcome and impact evaluations, and evaluation syntheses are among the strategies discussed that can be employed in evaluating a results-based M&E system.

**Step Eight: Analyzing and Reporting Findings**is a crucial step, as it determines what findings are reported to whom, in what format, and at what intervals. This step has to address the existing capacity for producing the information, and focuses on the methodologies for accumulating and assessing information, and preparing analyses and reports.

**Step Nine: Using the Findings**emphasizes that the crux of the system is not simply generating results-based information, but getting the information to the appropriate users in a timely fashion so that they can take the information into account in making decisions. This step also addresses the roles of development partners and civil society in using the information to strengthen accountability, transparency, and resource allocation procedures.

**Step Ten: Sustaining the M&E System**recognizes the long-term process involved in ensuring the longevity and utility of an M&E system. Six criteria are seen as crucial to the sustainability of an M&E system: demand, structure, trustworthy and credible information, accountability, incentives, and capacity. Each dimension needs constant attention over time to ensure the viability of the system. As noted earlier, building an M&E system does not have to be done according to these 10 steps. One could define a more detailed number of steps, or fewer. The issue is to ensure that key strategies and activities are recognized, clustered together in a logical manner, and then completed in an appropriate sequence.