

PN-AAW-640
48969

**PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION OF PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT:
A SCHEME FOR MEASURING AND MONITORING LOCAL CAPACITY**

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ABSTRACT

Two concerns that arose within both academia and government bureaucracies during the 1960s-- with "people's participation" and with "evaluation"-- converged in the evaluation of participation in development programs and in carrying out any evaluation in participatory ways. This article describes a methodology being developed in Sri Lanka to enable farmers to assess the performance of their organizations for improving irrigation management and agricultural production. This approach has the advantage of measuring and monitoring also the capacity of local organizations for self-management in a self-strengthening way. The methodology could be adapted to any participatory program wishing to have evaluation done at the grassroots.

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PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION OF PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT:

A SCHEME FOR MEASURING AND MONITORING LOCAL CAPACITY

It should not be surprising that there are so few examples of participatory evaluation from which we can learn. It has taken some years to get participatory approaches to development accepted by international agencies and national governments. Even now, the predominant mode for planning and implementing projects remains largely "top-down" and "expert-intensive." Meanwhile, the self-styled "evaluation movement," which started as a contemporary of the participation "movement" in the 1960s has gained strength, with evaluations becoming often mandatory and increasingly routinized. Yet evaluation is still not often taken seriously. Even when carried out in a systematic manner, any impact on performance remains difficult to demonstrate.

Gerrit Huizer's discussion (1983) of "guiding principles for people's participation projects" correctly emphasizes that participatory evaluation should be on-going rather than ex post and requires methodologies different from those currently used in rural development programs (IFAD, 1979). He acknowledges that there exists little experience with participatory evaluation but notes with optimism that "in the last few years, some relevant experiments have taken place, from which some

preliminary conclusions ... can be drawn. (p. 6). Unfortunately, he can point to only one country in Africa where participatory evaluation has been "systematically applied" for even some time.^{1/}

Unfortunately, references to "participatory evaluation" are most often about evaluation of participation rather than about people's participation in evaluation (e.g. Oakley and Marsden, 1984:77-78). These are not the same thing. And participation in evaluation, if planned and controlled by outsiders and intended basically to meet outsiders' requirements, does not qualify as meaningful "participatory evaluation." A manual for monitoring and evaluating people's participation projects, for example, speaks of monitoring and evaluation activities as:

providing the data and information to project staff so they can best understand whether the project is moving towards and accomplishing its intended objectives.
(Oakley, 1985:1)

Such an orientation results in a program of monitoring and evaluation which is admittedly "office-based" (Oakley, 1985:11-14).^{2/} Huizer has usefully defined participatory evaluation as involving:

self-evaluation by the groups of the entire process of planning and implementation: the rural people themselves [are to] discuss what progress they are making and how to overcome [certain] problems or constraints. The project beneficiaries as well as the project management at all levels should be involved in the designing and setting up of the system and subsequently in the interpretation and evaluation of the information gathered. (Huizer, 1983: 50)

The main function of this process, according to Huizer, is to "strengthen local capabilities for self-learning and joint problem-solving of the participants as a group." (p. 51) Some systematic, interactive process along these lines should be possible in development projects by working in a collaborative manner with intended beneficiaries/participants. This paper shares ideas for such an approach being introduced with grassroots organizations in Sri Lanka.

The Gal Oya Water Management Project

The Gal Oya irrigation scheme, completed in the early 1950s, was the first major undertaking of the government of Sri Lanka (then Ceylon) after independence in 1948. It was the largest irrigation scheme in the country (120,000 acres). Half of this area (60,000 acres) was in the Left Bank sub-system which was settled with families brought in from other parts of the country.

No detailed discussion of the scheme is necessary.^{3/} Suffice it to say that by the late 1970s, Gal Oya was probably the most deteriorated system in the country, with channels eroded and silted up, gates and other structures broken or inoperative, minimal water control, perennial water shortages in tail-end areas, low levels of production and income, social conflicts, antagonism between farmers and officials, etc. The Government of Sri Lanka with financial and technical assistance provided by USAID undertook in 1979 to rehabilitate the physical system and to improve the water management organization and capabilities of both technical staff and water users.

The Agrarian Research and Training Institute (ARTI), which operates under the Ministry of Agriculture, was sub-contracted by the Irrigation Department to undertake "action research" to introduce farmer organizations in the Left Bank of Gal Oya. The assistance of the Rural Development Committee of Cornell University was provided to ARTI by USAID under its Rural Development Participation Project.

Given the lack of cooperation among Gal Oya farmers during most of the preceding three decades and the animosity between them and Irrigation Department personnel, it was unrealistic to think that effective water user associations could be established by government directive. There needed to be a concerted effort at fostering group solidarity to accomplish irrigation-related tasks.

The Cornell consultants were familiar with the National Irrigation Administration's use of "Community Organizers" to set up water user associations in the Philippines and with the "Group Organizers" deployed in the Small Farmer Development Programme of FAO in Nepal. With knowledge of these "models," the role of "Institutional Organizer" (IO) was created to work with farmers and officials as "catalysts" to help establish farmer organizations starting at the field channel level.^{4/}

Beginning in 1981, these organizers operated in a manner very similar to that of Group Promoters in the People's Participation Programme in Africa, though possibly with more rapid and evident progress (Uphoff, 1985, 1987; Wijayarathna, 1985). Like the PPP, the Gal Oya program is based on small

groups, usually about 15 farmers who all cultivate rice using water from the same field channel. Organization starts informally, with groups identifying problems that are amenable to collective action and then engaging in activities such as cleaning silted-up field channels, rotating water among users, and sending any water that can be saved downstream to water-short farmers cultivating there.

Once the need and feasibility of group action has been made evident, explicit groups are constituted at the field channel level (50-100 acres) with a representative selected by consensus. Eventually, a four-tiered structure of organization has emerged with farmer-representatives from the field channel acting on behalf of their groups at the distributary channel level (serving 200-500 acres), in larger Area Councils (covering 4,000-6,000 acres), and finally at the Project Committee level for the whole Left Bank (25,000 acres organized thus far).5/

Both the Irrigation Department and the farmer organizations can share credit for the improvements in water use efficiency which have been achieved. Water issues in the dry season have been reduced from 8 acre-feet to about 5, and in the wet season from 5 to 2. These savings have been made with the concurrence and cooperation of farmers through their organizations, as they keep channels clean and rotate water deliveries when necessary to use water more efficiently and where possible to save water for downstream users.

Farmers are almost completely satisfied with water distribution now even though less volume is issued. There has

been a great decline in conflicts over water (there were even murders before, we have been told), and the top officials in the district -- the District Minister, the Government Agent (District Commissioner), and the Deputy Director of Irrigation -- all say that complaints about water problems, abundant five years ago, have almost disappeared (Uphoff, 1987).

Having established such a system of organization through the energetic and dedicated work of Institutional Organizers, the number of IOs has been reduced. Having had as many as 70 IOs in the area at one time, there are currently only 4. Most have left the program for more permanent jobs elsewhere. Some have now been reassigned to do similar work in other irrigation schemes.^{6/} How can the farmer organizations be kept strong and effective?

Organizational infrastructure resembles physical infrastructure in the sense that it requires some on-going maintenance investment. One should not expect to withdraw all support from local organizations involved in development work any more than one would remove all technical staff after an irrigation system is built or a telecommunications network installed. While the level of expenditure can be less once the structures have been created, there will still be some need for on-going investment in training, monitoring and trouble-shooting to sustain organizational capacity.

As the level of personnel invested to maintain the farmer organizations is reduced after 3-5 years of organizing effort, we have formatted a system for self-evaluation of groups. This has been described to and accepted by the farmer groups as a system

for self-strengthening (there is a good word in the Sinhala language for self-strengthening but not for self-evaluation). It is difficult to separate a discussion of the process and rationale of the approach from consideration of the content of evaluation. Different facets of the method can be discussed analytically and critically once the system has been sketched in some detail.

The Process: Getting Started

Although the aim is to have an active and self-correcting "bottom-up" process of participatory evaluation, there is no question that the impetus for this is "top-down." The framework has been conceived and introduced by the ARTI-Cornell team working with the Gal Oya farmers' organizations. But the approach is an iterative and consultative one. Through a series of discussions and modifications, the resulting system should be one which farmers are comfortable with and which they can regard as their own.

The process of self-evaluation is regarded as more important than the product. We are not concerned with numerical scores so much as with what is learned and concluded by participants about how their organizations can be made more effective. In the process, some consensus should emerge about the goals of these organizations as well as about their strengths and weaknesses. The process is to be self-managed, introduced and guided by the organizers but handled by the farmers themselves.]/

The process revolves around a list of items (activities, objectives, criteria) which are very concrete. They pertain to

things that the farmer organizations are (or may be) concerned with. This is consistent with the view that each program should "establish its own specific objectives in terms of local needs and problems" falling into two main categories of objectives (Oakley, 1985:5-6):

- (i) objectives related to economic or material activities of the project group, and
- (ii) objectives related to the organization and development of the project groups.^{8/}

Five activity areas, three under (i) and two under (ii), have been identified for which group performance can be assessed by the groups themselves. (As discussed below, groups can decline to accept one or more of these areas, or even the whole exercise, as relevant to their collective needs and objectives.) The five activity areas identified for consideration with regard to improving water management and irrigated agriculture through farmer participation are:

- (1) water management
- (2) maintenance of structures
- (3) agricultural practices
- (4) organizational capacity, and
- (5) organizational linkages.

It was thought that farmer groups would have some interest in good performance in these five areas, though a group can decide, for example, that its members will handle agricultural practices (3) on an individual basis, with no group activity or

responsibility in this area. If they do not want to evaluate their group in terms of its progress in agricultural extension work or crop diversification, they could simply decide not to include this in their regular self-evaluation. Thus the criteria for evaluation, though initiated by the program, are to be selected and agreed by program participants themselves.

The process will be clearer if a sample item is given:

Which of the following four statements best describes the situation in your group with regard to water management?

- (a) All farmers on our field channel always get their fair share of water. (3 points)
- (b) Most farmers on our field channel usually get their fair share of water. (2 points)
- (c) Some farmers on our field channel sometimes get their fair share of water. (1 point)
- (d) No farmers on our field channel ever get a fair share of water. (no points)

Other items are given below, but this represents the pattern for the rest. If all members can agree that the first statement "best describes" their situation, performance is excellent and there is little room for improvement. The second statement indicates a good situation, but one where improvements can be made. The third statement suggests a poor situation, with substantial room for improvement. The fourth describes a miserable situation which one hopes never or seldom occurs. This ordinal (quasi-cardinal) set of alternatives can be applied to practically any project activity.

The list of prospective items was developed initially within the Cornell-ARTI group and then discussed with the Institutional Organizers. We made a mistake the first time this was attempted. The items in English were translated into Sinhala by an ARTI staff member and not field-tested with farmers (or even IOs) before being presented to farmer groups. The Sinhala words used for some items were too "formal" to be easily comprehensible to farmers, so some items were not properly understood. Moreover, in some organizations, the farmer-representative himself filled out the questionnaire without discussing the items with all group members. So we had to scrap the first round of results as faulty (our fault). The process was expected to have gone as follows:

- (1) Initial draft of questionnaire (in English).
- (2) Discussion with field organizers of the goals and methods of this form of participatory evaluation.
- (3) Translation of questionnaire items into vernacular by organizers.
- (4) Discussion with selected farmer-representatives of the goals and methods of this form of participatory evaluation, using their suggestions to rephrase the questionnaire in language farmers are comfortable with and can accept as "theirs," possibly adding and subtracting items.
- (5) Testing of methodology with several groups of farmers to see how it works, to get their suggestions for modifying the questionnaire, the procedures and the explanation to make these more congenial and comprehensible.
- (6) Systematic introduction of methodology to farmer groups through organizers and farmer-representatives, with subsequent revision and refinement where suggested for next round.

This represents a cycle for developing participatory evaluation with local groups. The process will be treated in more detail below, but first, more needs to be said about the content of the evaluation instrument itself.

The Questionnaire

Each program must develop its own instrument with specific content relevant to the tasks and circumstances at hand. Items being used in Sri Lanka will be presented to give readers an idea of the concreteness which is necessary. This will provide a basis for discussing more tangibly the rationale for this methodology and for suggesting how such an approach can strengthen any participatory development program. In a different program, dealing with tasks other than irrigation, the specific questions would be changed, but the logic and methodology could be carried through.

WATER MANAGEMENT

1. Water Distribution (item given above)
2. Knowledge of Water Distribution
 - (a) All farmers know in advance when they will get water and when there is a change in schedule. (3)
 - (b) Most farmers know in advance ... (2)
 - (c) Some farmers know in advance ... (1)
 - (d) No farmers know in advance ... (0)
3. Water Saving Efforts
 - (a) All farmers make efforts to save water and reduce their offtakes of water as soon as their fields have enough. (3)
 - (b) Most farmers ... (2)
 - (c) Some farmers ... (1)
 - (d) No farmers ... (0)

4. Water Use

- (a) All farmers keep the water level in their fields at most 5 cm. deep and drain their fields at appropriate times, not using water to control weeds. (3)
- (b) Most farmers ... (2)
- (c) Some farmers ... (1)
- (d) No farmers ... (0)

MAINTENANCE OF STRUCTURES

1. Channel Cleaning

- (a) The field channel is properly cleaned before both the rainy and dry seasons. (3)
- (b) The field channel is properly cleaned before the dry season, and somewhat cleaned before the rainy season. (2)
- (c) The field channel is somewhat cleaned before the rainy and dry seasons. (1)
- (d) The field channel is not cleaned before either season. (0)

2. Voluntary Group Labor

- (a) All members participate in shramadana and do good work. (3)
- (b) Most members ... (2)
- (c) Some members ... (1)
- (d) No members ... (0)

Note: This item will not apply if channel cleaning is done on an individual basis with each member cleaning an assigned length of channel, which the group may choose instead of doing the work through group labor.

3. Protection of Structures

- (a) All structures are protected and there has been no damage to gates this past year. (3)
- (b) Most structures are protected and there has been only minor damage this past year. (2)
- (c) Some structures are protected; there has been some damage to structures this past year. (1)
- (d) Few structures are protected; there has been major damage to structures this past year. (0)

4. Preventive Maintenance

- (a) All structures are continuously or periodically observed, and regular maintenance is

- done to prevent deterioration. If there is danger or start of any damage, measures are immediately taken to prevent this. (3)
- (b) Structures are frequently observed, and maintenance is done to prevent deterioration; measures are usually taken to prevent major damage if noticed. (2)
 - (c) Structures are sometimes observed and maintenance is sometimes done to prevent deterioration; some measures may be usually taken to prevent major damage if noticed. (1)
 - (d) No notice is taken of structures' condition, and no measures are taken to preserve their functioning. (0)

AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

1. Agricultural Extension

- (a) All farmers acquire up-to-date information on the best agricultural practices from scientific sources. (3)
- (b) Most farmers ... (2)
- (c) Some farmers ... (1)
- (d) No farmers ... (0)

2. High-Yielding Varieties

- (a) All farmers use the most appropriate high-yielding varieties. (3)
- (b) Most farmers ... (2)
- (c) Some farmers ... (1)
- (d) No farmers ... (0)

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

1. Meetings

- (a) Our meetings are always very productive. (3)
- (b) Our meetings are often very productive. (2)
- (c) Our meetings are sometimes very productive. (1)
- (d) Our meetings are never very productive. (0)

2. Leadership

- (a) Many members of our group are willing and able to assume responsibilities as farmer-representative. (3)
- (b) Several members are willing and able ... (2)
- (c) Only one member is willing and able ... (1)
- (d) No member is willing and able ... (0)

3. Conflict Management

- (a) There are no conflicts among members of the group, or any that arise are always quickly and amicably resolved. (3)
- (b) There are few conflicts among members, and they are usually fairly quickly resolved. (2)
- (c) There are occasional conflicts among members, and the group may be able to resolve them. (1)
- (d) There are many conflicts among members, and the group is not effective in resolving them. (0)

4. Participation

- (a) All members participate actively in meetings and group activities. Everyone feels free to speak up. (3)
- (b) Most members participate actively in meetings and group activities. Most feel free to speak up. (2)
- (c) Some members participate actively in meetings and group activities. Some feel free to speak up. (1)
- (d) Few members participate ... (0)

5. Finances

- (a) The group has adequate funds and contributed time and materials for all its desired activities. It has a reserve for contingencies. (3)
- (b) The group is able to mobilize adequate funds or contributed time and materials for most of its activities. (2)
- (c) The group is able to mobilize some funds or contributed time and materials for certain of its activities. (1)
- (d) The group is not able to mobilize funds or resources for its activities. (0)

ORGANIZATIONAL LINKAGES

1. Horizontal Linkages

- (a) Our field channel group has frequent fruitful cooperation with other field channel groups. (3)
- (b) Our field channel group has occasional fruitful cooperation ... (2)
- (c) Our field channel group has infrequent fruitful cooperation ... (1)
- (d) Our field channel group never has fruitful cooperation ... (0)

2. Vertical Linkages (I)

- (a) Our field channel concerns and problems are always communicated to the distributary channel organization and appropriate action taken. (3)
- (b) Our field channel concerns and problems are often communicated ... (2)
- (c) Our field channel concerns and problems are sometimes communicated ... (1)
- (d) Our field channel concerns and problems are never communicated ... (0)

3. Vertical Linkages (II)

- (a) Farmers on our field channel are always kept informed of discussions and actions at the Area Council level. (3)
- (b) Farmers on our field channel are usually kept informed ... (2)
- (c) Farmers on our field channel are sometimes kept informed ... (1)
- (d) Farmers on our field channel are never kept informed ... (0)

4. Farmer-Official Contact

- (a) Communication and cooperation with officials through our organization are extensive and effective. (3)
- (b) Communication and cooperation ... are frequent and satisfactory. (2)
- (c) Communication and cooperation ... are occasional and sometimes satisfactory. (1)
- (d) Communication and cooperation ... are rare or nonexistent, and/or they are generally unsatisfactory. (0)

Other items could be listed, but these give an idea of how the methodology is conceived and of the range of things that can be covered by it.

The Process: Implementation

While testing the draft evaluation instrument with farmer groups before it is formulated for wider use, there may be suggestions from group members for modifications, such as adding

items like the one mentioned below. The wording of these can be worked out in keeping with the format described above. The four-step scale proposed here requires more discriminating judgments than with just two or three alternatives. Yet it does not introduce so many intervals as to invite "hair-splitting." Having five intervals could bias choices toward the middle one as an easy compromise. With four intervals, assessments tend toward judging performance as either satisfactory or not.

Farmers have agreed that this self-evaluation should be part of an annual meeting. They see this as a good idea to give their organizations more prominence and dignity. Many rural organizations in Sri Lanka have such annual festivities, with special food prepared and sometimes a community religious observance at the Buddhist or Hindu temple or at the Muslim mosque. .

When the idea of such a "self-strengthening" system was first raised with farmer-representatives, some of them thought this activity should be undertaken every six months. But when we tried to identify two times during the year when work schedules would allow everyone enough time for this activity, it was concluded that the wisest course would be to undertake a thorough group self-evaluation on an annual basis, during June, the month after dry season crops have been planted and work requirements are most slack.

We expect the goals and methods of this exercise to be presented first at a meeting of each Area Council, attended by as many as 100 farmer-representatives. The first year, perhaps

only those groups that volunteer to participate in this self-strengthening effort will be included. We hope to increase "demand" for this methodology on the basis of interest and satisfaction created in the participating groups. By the second year, we would aim for practically complete coverage. Once the approach has been explained to the assembled farmer-representatives, they can help the Institutional Organizer for their area to introduce it on their respective field channels.

The first time the exercise is attempted with a group, all items on the instrument as it has emerged from the field assessments are presented and explained, by the farmer-representative if possible, otherwise by the organizer. Members should discuss each item to become clear about its purpose and relevance. They may then decide (by consensus) to omit certain items from the set of criteria for self-evaluation of their group. The act of self-selection should give the groups more identification with and sense of responsibility for the process.^{2/}

As noted above, items can also be added by group consensus. One which farmers have suggested to add to our original list, for example, relates to the annual harvest thanksgiving ceremony which some of the farmer organizations in Gal Oya have revived:

- (a) All members contribute to and participate in the annual Aluth Sahal Mangala. (3)
- (b) Most members ... (2)
- (c) Some members ... (1)
- (d) No members ... (0)

If a group judges participation to be unsatisfactory, it can seek to improve this as one of its focuses of effort.

The group may want to make some changes in the wording of items, and any proposed by consensus should be accepted by the organizer. (They should be reported by him or the farmer-rep to the program's office where records are maintained). Idiosyncratic modifications need only be noted for interpreting the results of the group's evaluation. But some of the suggestions may point to ways of improving the wording of instrument in subsequent versions, and the program's coordinators should know about such ideas.

Once the items have been agreed upon, it is important that the group have a free discussion of each one, until consensus is reached on which statement best describes the group's situation. Many thoughts, observations, experiences, unhappinesses, new ideas, exhortations, etc. should emerge from the give-and-take.¹⁰ If after discussion there is no unanimity, the group can agree on some compromise "score," such as 2.5 or 1.5, since the score itself is not as significant as what the group has learned from thinking together about its performance.

We have stipulated that there should be no competition or comparison that would give a group an incentive to rate itself higher than members genuinely believe. "No prizes, and no penalties" is the motto we have articulated. Each group should be concerned only with how well it is doing in its own members' judgment. Each group's standard of evaluation should be its own previous performance and its members' aspirations.

The Process: Rationale and Uses

It should be clear that this "methodology" can serve many different but mutually compatible and even reinforcing purposes. We have identified six areas in which the instrument can be useful.

(a) Membership Education. The first thing this approach should do is inform everyone of the objectives of the people's organization. By discussing the list of items prepared by program staff and a representative set of farmers, individual members are confronted with the question of: what is our organization supposed to achieve? In reaching consensus on this, all members should become more conscious of what the organization can and cannot aspire to accomplish. A self-selection of criteria for evaluating group performance will command more attention and engagement than any lecture or brochure.

For example, not all members may have understood the matter of saving water for downstream farmers. Should this be a goal of the group? Not all may agree (though our experience in Gal Oya suggests that almost every time such a question is discussed, farmers agree that such water-saving efforts are proper and possible, and have followed up the consensus with action.) Should the group seek to improve members' knowledge of scientific agriculture? Should it be communicating and cooperating with other field channel groups? Should efforts be made to monitor the condition of structures so as to prevent their deterioration or damage?

Each item confronts members individually and collectively with a choice, the making of which will enhance their awareness of what is possible and desirable through their collective action. Reviewing this list at least once a year should refresh memories. At the annual meeting, items can be dropped or added. This will help keep alive the process of group formation and re-formation.

(b) Bringing Shortcomings into the Open. No organization will operate without some shortcomings in performance. However, it may be difficult to get these brought to group attention so that corrective steps can be taken. Some members may not complain because they do not want to appear negative or to be seen as hostile to certain individuals. They may fear embarrassment or even harassment. Groups need to have some fairly neutral and institutionalized means for surfacing problems that warrant group concern.

When an organization is engaged in a process of "self-strengthening," it becomes legitimate, even valuable for members to identify shortcomings for the whole group to consider. A farmer at the tail-end of the channel may not be getting (or may think he is not getting) his fair share of water. When the matter of water distribution comes up for group evaluation, he is entitled, even expected, to inform the group if thinks he does not get his due.

In this example, the group should consider whether his observation (not just a complaint) is true, and if so, why. It may be that the tail-ender only thinks he is not getting his

fair share but actually gets as much as others. If he is persuaded of this in the ensuing discussion, he can agree that the first statement is essentially correct; all get their fair share. If he can persuade others that water distribution can still be improved, the second statement would apply. The group should consider how to improve its performance enough to justify next year making the first statement (near-perfect water distribution).

Maybe the farmer-representative who chairs group meetings thinks that meetings are always quite productive, but some members think time is wasted, or decisions lack follow-up. When the group is trying to decide how best to describe its meetings, they can voice such views with less implication of "personal" criticism of the chairman than if such a view were expressed in an unsolicited context.^{11/}

It is usually difficult or awkward to state criticisms of a group's performance publicly. This methodology cannot ensure that all shortcomings will be voiced or will be accepted graciously. But it does give a legitimate opportunity to all members to express concerns in a context where everyone is trying in a constructive way to help the group reach the highest possible level of performance and satisfaction. While surfacing a problem can keep the group from scoring itself in the highest category this year, it opens the possibility of correctly classifying the group's performance that way in the future, with no reservations.^{12/}

In our experience, we have found farmers quite self-critical and anxious to have correct assessments of their performance. As there is no external competition, groups do not lose anything by agreeing on a lower rating. Such a methodology should help to institutionalize self-critical feedback as a norm of the program.

(c) Facilitate Communication within Group. By having a periodic discussion of the group's performance, there will be more occasion for exchanging ideas within the group, which is an essential part of building group solidarity. It is particularly important for certain kinds of information to be widely shared, such as on alternative possible leaders addressed one of the most significant items listed above.

Discussing leadership alternatives is a delicate subject, usually avoided. But it should not be addressed only when there is a high degree of dissatisfaction with an incumbent or when there is a crisis. The item proposed makes it legitimate to consider who besides the incumbent could be given those responsibilities. A person serving as farmer-representative, for example, may think that he is the only person in the group who is able or available to discharge these duties. But if he is the only qualified person, the group can score only 1 on this item. The group will be encouraged to think about who else might be able and willing to serve.

If it can identify and agree on several other persons who would be acceptable and willing, the group warrants a 2, and it would deserve a 3 if it can come up with a large number of possible candidates. The exact number representing a division

between 2 and 3 is not specified in the question and can itself be a useful subject of discussion. There may be a number of members who had not been thought of as potential candidates who will be suggested or who may volunteer in a group discussion.

If the farmer-representative refuses to recognize these other persons as possible successors, he limits the group's "score" on this item. Persons who had not thought of themselves as possible leaders may be suggested, or some who have been overlooked may indicate interest in working for group goals. Just by getting all members to consider regularly the question of how many persons -- and who -- among them might be entrusted with leadership responsibilities should broaden the leadership pool.

Or perhaps the farmer-representative thought he was doing a good job of communicating with all his neighbors about the Area Council meetings he attends. But in a group discussion, any persons who have been neglected, or who it was thought would learn about the meeting from a friend or relative but did not, can say they do not get informed about Council decisions. They may have been reluctant to complain about this or they may not even have known what they were missing. But they are free (even encouraged) to let the whole group know they are not getting the information due to them if this matter is taken up in the self-evaluation process.

(d) Set Priorities for Improvement. When members are agreed on what the organization should be accomplishing, and when shortcomings have been identified, the stage is set for the group to determine what things most need improvement or can most bene-

ficially be improved upon. If communication channels for letting everyone know about Area Council meetings are inadequate, they can be improved -- if members think this is important. If we realize that our leadership pool is too small, we can try to give some younger members experience and confidence during the year. They may decide that remedying any deficiency in water distribution is the most urgent thing, or that establishing good preventive maintenance routines deserves priority. Maybe channel cleaning, which used to be pretty good, has declined in recent years, and members can decide to rededicate themselves to doing this well before each season.

Discussion of such considerations, with an effort to reach consensus on priorities for action, should focus energies and ideas to improve each organization. Most members will want to be able to say, legitimately, that they deserve top marks on the criteria they have set for themselves. The process of discussion itself should enable people's organizations to accomplish much self-strengthening so long as they do not try to improve everything at once. Program organizers should emphasize the importance of setting and acting on priorities, a limited number of things that are considered both important and attainable.

(e) Training. Groups' own efforts to improve their performance should be backed up by the program's provision of appropriate training, targeted to deal with shortcomings that the groups have themselves identified. Training which meets self-identified needs will be more relevant and should be better received. If, members do not perceive that their meetings are

unproductive, for example, lectures on "How to Conduct a Meeting" are likely to receive little response. If, on the other hand, it has been agreed that meetings are a waste of time, members and chairpersons will likely be more attentive and will get more from the time spent in courses or role-playing to improve the conduct of meetings.

Not every problem is amenable to a solution through training so the methodology is intended to help tailor training efforts to organizational needs, not to prescribe training for each and every shortcoming. Still, there are usually some training activities that can be developed for most problem areas. If, for example, conflict management or preventive maintenance were identified by a number of groups as deficient, relevant training activities could be devised in consultation with farmer-representatives. Then those groups which had reported poor performance in this area would be invited to attend a session or short-course on the subject.

A different, but possibly better approach (consistent with the philosophy of participation) would be to use the self-evaluation process to identify groups which had been particularly successful in an area, such as protecting structures or maintaining good farmer-official relations, where other groups were having difficulties. The more successful groups could be coopted into planning and providing training for the less successful ones.

(f) Monitoring and Evaluation. Along with these other functions can go more conventional M&E activities. Presumably

some kind of management information system will be in place and operating to meet specific data needs of program managers. This is appropriate and not a substitute for participatory evaluation as outlined here. It is hoped that the management information system itself is operated in a reasonably participatory manner.

We have not reached the stage in the Sri Lanka program where we can say much about an institutionalized monitoring and evaluation function because we have been more concerned with the other functions and have had such large personnel turnovers. We have kept some records (minutes, copies of correspondence, etc.) for each group in the program's district headquarters, and we plan to add the annual self-evaluation to the files.

When we had more organizers and a denser coverage of all groups, we expected that the organizer working most closely with each group would also evaluate its performance, using the same items and criteria. We would then compare the group's self-evaluation with the IO's evaluation to identify any discrepancies warranting investigation. But with the turnover and attrition of IOs, we no longer have the capacity to make any "expert" judgments of the groups' performance. The IOs who continue to oversee the program will review all evaluations (in consultation with ARTI staff) and will prepare reports on groups' progress and areas of deficiency. We thus expect to have a more "formal" monitoring function as part of this program, but feeding into (d) setting priorities, and (e) training.

As the program of farmer organization has brought forward some outstanding, conscientious and capable rural leaders, this self-evaluation effort should be carried out in close collaboration with Area Council and Distributary Channel Organization officers. They have indicated support for this approach and would be in a good position to review the progress and performance of the field channel groups within their respective areas.

It is expected that the Institutional Organizers continuing with the program would devise strategies for supporting and strengthening farmer organizations in consultation with the leaders who have emerged. These leaders want the organizations to grow in their capacity to mobilize and manage both internal and external resources and have expressed great willingness to cooperate in any way for this proposal. They are even willing to go to other areas to "spread the message" of farmer organization.

The government has established a new Irrigation Management Division (within the Ministry of Lands, but working closely with the Irrigation Department). It has been given responsibility for the "farmer organization" component of improving irrigation management, explicitly building on the experience gained so far in Gal Oya. We expect that some version of this self-evaluation methodology will be incorporated into the IMD's plans for monitoring and evaluation as a national effort.

Some Problems

The data generated from this process can be looked at in several ways. "Average" scores may not be very meaningful since

no effort has been (or would be) made to validate all criteria and their application, each by a different group. In our experience, farmers have not been inclined to exaggerate their accomplishments, so we think some credibility can be given to their numbers.

To get around problems of comparability of numbers:

- (1) We are concerned with year-to-year changes, in which groups' self-assessed performance is compared with their previous assessments, to determine where "progress" is being reported and where not.
- (2) We also focus on self-identified areas of weakness, to alert organizers and administrators to limitations in farmer organization performance, which should be recognized and compensated for, or remedied, by program activities.

One possible problem resulting from our willingness to have each group determine for itself which of the items it will apply is that not all groups will generate comparable data. This is a "price" we are willing to pay in order that all groups regard the methodology as "theirs."

One variation we have discussed with farmer-representatives but which we have not reached final agreement on is to have a set of 10-15 items which the program has determined are "core" activities. All groups would be expected to assess their performance on these activities (such as water distribution, channel cleaning, productivity of meetings, size of leadership pool, etc.). Whether or not they did channel cleaning by voluntary group labor, or whether they monitored the water level in farmers' fields, would be regarded as "optional," for example.

Having a common set of "core" criteria will make the self-evaluation system somewhat less under the control of rural people themselves. But this might be an acceptable compromise to get some degree of standardization. One approach could be to wait several years to see which items practically all groups accept, and then to designate these as the "core" activities for all groups to evaluate themselves on.

One unresolved question is how far the program should go in promoting its preferences. A case in point is whether we should try to require all groups to include as a standard criterion an item on the extent of "women's participation" in their organizations. Between 8 and 10% of rural households in Gal Oya are female-headed, but less than 1% of farmer-representatives are women. (Membership in the organizations is 5 to 10% female.) By including an item on women's participation in our standard list, we could raise men's and women's consciousness of the extent to which women may be less active in organizational affairs. But there is no assurance many groups would accept this as a goal of performance unless it were mandated.

One of the most immediate problems we have encountered is the difficulty of translating even "simple" statements in English into Sinhala. While it is not hard to come up with four statements that express ordinality (rank-ordering) of responses, it is not easy to express satisfactory cardinality in the alternatives (all, most, some, none) so that roughly equal "steps" from 100% to zero are expressed in Sinhalese adjectives. The word for "some" translates more readily as "a few," while the word for

"most" is a fairly indeterminate "many." With enough discussion, it is possible to arrive at satisfactory approximations of qualitatively expressed "steps." But they need to be examined and debated extensively, with farmers and not just colleagues, to arrive at terms that represent appropriate degrees of difference. Literal translations are not appropriate, as each language has its own gradations.

One problem some persons may find with this methodology is the "lack of objectivity" it allows. The prevailing ideology of evaluation has stressed detachment and objectivity to the extent that only "outsiders" can attempt it. We have wrestled with this issue for several years in our Gal Oya work.

In our experience, outside evaluations produce very little change in behavior or improvement in performance. There are many things any external observer will miss or misunderstand, thereby causing (or allowing) insiders to discount and sidestep any conclusions or recommendations that come from the evaluation.

Both the views of outsiders and insiders are likely to be useful. If the purpose of evaluation is to decide on sensitive matters like allocation of funds, there may be reason to look to outsiders' judgments. But we find that the results of evaluation are more likely to have an impact on what people do if they have had a role, a hand, or a voice in the process itself, that is, if the process has itself been participatory.

This is not the place to engage in the broader debate over the best methods of evaluation generally. However, I would defend self-evaluation, or participatory evaluation, against

criticisms of subjectivity and bias on the ground that its impact is likely to be more beneficial for performance than from "top-down" or "expert-centered" evaluation efforts. Participation should improve evaluation in the same way that it can strengthen the planning and implementation of development programs.

The author would like to thank Mr. Gerard Finin of the Center for International Studies at Cornell for comments and editorial suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper. Also, he is pleased that several ARTI colleagues A. M. Razaak, S.M.B.K. Nandaratna, and Dr. C. M. Wijayaratna -- are carrying on field (action) research on this methodology with farmer organizations in Gal Oya. The results of their work will eventually be reported and probably published by ARTI.

FOOTNOTES

- 1/Mozambique is the country Huizer suggests as having experimented with participatory evaluation (p. 10), and this is not a very persuasive example.
- 2/In a report written by the same author for the UN's Task Force on Rural Development, little space is devoted even to the subject of evaluation. The report deals only with how to evaluate "participation" in development activities, not how to make the usually neglected activity of evaluation more participatory (Oakley and Marsden, 1984: 77- 78). This latter question has been addressed in Cohen and Uphoff (1977:55-58) and in Uphoff, Cohen and Goldsmith (1979:317-319).
- 3/This is discussed in Uphoff (1985 and 1987).
- 4/The SFDP Group Organizers served also as "models" for the Group Promoters used in the People's Participation Programme of FAO in Africa. The NIA approach is written up in F. Korten (1982) and Bagadion and F. Korten (1985). The Nepal SFDP is described in Oakley and Marsden (1984:39-43) and Rahman (1984:121-151). On the catalyst role, see Lassen (1980), Esman and Uphoff (1984:253-258), Hirschman (1984), and Uphoff (1986: 187-320).
- 5/This area is almost entirely Sinhala-speaking. Organizing work was started in 10,000 acres where farmers are mostly Tamil-speaking with Institutional Organizers fluent in that language. Good progress was being made, but this work had to be suspended after 1984 because of communal tensions and violence. Our program has experienced no communal problems, and indeed, there have been some noteworthy examples of inter-ethnic cooperation and even courage. Farmers have tried to rise above such divisions.
- 6/One of the marvels of the program has been that it managed to be as successful as it was despite huge, recurring turnovers in the IO cadre. Of the 169 IOs trained and fielded, less 3% remain in the field. Yet the IOs and the farmer-representatives they worked with have had a great impact in Gal Oya and indeed on the country, since the whole irrigation sector is now to be organized along similar lines. Twenty permanent positions are now being created by the Government of Sri Lanka as the core of a larger program with hundreds of organizers working on contract.
- 7/This paper will not address the "self-management" strategy and structure ("the team concept") devised for the organizers, but this theme has been basic to the program from its

inception. If the organizers did not and could not work in a decentralized responsible manner, there was little likelihood that the resulting farmer organizations would operate in that way. One of the generalizations from the literature on organization theory is that organizations tend to reproduce externally the values and patterns of behavior they manifest internally. ARTI and Cornell likewise had to work according to egalitarian and participatory principles if the IO program and the farmer organizations in turn were to embody such relationships and values. See Uphoff (1985 and 1987).

8/These objectives are described, unfortunately in my view, as the project's objectives (p. 5). It would be more apt to think and speak of evaluation criteria always in terms of the people's objectives.

9/A more open-ended process would be possible, where three or four items would be presented as examples of the method of self-evaluation, and participants would then be asked to propose activities for which criteria could be formulated according to the format shown above.

10/If an organizer is present, he or she could make notes on the discussion in order to feed back to program managers a richer stream of information from the self-evaluation process.

11/Where an organizer is involved in monitoring the self-evaluation process, provision could be made for group members to submit comments (written or oral) to the organizer, who could report them on an unattributed (anonymous) basis to the group. This could get around problems of fear or intimidation impeding honest evaluations, though if group members are afraid to speak openly, the quality of group life may be too distorted to be improved by a self-evaluation process anyway. In some cultures, anonymous views may not be accepted or meaningful.

12/One option, to get honest individual opinions, would be to have paper "ballots" prepared, which members could mark after discussion of each item (a, b, c or d). The ballots could be collected in such a way as to be unidentified, and the average score on each item could be calculated. This would permit individuals who disagree with the prevailing opinion to register their dissent without fear of reprisal. When dissonant views are reported, this may cause other group members to rethink their own assessments. The "ballot" option is more complicated but could also introduce some element of "suspense" into the process of reaching conclusions. This is an option which it could be left to groups to adopt, unless the majority of organizations were persuaded this method was preferable and would adopt it for the whole program.

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