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REPORT ON EVALUATION SEMINARS

A B E L

Advancing Basic Education & Literacy

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Bureau for Research and Development • Office of Education • Office of Women in Development
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REPORT ON EVALUATION SEMINARS CONDUCTED FOR PROJECT ABEL

MARCH 1992

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FINAL REPORT

EVALUATION SEMINARS - MARCH 1992

BACKGROUND

In July of 1991, Washington based staff of the Advancing Basic Education and Literacy (ABEL) project sought the services of an evaluation consultant, as well as those of a South African contractor, to carry out three evaluation seminars for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) receiving grants under the USAID funded Educational Support and Training (ESAT) project. The goal of the seminars was "to create the capacity among non-governmental organizations to competently conduct and manage evaluations." The need for the seminars had been identified via observations of both grantees and ABEL staff; and, the need reflected the requirements for external and internal accountability in locally-administered NGOs.

Contractual arrangements were subsequently made with Dr Sharon Harpring, an American evaluation consultant with experience in southern Africa, and with the Leadership Institute, a South African organization experienced in delivering training services and providing logistical support for such activities. Mr Stan De Klerk, Director of the Leadership Institute, and consultant, Mr Rams Ramashia, represented the Institute.

Twenty-nine NGOs were invited to send two representatives of their respective organizations to one of three scheduled, two day seminars. Twenty-three elected to do so. The seminars were conducted on February 27-28 in Durban, and on March 5-6, and 12-13 in Johannesburg.

This report summarizes the objectives of the seminars, the curriculum presented during the seminars, and seminar evaluations in the form of participant feedback and contractor observations measured against the original seminar objectives. Appendices will contain the names of the representatives of participating organizations, the curriculum outline followed by the presentors, handouts, worksheets,and copies of the questionnaire used to evaluate the seminars and survey the participants' interest in obtaining additional evaluation training. A brief bibliography will also be included.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SEMINARS

OBJECTIVES

The objectives for the seminars were outlined in the scope of work developed by USAID and the Director of ABEL. These objectives were further refined as progress on the curriculum content occurred.

There were four major objectives of the seminars:
1. To review and supplement the grantees' existing knowledge of evaluation;
2. To present information on how to satisfy evaluation requirements of donor agencies, e.g., USAID;
3. To assist grantees in planning for an evaluation tailored to their specific programme/project;
4. To critique evaluation plans developed during a participant working session.

These objectives were highlighted for the participants on each of the meeting days and feedback was solicited on the achievement of the objectives.

PROCEDURES

The agenda and course outline for the seminars can be found in Appendix A.

The same basic format was followed for the three seminars with minor adjustments for the Johannesburg meetings as a result of suggestions made in Durban and to accommodate the anticipated larger numbers attending in Johannesburg.

Each seminar was opened with introductions of the presenters by Stan De Klerk. An "ice-breaker exercise" served to acquaint the participants with one another and with the presenters. Participants were requested to move so as to be seated next to someone with whom they did not work. They then had approximately 10 minutes in which to familiarize one another with their names and purposes of their respective organizations. Each participant then introduced the person with whom they had been conversing to the rest of the group. Following this activity each person was asked to state what it was they hoped to learn as a result of attending the seminars. During the course of the second day the presenters assessed for themselves whether the expectations of the participants had been addressed and if they had not, attempts were made to do so individually or as part of the programme.

The content for the seminars was presented through a series of questions which were read aloud in Durban and posted on the walls of the meeting room in Johannesburg. Each question was followed by a segment of "lecture", discussion, and in some instances, by small group activity. Mr Ramashia directed the participants through Questions A, B, and C using an interactive mode in which he asked participants to attempt to define evaluation and discuss who might be interested in conducting an evaluation or interested in the results of an evaluation. He also discussed a sample of types of evaluation. Two handouts which were in the packets distributed to participants were noted for later reading.

Questions A, B, and C (given below) were addressed until the first break at 10:30 AM.
Question A: What is evaluation?
Question B: What are the different types of evaluation?
Question C: For whom might evaluation be helpful or required?

Following a break of approximately 30 minutes, Dr Harpring introduced the second session with Question D: I have to evaluate my program. Is there a generic planning method I might be able to use to get acquainted with the steps involved? A set of seven transparencies (corresponding to worksheets for the following day) was used to illustrate critical steps in planning an evaluation. The worksheets may be found in Appendix B. Questions and discussion were encouraged from the participants in order to clarify terminology and understanding. Formulating evaluation questions rather than process questions and anticipating results were emphasized. Two handouts were referenced to support the overall discussion.

In Durban, Dr Harpring continued with Questions E and F, while in Johannesburg, Mr Ramashia handled the discussions for Question E. On the latter occasions, the participants were divided into small groups and attempted to identify the advantages and disadvantages of various types of data collection instruments and then reconvened for discussion. In the former instance, the participants were directed to handouts reflecting the same type of information and discussion followed. Two additional handouts on designing questionnaires and conducting surveys were also referenced in conjunction with Question E, which asks: How should I decide which data collection method to use?

Question F: All of this sounds very time-consuming and I have other work to do. What options do I have? - provided stimulation for a discussion of the roles of the internal and external evaluator, as well as procedures for a

collaborative model. Advantages as well as disadvantages of each choice were stressed, and strategies for defining a scope of work for an external evaluator, and recruitment procedures were outlined. The necessity of checking references for applicants and notifying those not selected were discussed. Because some of the organizations are presently undergoing evaluations, questions regarding the contracting of an evaluator, expectations for reports and so forth were frequently addressed.

A break for lunch followed the above. Participants sat together during lunch and considerable "networking" seemed to be occurring on these occasions.

Little time was spent on Question G: This sounds expensive. I may not have enough money. Are there other limitations I should think about?- because we found that most of the points to be presented evolved from the discussions during the session prior to lunch. Reference was made to a handout contained in participants' materials.

Earlier discussion provided a transition to Question H: I've made a tentative decision. We'll hire an external evaluator and one or two of our project staff will work with the evaluator. Now what more should we consider? The importance of developing a scope of work for the evaluation was discussed and participants were directed to the ninth handout outlining major considerations for this task.

Dr Harpring then led the group on to a discussion of Question I: I feel pretty good about all this, but my money comes from USAID. Do they have any particular philosophy about evaluation or any special requirements it might be helpful for me to know? USAID documents were helpful resource materials for stressing the importance of using evaluation to determine effectiveness, significance, efficiency and to learn lessons. Concerns for what interpretation of the data should address and the importance of unexpected effects were dealt with, as well as seeking explanations for unsatisfactory progress. Three handouts, numbers 10, 11, and 12, were referenced during the discussion, with number 11, the Project Evaluation Summary provided only to acquaint participants with a format frequently used for large projects in particular. This session completed the first day of the seminars.

Activities for the second day commenced with distribution of the set of worksheets corresponding to the previous day's

transparencies. Participants then proceeded to spend the morning in discussion with the person accompanying them from their organization and in completing the worksheets with examples from their own program. Dr Harpring circulated among the participants in order to determine the level of expertise demonstrated, and to serve as a resource for those participants with questions or encountering difficulty.

Following a break for lunch, participants reconvened and the afternoon was spent primarily in having a representative for each organization provide examples from each of the worksheets. This activity provoked considerable discussion as was intended. The worksheets call for a comprehensive understanding of the audiences for the "prospective" evaluation, the key characteristics of the program, weighing the merits of investigating the characteristics, writing evaluation questions, anticipating potential findings, outlining tasks necessary to carry out an evaluation, and decisions regarding report writing and presentations.

Participants were given two sets of the worksheets so that they would have a "clean" set for use on-site should the need arise.

The final activity of the seminars was to collect the seminar evaluation survey forms from the participants. The forms were placed in the packets along with the handouts and participants were encouraged to read them on the first day so that they could think about the questions before responding on the second day. A tabulation of the forms is given in the section Seminar Survey Results and Discussion and copies of the survey can be found in Appendix C. The form was designed by Mr Ramashia in consultation with Mr De Klerk and Dr Harpring.

PARTICIPANTS

As has been stated, 30 organizations were each invited to send two representatives to the seminars. All six organizations encouraged to attend the Durban seminar were present. This group included five Black persons and seven White persons; only two males were in the group and both were Black, one from the East London area and the other from the Cape.

The second seminar, held in Johannesburg, had a total of 18 participants representing nine organizations. Among the participants were 11 Black persons and 7 White persons. Included among them were four males and 14 females.

The final seminar, held in Johannesburg, experienced several absences from participants who had indicated they were planning to attend. Thirteen organizations were originally invited to attend, however eight were actually represented. Among the 13 participants on the first day were five White persons and eight Black persons. Ten of the participants were female.

Each seminar contained persons who were unfamiliar with evaluation concepts as well as persons who had some fundamental knowledge of evaluation. Only three persons felt reasonably well-versed in how to carry out an evaluation, although 25 had at some point in time been involved in an evaluation; the actual type of evaluation was not investigated. The Durban participants on the whole appeared to feel more confident about filling in the worksheets, although they were more critical of the technical language used than was either of the subsequent groups. Each of the subsequent seminars had at least one or two persons who felt insecure about their ability to respond adequately to the worksheet activity. Two participants in the first seminar held in Johannesburg clearly had difficulty following the English language.

SEMINAR SURVEY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Copies of all survey forms returned by the participants can be found in Appendix C. Thirty-eight persons, from a total of 43 attending the seminars, returned the forms. All forms were returned by the Durban participants, while two are missing from the first seminar held in Johannesburg and three from the second.

An examination of the types of positions held by the participants reveals a wide variety. This could, of course, reflect different titles used for similar jobs. There were approximately nine project directors, coordinators or managers represented among the three groups. This accounts for approximately 21 percent of those attending. Five individuals cited trainer for their positions, and two administrative secretaries were present. Among the other positions mentioned were development officer, public relations/fund raising coordinator, steering committee member, field worker, pre-school teacher and part-time researcher.

Data for most of the survey questions is recorded on a copy of the instrument which follows the description below.

100 percent of the respondents indicated that the objectives of the seminar were clearly presented.
100 percent of the respondents indicated that the seminar was useful.
29 percent (N=11) indicated that they had had some evaluation training.
71 percent (N=27) indicated that they had had no evaluation training.
66 percent (N=25) had conducted an evaluation or participated in one. Thirteen persons had not done so.
74 percent (N=28) mentioned the worksheets and associated activities of the second day as being the most useful topics.
9 individuals mentioned reviewing the "process of evaluation" as being useful.
Other topics mentioned a minimum of three times included USAID expectations, instrumentations techniques, handouts, participatory activities/nature of seminars, and meeting persons/networking.
A number of individuals supported their choices by responding to survey item 7 that the information was useful for future application within their programs.

100 percent, with the inclusion of one ("if I can"), checked that they were likely to apply some of the lessons learnt or use some of the insights gained from the seminar.

The question regarding the topics on which participants would find additional training helpful solicited responses ranging from a high of 82 percent (N=31) for the topic of using evaluation results to the low of 47 percent (N=18) for managing external evaluations.
78 percent were interested in training on managing internal evaluations.
61 percent would like to have training on report writing.
66 percent ticked developing data instruments as a training need.
Most participants ticked multiple topics.
A small number of individuals cited "other" topics on which they believed training would be helpful. These included conflict management among staff (discussed as a potential constraint in an evaluation) and using lesson plans/records as a form of monitoring/accountability for teachers. The latter arose during discussions about the worksheets.

100 percent indicated that they felt that the presenters were familiar with their subject matter and that the handouts adequately supplemented the content presented.

Participants were encouraged to mention changes they would like to see if the seminars were to be run again, as well as to make additional comments. Reactions were almost as varied as the participants themselves and frequently reflected the level of expertise brought to the seminars by the individual. As with most surveys, comments tended to cancel one another, e.g., some felt the seminar was too long, others believed it was too short; some felt the language was too technical, others were thankful for the clarity brought to technical terms. These comments can be read on the forms found in the Appendix.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The participant survey results unequivocably imply that the grantees attending the seminars want more training on evaluation topics. In view of the facts that USAID requires evaluations of its grantees and that most of the participants have had no training in evaluation before the seminars, it is strongly recommended that additional training be provided for grantees.

2. Strategies for delivering evaluation training should be varied to insure that the capacity to carry out evaluation procedures does not reside in only one or two persons within a programme/project. Periodic on-site training or regionalized small group training should be considered so that a broader foundation of knowledge across project personnel can be developed.

3. Subsequent training should initially focus on implementation/process evaluation. A primary goal of evaluation should be continued programme improvement. If more persons understand how to build evaluation into their day-to-day activities, programme problems are likely to be recognized more immediately and resolution of them can occur before potential or substantial damage is incurred. The usefulness of a management information system for evaluation purposes as well as other purposes should be stressed.

4. Projects should be encouraged to identify individuals who can bring certain skills to the evaluation process, whether it be for internal evaluation purposes or to satisfy external requirements for evaluation. For example, some persons have stronger writing skills, while others have organizational skills, or data processing skills. These persons can serve as resources during evaluation activities.

5. Insofar as possible, grantees should receive a schedule of training activities well in advance of their commencement. They should be asked to designate candidates for the centralized/regionalized training and reminders should be sent as the time for the training approaches. It should be clear that the training is important and that it originates out of the ABEL office. The training's relevance to grantee responsibilities should be emphasized.

CONTRACTOR OBSERVATIONS

Sharon Harpring: The seminars were designed to provide an overview of evaluation, with emphasis on how to plan for an evaluation, whether it be externally or internally conducted. I believe that these objectives were accomplished insofar as possible during a two-day intensive period. The participants were somewhat overwhelmed by the amount of time necessary to plan a credible evaluation, yet they indicated an understanding of the importance of doing so. They were concerned about the possibility of losing funds and wanted reassurance that program deficiencies revealed in an evaluation would not automatically result in the withdrawal of funds. Throughout the seminars emphasis was placed on using evaluation results for programme improvement, and efforts were made to dispel the belief that evaluation is an onerous task necessary to appease donors. Accountability of donors to their constitutencies was also stressed.

The grantees were for the most part eager participants in discussions provoked by the material. There seemed to be little reluctance to question the presenters about unfamiliar material and to request additional clarification. I particularly tried to provide many examples from African experiences to illustrate evaluation content. During the tea/coffee breaks and some of the lunches, participants asked me many questions about evaluation as a professional field, the training required, and how to obtain assistance with their evaluation needs. The survey results clearly indicate the desire to know more than could be provided during the two day period.

I strongly urge that consideration be given to some follow-up reinforcement of the evaluation lessons taught during the seminars. Historically, research indicates that one training session on a topic is insufficient to result in substantial changes in behavior. A mechanism to stimulate a continuing dialog, especially regarding using evaluation as an ongoing feature of a program, would be, I believe, appreciated by the grantees, and would ultimately result in better program impact. The participants have received only a sample of what evaluation can do to help them, but they have clearly indicated in the survey that they want more on virtually all of the topics mentioned. Hopefully some means of providing continued assistance can be identified. Participants were urged to contact the ABEL office when they have questions or concerns.

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APPENDIX A

Curriculum Content Outline for Seminars

I. Objectives
   A. To review and/or supplement grantee knowledge of evaluation.
   B. To provide information on how to satisfy evaluation requirements of donor agencies, e.g., USAID.
   C. To assist grantees with the development of program specific evaluations.
   D. To critique program specific evaluation plans.

II. Seminar Curriculum

Question: What is Evaluation?
   A. Defining evaluation
      1. Systematic collection of information
      2. Broad range of topics
      3. For specific audiences
      4. For a variety of purposes

Question: Are there different kinds of evaluation?
   B. Types of evaluation
      1. Handout - Patton: pp 345 - 347 #1
      2. Handout - Five approaches to evaluation #2

Question: For whom might evaluation be helpful or required?
   C. Potential "clients" for evaluation
      1. Institutions
      2. Programs
      3. Personnel
      4. Processes
      5. Products

Question: I have to evaluate my program. Is there a generic planning method I might be able to use to get acquainted with the steps involved?
   D. 1. Generic evaluation model
         a. Definition
         b. Stakeholder considerations
         c. Key attributes/objectives/characteristics
         d. Prioritization of attributes
         e. Evaluation questions
         f. Alternative findings
         g. Task delineation
         h. Planning presentation of results
         i. Report writing
      2. Handout: Advantages of planning #3
      3. Handout: Summary statement #4

Question: How should I decide which data collection method to use?

E. Evaluation instrumentation
   1. Handout: Advantages and disadvantages of various instruments #5
   2. Handout: The questionnaire (USAID) #6
   3. Handout: Conducting the survey (USAID) #7

Question: All of this sounds very time-consuming and I have other work to do. What options do I have?

F. External and internal evaluators
   1. Clarification
      a. In-house personnel
      b. Outside experts
      c. Collaborative model
   2. Considerations when securing an external evaluator
   3. Employment of the external evaluator
      a. Scope of work
         1) Rationale
         2) Objectives
         3) Level of effort
         4) In-house participation
         5) Budget
      b. Recruitment
         1) Qualifications
         2) Advertising
         3) Selecting candidates
         4) Conducting interviews
         5) Follow-up: references
            notification
            contracting

Question: This sounds expensive. I may not have enough money. Are there other limitations I should think about?

G. Constraints and limitations: Handout #8
   1. Budget
   2. Schedule
   3. Availability of information
   4. Existing resources

Question: I've made a tentative decision. We'll hire an external evaluator and one or two of our project staff will work with the evaluator. Now what more should we consider?

H. Developing a scope of work for an evaluation: Handout of major considerations (USAID) #9

Question: I feel pretty good about all this, but my money comes from USAID. Do they have any particular philosophy about evaluation or any special requirements it might be helpful for me to know?

I. The AID mandate for evaluation
   1. Reasons for evaluating
      a. To determine effectiveness
      b. To determine significance
      c. To measure efficiency
      d. To learn lessons
   2. The "regular" evaluation
   3. What the evaluation process should do
   4. What to look for when analyzing the data
   5. What interpretation of the data should address
   6. The importance of unexpected effects
   7. Possible explanations for unsatisfactory progress

J. Handout: Checklist for an evaluation study #10(USAID)

K. The project evaluation summary (PES/USAID) #11

L. Terminology: Handout (USAID) #12

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX D