

**IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY (IEQ) PROJECT  
SOUTH AFRICA**

**COLLABORATIVE  
PROGRAMME  
EVALUATION**

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## **Purpose of the Monograph**

The purpose of this monograph is to share the experiences and findings of the IEQ in South Africa in collaborative programme evaluation with NGOs, policy-makers, researchers, educators, and funders who are concerned with improving the quality of education.

## **Content**

The monograph is divided into three papers, each of which reflects a key aspect of the IEQ's work:

### **Part I: Evaluation Overview: A Process and Methodology for Making Evaluations More Effective and Relevant**

This section provides an overview of stakeholder-based or collaborative evaluation methodologies. Methodological considerations and features of stakeholder-sensitive evaluations are discussed, and strategies for analysing and utilising results are presented.

### **Part II: Collaborative Evaluation: The Approach as Applied in South Africa**

This section describes the steps in the collaborative process used in conducting impact evaluations of NGO teacher training programmes. Examples of key activities and results are provided to illustrate the process. Finally, a discussion of the benefits and challenges of collaborative evaluation are presented for those who might consider using such an approach.

### **Part III: Research Utilization In Support Of Education Policy Reform**

This section describes how the collaborative evaluation methodology and findings from the impact assessment studies were disseminated to a variety of stakeholders to influence practice and policy. The various avenues of dissemination and the steps undertaken in disseminating the evaluation findings are described, and policy implications of the IEQ work are discussed.

## PART I

### A PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY FOR MAKING EVALUATIONS MORE COLLABORATIVE AND RELEVANT

This section will focus on both a process and a methodology for enhancing evaluations so that they are more collaborative and relevant to decision making. The notion will be presented that by including individuals in the evaluative process who represent diverse views and also have significant interests in funding decisions, the probability that the evaluation will become more relevant and useful to program decision-making is significantly increased. This approach to evaluative studies is guided by experience gained over time of an emerging evaluation field. It is of interest because it values and is compatible with principles of inclusion and open and participatory decision-making. It will also be argued that evaluative methodologies should be rigorous, and they should be designed to collect information that stakeholders find important and presented in the form most useful to them.

#### The Process of Collaborative Evaluation

##### Forming Stakeholder Groups

The formation of stakeholder groups is critical to evaluations that can be used for decision making. The first and most important task is to ensure that parties which are involved in, required to support or are affected by the program take part in the evaluative study and guide its development, implementation and use. This is done by incorporating a wide array of interests within the fabric of the study. This approach not only helps to insure its utility, but also its accuracy and objectivity. A stakeholder group or evaluative committee can be made up of representatives of school staff, the school board, a local university, community-based organizations, participating families, businesses, government agencies or evaluators. The primary function of the group is to reach an initial consensus concerning expectations for program accomplishments and the information necessary to achieve these common expectations. If stakeholders continue to be involved in the development and implementation of the evaluation, offering relevant input along the way, the resulting evaluation stands a good chance itself of being relevant and useful to decision making.

The value to the evaluation of this type of effort is clear. But it goes beyond the evaluation. Those who will be most involved in implementing the study's findings, aimed at program improvement or developing a sustainable support-base for the project, are those persons who have participated as stakeholder/reference-group members. They will remain in the community and continue to use the evaluation to support the project. They will also be

advocates for future assessments of programmatic progress oriented toward continual improvement in the instruction and educational achievement of students.

### **Identifying Roles and Boundaries**

It is important to identify clearly the roles of the several parties involved in the evaluation. The present approach requires that all persons directly involved in the study, including members of the stakeholder group, participate fully and equally in its development and implementation. This does not mean that all parties share equally all of the responsibilities for producing an effective evaluation. For the process to work efficiently and effectively, it is important that evaluators provide the structure and technical leadership for development and implementation of the study. For example, the evaluator needs to offer sufficient expertise to produce a proper evaluative design that meets the needs of all stakeholders within the limitations of cost and time. All must participate fully in its development, but the evaluators provide the framework and technical direction that leads the group to a workable, appropriate design and a feasible plan for implementation.

It is equally important that those responsible for the program provide leadership and expertise in identifying specific objectives of the program and that they clearly articulate the benefits that are expected to accrue to those who participate. These benefits must be specific enough to be observable and measurable. The role of the stakeholder group is to agree on a set of standards and expectations for programmatic performance and to monitor continually the implementation of the evaluation, particularly at critical junctures. It is the responsibility of both participating evaluators and program personnel to provide the information needed by the stakeholder group in as timely and effective a manner as possible to aid their decision-making.

### **Orientation and Training**

To ensure that stakeholders are knowledgeable about the evaluation and the decision-making-process they will be engaged in, it is important that they receive some orientation to the evaluative process. The training may vary in time and intensity but it should involve hands-on practice and include identifying the critical questions to be answered by the evaluation, becoming familiar with performance measures that address these questions, positing an effective and appropriate design, and learning about data collection and (to a lesser extent) data analysis.

### **An Effective Evaluative Approach and Methodology**

The proposed sequence comprehends both the technical design and activities necessary to implement the evaluation so that it is compatible with the

stakeholder process described above. It includes first designing the evaluation and creating the instruments to identify the information necessary for large-scale, classroom observation-based data collection. It requires analytical strategies that are straightforward and relatively easy to learn and use, but nevertheless that answer the important stakeholder questions about impact associated with the program intervention being assessed. This end is achieved primarily by employing a process of alternative explanatory analysis, which at once answers the primary questions posed and queries the data for alternative explanations. The final step in the stakeholder-based evaluative process is presentation and utilization of the results that meets stakeholder requirements.

It is important to remember that, as the more technical aspects of conducting the evaluation are presented, it remains stakeholder-based and -compatible throughout. As each phase of the evaluation commences, the stakeholder group meets to review and monitor its implementation.

Evaluators work with project personnel and stakeholders who form a design committee. It identifies the program's performance objectives, operationalizes their measurement; determines the basis for comparison, the size and dimensions of the representative sample to be employed, the type of instruments to be used, the approach to data collection that will be adopted, and the means necessary to process and analyze the data. The design phase also includes task-and resource-planning for implementing the evaluation, as well as discussion about the timing, types and form of the evaluative products that will be most useful to stakeholders.

### **Design Development: Features of Stakeholder-Sensitive Evaluations**

The evaluative designs that are most beneficial to stakeholders and decision-making have several features. The chosen measures match programme objectives, various approaches are combined, and several observations are used for comparison. In addition, proximal indicators substitute for more long-term performance measures, behavioral measures gauge improvement in teaching and learning, complementary case studies are used, behavioral change is observed in the classroom, and survey questionnaires and in-depth interviews provide perspective.

- ***Matching Programme Objectives and Evaluation Measures***

It is crucial that evaluations measure outcomes that are related to the program goals and objectives. Otherwise there is potential for disjuncture between evaluative outcomes and the program's intent or effects. As part of the initial process of the impact-assessment studies, key stakeholders gather to come to common understandings about the objectives of the program and develop a set of expectations for performance or outcomes. The process involves identifying

the goals of individual programs and outlining the expected classroom outcomes based on these goals. Indicators are then defined operationally and instruments are designed for data collection. As a group, stakeholders review the instruments and make comments prior to field testing.

- ***Using Multi-method Research***

Most evaluations employ a single approach to gather and analyze data. Combining the approaches, e.g., qualitative and quantitative, data and case study, provides both general and in-depth information that explains more about the results obtained than using only one technique. Multi-method approaches recognise the importance of using multiple modes of collecting data and "triangulation" of information thus obtained in order to test the validity of the findings.

Multiple measures of student performance are also desirable to gain a better perspective of conditions that are attributable to changes in school- or classroom-based interventions. Multiple measures can be obtained through use of assessment tools such as student work portfolios, criterion references and standardized tests, and teacher grades and written reports.

- ***The Importance of Comparison***

An evaluation that simply reports the progress of its clients does not satisfy constituents who need to know the value added by the program. The question that must be addressed is whether these changes would have occurred for these individuals without the program. The only way to answer this important question is to *compare* the program being assessed with others that serve similar clients but lack the innovative features of the present program.

For example, with in-service programs one can compare teachers who have had in-service training with similar teachers who have not yet had the opportunity to have it. In most other respects the range of teacher background, formal training, and experience may be similar. The primary question to be addressed by the evaluation then becomes: Was the in-service training provided associated with classrooms which evidenced the anticipated changes in teaching and learning, as defined by stakeholder expectations? From this basic type of comparison, we can determine if those who participated in the in-service training created significantly more desirable instructional environments than those who did not. If so, the chances are that the in-service program contributed to the differences observed, and this outcome would be affirming to stakeholders.

An even more powerful design is one that compares several observations of performance prior to the onset of training, with observations over time of performance after training has been completed. Confidence in data recorded cumulatively would surely be greater, and a number of questions could be

addressed more accurately (such as the permanence of the effects produced by training) than with non-comparative data.

It is also possible to compare several programs on the same measures of effectiveness that vary in cost to determine relative cost effectiveness. Or one could design a group of program interventions to determine their relative effects and associated costs, e.g., a comparison of early childhood programs stressing cognitive versus social development, or comprehensive versus single-function interventions.

- ***Assessing Both Programmatic Process and Impact***

Often staff engaged in evaluation concentrate primarily on assessing the degree to which a program was implemented as planned. Evaluators may concentrate on assessing the extent to which impact-performance objectives were achieved. Those providing an assessment of program *implementation* only are not able to describe the effects on program recipients directly. On the other hand, those providing information only on *effects*, lack an understanding of how attributes of the program contributed to the results observed. And while comparison of programs implementing an innovation with those which have not may provide information on program differences, evidence that aspects of the intervention that are associated with the differences observed remains inconclusive. Therefore, assessment of both the extent and quality of the intervention, as well as its effects on beneficiaries, is the most powerful approach.

Combined process- and impact-evaluations are designed to assess the relationship between critical programmatic and non-programmatic factors, in relation to their expected outcomes. Comparative assessment is able to associate impacts/findings with a given program component or strategy that is designed to produce such findings. The programmatic factors considered in the case of in-service training, for example, include the level and duration of training, types of training provided, the number of different training programs experienced, and variation in the delivery of training services. In assessing in-service training for pre-school teachers, for example, its effectiveness in providing a safe, healthy, stimulating and interactive environment can be compared to the specific level and type of training intended to improve these areas of competence.

- ***Proximal Indicators as Substitutes for More Long-term Performance Measures***

A program's ultimate impact often extends far beyond the period in which it must be evaluated. For example, determining the effects of a drop-out prevention program concentrating on high-risk, pre-adolescent fifth-graders may take years because of the need to determine the number who remain in school until graduation. But near-term indicators are fairly good predictors of a student's ability to remain in school for the long term. The most immediate indicators are

regular school attendance and application to school work. Further removed, but nonetheless relatively near-term predictors of reduced risk of early school-leaving, are the rate of course completion, grade matriculation, and involvement in extra-curricular activities. These proximal indicators are so named because they are proxies for ultimate indicators of success. Most evaluations use proximal indicators in some measure, but the closer the proxy is associated to the ultimate performance indicator, the better.

- ***Utilizing Behavioral Measures of Improvement in Teaching and Learning***

Observing teacher and student behavior in a classroom is also a considerably more reliable measure of the effects of instructional improvement initiatives than, say, administering a teacher or student questionnaire that records a teacher's own assessment of benefits received from training. Opinions are optimal when used as a supplement to the firsthand observation of behavior.

In assessing in-service training for example, teacher questionnaires and interviews are used primarily to supply information on factors like level of training and years of experience that are expected to be associated with instructional performance differences directly observed in the classroom. It is these factors that provide alternative explanations for outcomes associated with in-service training.

- ***Using Complementary Case Studies***

Case studies generally collect more information on fewer individuals or groups. There are many conditions under which this approach is superior, but generally when little is known about the population under study, an in-depth descriptive study is more fruitful. Conversely, when there are enough data to frame precise questions that address a particular set of problems, broad quantitative studies are more often of use. Both methods also have their disadvantages--for example, it is more difficult to generalize from quantitative studies, and one learns much less about explanatory factors from qualitative studies. Nevertheless, combining the two approaches provides both general and in-depth information that explains more about the results obtained than using only one or the other.

- ***Observing Change in the Classroom***

As indicated earlier, the primary method for gathering performance data is through behavioral observation in the classroom. The advantage of observing how expected instructional changes are implemented--as well as corresponding anticipated changes in student engagement, interaction and performance--is that it is a good way to assess the effectiveness of interventions at many levels of the system--in-service training, administrative and organizational changes, and so on. Direct observation of classrooms allows for an assessment of how well

teachers who have been affected by the intervention (for example, in-service training) were able to incorporate within their classrooms characteristics that 1) reflect state-of-the-art practice and 2) are deemed positive from the perspective of stakeholders or program developers. When compared with similar teachers who did not receive the training, a pattern of instructional differences can emerge that demonstrates the contribution the training program has had on classroom instruction.

Observation of classroom instruction can also be used as a formative aid, not only in the assessment of the training program, but also of its performance. In one program, classroom observations revealed that students continued to be very passive in the classroom, even after teachers received in-service training designed to increase student interaction. Increasing student initiative and interaction became a higher priority for the entire project and methods by which to intensify this aspect of the training program were more aggressively explored.

- ***Instruments for Classroom Observation***

It is important that assessment be authentic and that it reflect changes in teaching and learning that result from program improvement. And changes in teaching and learning are best observed right in the classroom. Instruments for classroom observation often employ a qualitative/quantitative approach in an attempt to describe teacher-learner interactions. The observational instruments are used to assess changes in instructional approach and learners' responses or behavior.

For example, an observational instrument which assesses the effects of in-service training in the classroom can record changes in instructional approach. The observation focuses on the spectrum from traditional to more contemporary instructional practices--those targeted by training programs. To help gauge the effectiveness of training, teachers are selected who have had no training, minimal training and extensive training. Observation-based instruments can rate training on dimensions such as teacher-directed versus student-initiated events; whole groups versus small, flexible groupings; lack of teacher feedback versus extensive feedback encouraging future effort, etc. These dimensions can then be scaled to reflect progress along a continuum, from traditional to more contemporary and effective instructional practices. This format enables baseline data to be collected prior to training and allows for gauging progress over time as a function of the amount of training offered. It is relatively simple to analyze information gathered from a set of observations and to provide summative data on comparative progress in upgrading instructional capacity as a function of the training provided.

- **Survey Questionnaires**

Survey questionnaires provide information on each participant in the study. Using the in-service training example, surveys are designed primarily to gather information on teacher demographics, professional background, areas of concentration, teaching conditions and perspectives, and the extent of in-service training received. The information collected on the questionnaire provides most of the data that represent the independent and intervening factors to be assessed in the study.

- **In-depth Interviews**

In-depth interviews generally have fewer questions than survey questionnaires. The queries are framed more as protocols that guide the interview, rather than as questions to be asked verbatim. Another characteristic difference of most interviews is that they are "open ended," allowing for a more or less free-ranging response. This type of instrument is used to assess, for example, the effectiveness of in-service training from the perspective of the teacher and its impact on her/his instructional program. The combination of large-scale data collection and in-depth interviews provides a fairly accurate picture from which an informed assessment of a program's effects can be made.

## **Analyzing Results**

### **Employing Different Levels of Analysis**

The *primary* analysis of evaluative data consists of determining if there are significant and consistent differences in performance--for example, in the in-service example, between teachers who received training and teachers who had not. The *second-order* analysis consists of determining if there are similar differences among teachers based on the amount of training they received. In addition, analysis can be performed that determines if there are any consistent differences between training groups with regard to observed improvements in performance. This latter analysis of observed training effects is fairly straightforward when using SPSS for the personal computer.

The second major task in the analysis is determining the effect that other factors, such as a teacher's level of academic training and years of experience, might have had on the classroom performance observed, in the case example of in-service training. These analyses and others with similar purposes can be conducted employing the SPSS statistical program. Chi Square and One Way Analysis of Variance tests can be effectively used to determine the extent to which differences observed between groups are statistically significant.

Although statistical significance is used to assess the strength of the relationship among variables, evaluators should be aware of the fact that this indicates only that there is a high probability that the differences observed did not occur by chance. It offers relatively little information about the reasons why observed events occurred. In one in-service training study, it was found that teachers with more in-service training were rated lower than those with fewer years of training on most of the classroom-observation components assessed. The explanation for this finding came from those who developed the training program, indicating that significant changes occurred in the more recent past of the program and that the changes appeared to have been highly effective, as indicated by the evaluation.

### **Conducting Secondary Analyses**

It is very helpful to funding decision-making to survey the evaluation literature to determine the extent to which similar studies have obtained results like the current study being undertaken. Summarizing other studies' findings can lend considerable power to and support for a particular study's results. The significant increase in the quantity of evaluations conducted should make this task considerably easier than in the past. It is important, however, to note that not all studies are referenced in the literature, particularly those conducted for operational purposes at the school-system level. It is therefore important that searches include surveys of the evaluation offices of school systems, county and state offices. It is also recommended that sufficient information be made available to enable the user to ascertain the quality of the studies to be cited. Many studies are not used because they lack the rigor or application required by stakeholders.

### **Presenting the Results**

The final step in the evaluative process consists of presentation of the results. The format of presentation often presents the logical progression of the evaluation, from problem statement, to conceptualization of measures, to findings and conclusions. Although it is essential that the full process be understood, it is important to be mindful of the priorities of the reader and to present in as clear and concise a manner as possible the findings and conclusions of the evaluation. Here it is particularly important to offer sufficient information without straying from the "big picture"--the primary question being: What information does one offer in the service of utility that is also germane to the main points? The use of graphs and charts to complement the text provides pictures that are truly "worth a thousand words." It is also valuable to insert descriptive or qualitative material--in the form of quotations from interviews, for example--that illuminate and render more dynamic the emerging quantitative picture.

It is vital that the report address concerns expressed directly by stakeholders. One should also keep in mind that evaluations differ from research reports because the former must meet the expectations of stakeholders, provide targeted analysis and offer a discussion of the evaluation's relevance that focuses on the primary issues as framed by the stakeholders. It is also clear that stakeholders should be central to the review process, not only providing feedback on the report's merits, but also offering suggestions that might make the presentation clearer and more insightful.

### **Making Effective Use of Evaluative Findings**

As indicated earlier, a significant aspect of the stakeholder strategy is to facilitate the use and application of evaluative findings. It is the stakeholders who, in fact, provide the enduring link to the community of interest. The professional evaluators, and the intervention program they assess, are transient features of the community landscape. It is the stakeholders who represent the direct interest of the community and who are the sustaining link. It is they who must ultimately judge the merits of the evaluation and determine its productive use. Utilization will be enhanced to the extent that stakeholders prepare and make plans for reviewing program performance and making corrections where necessary. The greater the amount of information provided to stakeholders concerning evaluative findings, the greater will be their ability to plan for and execute actions based on information acquired through the evaluation process.

## PART II

### COLLABORATIVE EVALUATION: THE APPROACH AS APPLIED IN SOUTH AFRICA

#### Introduction

This paper describes the Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) Project's experience in adopting a collaborative approach in conducting programme evaluations with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) that provide in-service training (INSET) to unqualified and underqualified teachers in disadvantaged schools in South Africa. These NGOs provide a variety of services which include the training of teachers in learning-centred methodologies and materials development and usage, to address pressing needs to improve the quality of education at the classroom level. The purpose of these impact evaluations was to establish whether the teacher training programmes offered by these organisations were associated with improved instructional practices and learner participation in classes.

Historically, NGOs in South Africa have focused primarily on service delivery to address imbalances and disparities in educational provision and quality. With delivery being the focal point of their operations, systematic monitoring and evaluation activities either did not exist, were done on an ad-hoc basis, or were left to external evaluators. This scenario is currently changing. Large numbers of NGOs are becoming aware of the importance of research, monitoring and evaluation activities which have direct implications for their sustainability and sometimes mere survival. Donor agencies, both national and international, are placing greater pressure on their grantees to produce evidence that shows programme impact beyond outreach information. And, as NGOs seek to establish partnerships with new national and provincial departments of education, such evaluation data is essential to establishing areas of potential cooperation--areas where NGOs can show that they are making a difference.

Evaluations of NGO teacher training programmes are usually conducted by external evaluators (often non-South Africans) who are commissioned by donor agencies to determine whether their funding makes a difference to target groups and/or whether funding should continue. In the past, the objectives of the evaluations have not included building research and evaluation capacity of NGO staff. The IEQ Project differs from the manner in which external evaluators traditionally operate, in that, evaluations are conducted by an IEQ team of South Africans, with NGOs involved in determining the goals of the evaluation and throughout the design and implementation of the evaluation. Thus, the development and strengthening of research and evaluation capacity of NGO programme personnel are important facets of the evaluation process.

## **IEQ's Collaborative Approach to Evaluation**

Collaboration between the IEQ and the USAID-funded South African Basic Education Reconstruction (SABER) grantees in conducting programme impact evaluations has been characterised by negotiation, reciprocity and empowerment. This means that both the IEQ and the NGO personnel interacted as active participants in the evaluation process, albeit at different operational levels. The nature of the collaborative approach to evaluation with NGOs reflected the goals of the IEQ Project, which are:

- To conduct impact evaluations of SABER grantees' products and services that influence instruction and learning at the school and classroom levels
- To strengthen grantees' capacity to establish and maintain monitoring and evaluation systems for individual projects
- To strengthen SABER grantee staff expertise in educational research and evaluation methodology
- To facilitate professional linkages between SABER grantees and the educational research and development community outside of South Africa.

Collaboration is underpinned by the professional development strategy which is linked to institutional development. In other words, as the capacity of the NGO staff members to conduct formative and impact evaluations is developed on a personal level, these skills can be transferred to various functions and activities of the organisations as well. For example, people who have gained/developed skills in monitoring and evaluation will be in the position to review and refine their organisation's existing monitoring and evaluation efforts.

## **Steps in the Collaborative Evaluation Process**

IEQ's approach to working with NGOs to implement evaluation methodologies involved collaborative working relationships at each stage of the evaluation process:

- initiating task structure and establishing relationships;
- identifying NGO information needs which may be gathered during the assessment;
- working together to construct a design that fulfills NGO information needs;
- forming teams of IEQ and grantee staff to develop data collection instruments that remain with the NGO for project use;

- preparing for data collection;
- conducting site visits together and collecting data;
- analysing data;
- report writing; and
- developing strategies for utilisation of the findings to influence policy and improve practice.

In the next section, each of these steps in the process of building capacity while designing and conducting impact assessments will be explored in detail. For each step, tasks will be identified and issues which arose will be discussed.

### **Step 1: Initiating Task Structure and Establishing Relationships**

A preliminary task of the IEQ was to create a structure and process for working with NGOs that would ensure both the effective development of impact evaluations and, at the same time, build the capacity of grantees to conduct their own evaluations in the future. Individuals were chosen to represent the NGOs who were key persons in their respective organisations, who knew the training programmes, who could make decisions, and who could serve as liaisons between IEQ and the organisations. These representatives were typically not the directors but rather those who were directly responsible for the development and implementation of the training programmes.

Sensitivity to personal concerns, organisational needs, knowledge and skills bases with regard to evaluation was crucial in adopting a collaborative approach. There were different levels of monitoring and evaluation skills evident in the NGO personnel--differences not only by organisation, but also amongst individuals within organisations. Before focusing the evaluation it was necessary to recognise and address, where possible, participants' concerns, needs, and knowledge and skills bases.

At an initial meeting with these NGO representatives, the purposes of the evaluation were discussed, the collaborative approach outlined, and the sharing of responsibilities explained. Time was spent in establishing trust and rapport, as NGOs' previous experiences with evaluation had often been threatening. Moreover, NGO personnel worked for competing organisations, each offering inservice teacher training programmes and competing for scarce donor resources; hence, it was also necessary for them to become comfortable with one another. At this first meeting many questions were raised about the "real" purpose of the evaluation and what would "really happen". IEQ researchers tried

to answer them honestly and openly, emphasising the collegial nature of the task. A key factor in establishing trust and rapport among competing organisations was a commitment on the part of the IEQ team not to compare the evaluation results of the various organisations in any type of report. Rather, the potential collective impact of NGOs in the field of inservice teacher training through a series of reports was viewed as carrying more weight with government departments of education than any individual programme results.

Roles of IEQ researchers and NGO representatives were discussed and agreed upon. It was agreed that as evaluation specialists, the IEQ would take the lead in providing the structure and technical base for the development and implementation of the study. NGO representatives would provide leadership and expertise in identifying intended programme outcomes and, by participating throughout the design and implementation process, ensure that designs and instrumentation fit the context and the needs of the NGOs. They would also assume responsibility in logistical matters and participate as data collectors (and/or identify people in their organisations to do so) along with the IEQ researchers. The roles of the IEQ and NGO personnel were necessarily complementary, requiring a good deal of mutual respect and trust.

Each of four IEQ researchers and one consultant were designated as primary contact persons for organisations and, as a follow up to the first meeting, visited the NGOs at their organisations to answer questions, calm fears, and establish a working relationship.

At the second meeting, a consultant observed that a relationship characterised by trust and rapport had already been established among the NGO personnel and the IEQ team:

*Participants arrived at the workshop eager to begin working. No concerns were expressed related to the study. It was evident that trust and rapport had developed between participants and "their" IEQ team member, probably as a result of the follow up visits and collaboration with team members since the last meeting. All members quickly became involved, even some who felt unsure during the first meeting. Concerns among participants seemed to have shifted from "self" concerns to concerns about how to inform others about the study in a positive way, to gain their support. As they worked toward consensus on a variety of issues, this was a recurrent theme.*

## **Step 2: Identifying Information Needs**

It was agreed that the impact of each programme would be assessed at the classroom level. Since no pre-test data nor pupil achievement test data existed, it was further agreed that measures of impact should be observable differences in teachers' instructional practices and learner participation. The instructional practices and learner participation in classrooms of teachers who had received INSET training would be compared to classrooms where no such enhancements had yet been introduced.

Several design worksheets were developed by IEQ researchers to determine the information and instruments that would be necessary to assess programme impact. These worksheets consisted of open-ended questions to facilitate NGOs' reflections about the goals of their programmes, expected outcomes, key evaluation questions they would like to answer, types of instruments that could be used to gather information, samples that could be used, and products expected by the organisation. Sample questions included:

*What would you like to find out from this evaluation?*

*As a result of participating in your teacher training programme, what would you expect to see teachers doing differently in the classroom?*

*What would you expect to see learners doing?*

*How could this information be obtained?*

*Which group(s) in your organisation could collect this information?*

Working through the design process with the assistance of the IEQ team, NGO personnel discussed the questions as a group. They then took them back to their organisations to discuss with other members of their organisations and complete.

## **Step 3: Constructing Designs**

NGO representatives returned to the next meeting with the design worksheets for their impact evaluations. The IEQ team was surprised at the effort and amount of detail that they had put into their "homework". These initial efforts were important not only to gather information needed for the designs but, perhaps more importantly, to get NGO personnel to "think assessment" and to build commitment to the process. The activity also allowed IEQ researchers to assess informally where different individuals were in their understanding of concepts such as "impact," "sample," and "evaluation questions."

At this meeting, major decisions were made regarding the evaluation design and related issues. IEQ team members worked with the NGO personnel to identify each programme's intended outcomes, operationally define indicators, determine the bases for comparison, the size and characteristics of the sample, types of instruments needed, data collection training and methods, and how data would be analysed and reported. Since it was apparent that intended programme outcomes were similar for the six NGOs, it was decided that they would work together on a core design which could be tailored to individual needs. It was emphasised that there would be no comparisons of individual programmes--an essential understanding if competing organisations were to work together on evaluation.

The process involved a discussion facilitator presenting issues requiring a decision, or an issue would arise from the group. The facilitator presented various options and some advantages and disadvantages of each. Participants reflected on the implications for their organisations, offered perspectives based on the organisation and the context in which he/she worked, and explained the rationale. NGO representatives retained an independent stance and were not hesitant to disagree with one another. The facilitator solicited input from all. Decisions were made by consensus, which sometimes involved a compromise suggested by a participant or the facilitator. The facilitator provided a "check" that the agreed-upon procedures were technically sound. At times it was decided that more information was needed, and decisions were postponed until the NGOs could obtain information or consult with their organisations. Examples of decision points related to the evaluation design and the paths to consensus are included to illustrate the use of the collaborative approach.

- *Levels of Training*

Teachers who participated in inservice training had various amounts of training. Programme co-ordinators saw this as an important variable, since their programmes were developmental in nature. IEQ researchers saw the need to define these various levels of training for the purposes of comparison in the study. Operational definitions were then developed for high, medium and low-trained teachers so that teachers with various levels of training could be compared. These trained teachers would also be compared with teachers who had not received INSET training, called the "untrained" group. This comparison was necessary because there was no baseline data on teachers' instructional practices and learner participation before teachers attended training programmes provided by NGOs.

- *Internal/External Comparison Groups*

After a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of internal and external comparison groups, grantees agreed that they would try to get access to untrained teachers at other schools. Some programmes operate school-wide,

and all encourage sharing among teachers, so for these programmes, an internal comparison group was not a viable option. Therefore, grantees agreed that the comparison group would consist of teachers in other schools who had not participated in the INSET programme or a similar programme.

- *Sample Selection*

The importance of using a representative sample was discussed. Other variables that could account for teachers' instructional practices besides level of training were discussed, including types of schools--farm schools, rural (distinct from farm schools), and urban; level of formal education, and years of experience. Participants agreed that teachers selected should represent a variety of types of schools, levels of education and years of experience; and that the each of the training level groups should include approximately equal proportions of the different variables, to keep the groups "equal."

- *Use of Proximal Measures*

How would one know if training "made a difference?" NGO representatives confirmed that no baseline data was available on student performance levels prior to teacher training that would allow such a comparison. Within the scope of the study, it was decided that teachers' instructional practices and learner participation would be suitable proximal measures of student learning. While it was recognised that teachers' instructional practices and student participation cannot be equated with student learning, they were considered far better indicators than how "happy" a teacher felt about a workshop--the more often used indicator of "success" of training programmes.

- *Announced or Unannounced Visits*

When presented with the options and rationales for announced and unannounced visits, the group responded that visits had to be announced: "That's the way we do business around here!" Unannounced visits were considered for a second visit, after teachers could be informed that observers would be coming "sometime," but with the uncertainty about the scheduling of school events in remote areas, the group decided that announcing visits and scheduling them in advance would be much more productive.

As they discussed design issues and worked toward consensus, participants carefully considered the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches and based their decisions on what would be best for the study and services to teachers, and logistically feasible, not ease or convenience. They demonstrated commitment to the process and also considered the needs of people in their organisation and their clients (teachers, students, and parents) in making their decisions.

#### Step 4: Developing Instruments

To ensure that the evaluation measured outcomes directly related to the programme's goals and objectives, discussions were held individually and collectively about what the programmes were trying to achieve. Programme objectives for each of the six NGOs focused on the use of learner-centred activities in the classroom. Inservice training attempted to take the focus off of the teacher as dispenser of information and "put the light on the learner" in terms of an interactive process of teaching and learning. This approach also requires a new role for learners as active participants in constructing and using their new knowledge.

The process of developing a classroom observation instrument involved NGOs describing the "ideal" scene in a classroom of a teacher who was implementing a programme exactly as the inservice programme developers envisioned. Participants brainstormed what the teacher would be doing; what students would be doing; and what the classroom learning environment would look like and feel like. These were recorded on chart paper and then combined into a number of components of teaching and learning in a learner-centred environment:

- Use of a Variety of Teaching Strategies
- Use of Materials by Learners
- Use of Materials by Teacher to Enhance Learning
- Grouping of Learners
- Learners Work in Groups
- Critical and Creative Thinking Activities
- Questioning Skills
- Learners Asking Questions
- Teacher Feedback to Learners
- Use of Language to Improve Learner Understanding
- Opportunities to Learn

This core group of 11 components was used by each of the NGOs; in addition, individual NGOs had the option of adding components to measure areas of interest that were peculiar to them. All components were in line with findings of research on effective teaching over the last decade (Ellett, Loup & Chauvin, 1991; Lockheed & Verspoor, 1991).

Working together, INSET programme co-ordinators and IEQ researchers further articulated the components in terms of specific behaviours of teachers and learners, with intended outcomes identified as the "ideal" on a rating scale. Other less acceptable teacher and learner behaviours were identified and described along a continuum for each component, with the least acceptable variation on the opposite end of the rating scale.

This is an example of the rating scale (for classes where learners are grouped):

## Component: Learners Work in Groups

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Groups of learners discuss problems, questions, and activities	Groups of learners with limited interaction	Only one or two learners in a group interact	Learners sit in groups but work as individuals

**Description:** \_\_\_\_\_

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In addition to making a rating decision, observers described what was happening in the classroom and provided examples.

A critical incident in the emergence of trust between the NGOs and the IEQ team, and among NGOs, was the inclusion of a component in the instrument on which all NGOs expected to rate poorly: Learners Asking Questions. When the idea for this component was first suggested by an NGO representative, there was some initial hesitation about including it. While getting learners actively involved is a goal of all of the programmes, asking questions represents a dramatic shift in the role of learners in South African classrooms and of children in society in general, where they are expected “to be seen and not heard.” After discussion, however, all NGOs agreed that if this was important, it should be included. While they predicted (correctly) that ratings would be low in this area, they saw this as an opportunity to begin monitoring improvement and reaffirmed among themselves that if this process was to be meaningful, “window dressing” could not be a part of it.

A variety of other instruments were developed with NGOs, including a demographic profile sheet; questionnaires and interview protocols for teachers, head teachers, and facilitators who work with teachers; and a classroom environment and resources checklist. With the assistance of an IEQ team member, each organisation decided which combination of instruments would be appropriate to collect the kind of data needed. A common core of items from the various instruments was used by all of the NGOs, including a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Both the content of the instrument and the development process, then, relied on the NGOs working closely with the IEQ researchers. This was considered essential if instruments and monitoring and evaluation processes were to be used by NGO organisations in the future.

### **Step 5: Preparing for Data Collection**

In addition to arranging classroom visits and handling the logistics of scheduling and permissions, NGO representatives and others from the organisations were trained as data collectors. To prepare for classroom observations, participants viewed videotaped segments of classroom teaching and learning in South African classrooms and made rating decisions, then discussed their ratings and rationales in small groups and reached consensus. This process was followed until participants felt comfortable with the observation instruments and rated videotaped teaching segments consistently. Directions were reviewed for the questionnaires and teacher profile sheets, and tips on interviewing were provided, e.g., how to make the interviewee feel at ease, how to get more information, use of verbal and non-verbal communication.

### **Step 6: Visiting Sites and Collecting Data Together**

IEQ researchers and NGO personnel trained as data collectors visited schools and collected data together. In completing the observations, observers watched an entire lesson for each teacher (30 minute minimum), focusing on the teacher and learners, in order to observe learner engagement, learner interaction with the teacher and other learners, and learning equity (e.g., gender equity in opportunities to participate in class activities). For each component, observers rated the teacher on the classroom observation rating scale and provided rationales for assessment decisions. They also completed a classroom environment and resources checklist.

Direct observations of classes taught by teachers with different levels of training, including no training, allowed comparisons to be made between the groups, to determine the impact of training. Observers were careful to explain to teachers that they were evaluating the inservice training programmes, not the teachers themselves.

Questionnaires and interviews were also completed during the school visits. An attempt was made to “triangulate” the data by gathering the perceptions of teachers, principals, and NGO teacher trainers/facilitators.

### **Step 7: Analysing Data**

Classroom and interview data were analysed using a variety of descriptive and inferential statistics to determine if there were differences between teachers with different levels of training. While the IEQ researchers took the lead in the computer analysis using SPSS (due to time pressures and the lack of experience of grantees in data analysis), the input of the grantees was invaluable in explaining the results. What might have looked puzzling as numbers on paper

became very plausible when one understood the context in which it was found. For example, in a comparison of teachers by levels of formal education, differences were not found for teachers in most of the programmes. That is, it did not seem to matter if teachers had achieved matric, completed a teacher training college program, or had a diploma. Differences were related instead to level of NGO teacher training. While surprising at first, the finding could be explained when one considered that the formal education received was Bantu education--notably inferior, lacking in resources, and typical of education for the majority disadvantaged population during the apartheid years in South Africa.

While statistical significance was used to determine the strength of relationships between variables and the probability that the observed differences were "real," practical significance was determined through discussions with NGO personnel. The question of practical importance of the finding to the organisation was a consideration equally important to the statistical significance of the finding.

### **Step 8: Report Writing**

The impact evaluations for each NGO organisation were documented in an individual technical report which was reviewed by all stakeholders. Again in this step, IEQ researchers took the lead. NGO representatives had input in all phases of the report, however, and wrote selected segments, particularly those related to programme descriptions and expected outcomes at the classroom level, and how the findings might be utilised for programme improvement. The involvement of NGOs also served as a reminder "check" on IEQ researchers to communicate in user-friendly terms, avoiding jargon. In addition, graphs and simple tables were used to visually represent the findings.

NGO personnel were central to the review process. They took draft reports back to their organisations and reviewed them with colleagues, teachers, and teacher trainers; asked questions; and made suggestions that would enhance the presentation. In some cases the questions and suggestions led to further analysis of interesting and/or surprising findings, and subsequent reporting of new findings.

### **Step 9: Developing Strategies for Utilisation to Influence Policy and Improve Practice**

Results of the impact evaluations provided a large amount of information about teaching and learning in classrooms that can be used by a variety of stakeholders--INSET NGO organisations, policy makers, potential donors and teacher training colleges. As collaborators in the evaluation process, NGO organisations "own" the data, understand the findings, and can better use the

evaluation findings to enhance practice and influence policy decisions. This aspect will be discussed in more detail in a later section on utilisation of findings.

The nine steps to collaboration described above comprise the impact evaluation process, with IEQ and NGO involvement described at each step along the way. A summary of the steps and their outcomes, which led to the succeeding steps, is included in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**Collaborative Evaluation Process**

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<b>Step 1:</b>	Initiating Task Structure and Establishing Relationships
<b>Outcome:</b>	Working group of NGO representatives; beginning of a team
<b>Step 2:</b>	Identifying Information Needs
<b>Outcome:</b>	Essential information for designing the evaluation
<b>Step 3:</b>	Constructing Designs
<b>Outcome:</b>	Evaluation design blueprints
<b>Step 4:</b>	Developing Instruments
<b>Outcome:</b>	Evaluation instruments
<b>Step 5:</b>	Preparing for Data Collection
<b>Outcome:</b>	Trained data collectors and schedules
<b>Step 6:</b>	Visiting Sites and Collecting Data Together
<b>Outcome:</b>	Classroom data
<b>Step 7:</b>	Analysing Data
<b>Outcome:</b>	Data organised, interpreted, and conclusions/implications drawn
<b>Step 8:</b>	Report Writing
<b>Outcome:</b>	Completed impact evaluation reports, with suggestions for utilisation
<b>Step 9:</b>	Developing Strategies for Utilisation to Influence Policy and Improve Practice
<b>Outcome:</b>	Results presented jointly (IEQ and NGOs) to programme staff and teachers; national and provincial departments of education; cross-sector exchange to discuss and plan next steps for South Africa

It was discovered in working through this process that although the two groups collaborated, this did not mean that the effort was shared equally at each step. At times the IEQ researchers took the lead, most evidently in data analysis and report writing, while involving the NGOs. At other times, particularly in data collection, the NGOs tended to take the lead in scheduling and/or conducting observations and interviews. In other steps, e.g., design and instrument development, the IEQ researchers facilitated discussions which led to joint agreement on outcomes. In utilisation, both the IEQ and NGOs have made initial strides in using the data to inform policy decisions, and the NGOs have used the results to take a closer look at their programmes as well.

### **Opportunities and Challenges of a Collaborative Approach to Evaluation**

There are number of opportunities and challenges that need to be considered when deciding to adopt a collaborative approach to evaluation. The following are some of the opportunities, or advantages, of adopting such an approach:

#### **Opportunities**

- *Hands-on learning by doing*

NGO personnel learn about programme evaluation by being actively involved in all the phases of the evaluation process. Group meetings and workshops on evaluation methodology and processes which focused on the IEQ/NGO INSET impact evaluations provided NGO personnel with opportunities to learn by doing. As each IEQ team member worked closely with a contact person (sometimes a team) from the NGO, learning could be assessed on an on-going basis.

- *NGOs know their programmes and contexts*

A collaborative approach to evaluation also affirms the NGO personnel's experience and practice-based knowledge. Assistance from people working in the field in terms of sample selection and access to schools for data collection is invaluable. From this perspective, the NGO personnel's experience with regard to logistics and access to schools is extremely important.

Collaboration with NGOs also required them to reflect about their programmes and their tasks in implementing the programmes. For example, in developing instruments, NGO personnel were crucial because they were able to express what their programmes were intended to achieve by their objectives. Indicators for each objective were identified which were then developed into measures in an instrument. The instruments that were developed for the study were enriched with input from NGO personnel.

Another important component of collaboration is that the NGO personnel know the contexts in which they work. They clarify and/or verify perceptions on contextual issues that external evaluators could be holding. This is especially important if the evaluator is a non-South African.

- *NGOs understand the schooling contexts*

NGO staff have a good understanding of the context of schooling. This is important for providing the contextual background to the data collected and interpreting and explaining the findings. Collaboration with the NGOs provided the IEQ team with an understanding of the context in which NGOs operate. This knowledge was especially useful in trying to explain what a particular finding meant to that programme. For example, a recommendation in an evaluation report may suggest increasing the number of follow-up visits to the teacher. This suggestion may be completely inappropriate if one programme person has 300 teachers in two distant areas to visit. It may also be possible that the organisation can only afford one instead of two visits per school term. By having knowledge of the context in which the NGO operates, recommendations are more likely to be context-sensitive and thus more feasible to implement.

- *Demystification of the evaluative process for NGO staff*

External evaluation, traditionally, is characterised by an evaluator coming into the organisation, conducting the evaluation and producing a technical report without programme staff being aware why and what was evaluated. This results in programme staff feeling bewildered and alienated from the process. However, by working collaboratively with NGO staff the evaluation process is demystified. To do so it is necessary to discuss with programme staff why the evaluation is being done, how it will be done, how the findings could be used by the organisation and how their participation is crucial to the process. Also, they come to understand that evaluation need not be viewed from a negative perspective and that it is an integral part of programme development. Demystification of the evaluative process also helps in ensuring programme staff's co-operation.

- *Co-ownership of the evaluation*

When NGOs collaborate in the evaluation of their programmes, they co-own the process and with this comes a sense of responsibility to "get the best out of the process". By co-owning the process, they are crucial players in identifying and answering pertinent questions. The report and other additional products such as instruments are viewed as belonging to them. Co-ownership of the evaluation also contributes to higher levels of commitment.

- *Human capacity building in monitoring and evaluation skills*

A collaborative approach to evaluation is based on capacity development and as such it seeks to develop monitoring and evaluation skills of NGO personnel. This empowers them to become active participants in the evaluation. An added benefit is that they are able to assess some of the merits and pitfalls of external evaluations. For example, previously, NGOs accepted evaluation designs proposed by evaluators they may have commissioned without question, whereas after actively participating in evaluations with the IEQ, they are able to review designs, instrumentation and data collection procedures in a more enlightened way. Even if the NGO staff do not conduct their own programme evaluations, they have some knowledge and a skills base from which to assess whether outside evaluators are carrying out the organisation's brief. Also, they understand and appreciate the constraints that need to be considered in conducting an evaluation.

- *Evaluation is manageable and meaningful*

The involvement of NGO staff makes many aspects of the evaluative process manageable and meaningful. For example, having NGO personnel involved in data collection makes the process manageable particularly if there are vast distances to be covered, especially in rural areas. The NGO staff collecting data together with the IEQ had cost benefits both for the IEQ and the NGO. Also, the quality of data collected, especially interviews and questionnaires, was enhanced because the NGO personnel are able to speak the local language. The use of the local language also contributes to creating a relaxed and enabling environment for respondents. Although many respondents may be able to speak English, they may feel more comfortable doing an interview in their home-language. In this way the data collected are meaningful. Not all the IEQ researchers speak the local languages of all the regions in which data were collected.

- *Evaluation reports are "user-friendly"*

By working together as an evaluation team, the NGOs and the IEQ were able to interpret the results of the study from both a "technical" and a "grassroots" perspective. This allows a more comprehensive and integrated picture of the programme. Dual perspectives have the advantage of integrating theory and practice. Evaluation reports in a collaborative process are also likely to be written in a manner that is "user friendly" and thus, accessible to people who might previously have found an evaluation report full of jargon. This has positive implications for the quality of the report and any other product that comes out of it. Also, the report is used by the organisation instead of being stored as "another evaluation report."

- *Shared decision-making and responsibility*

The adoption of a collaborative approach to evaluation involves decision-making, responsibility and accountability being shared among all team members, usually at varying degrees. All team members' knowledge and experience are recognised and respected. Shared decision making, for example, is by no means relinquishing responsibility but rather an expression of joint responsibility. This aspect of collaboration also builds capacity in dealing with not only with the technical aspects of an evaluation but also with process issues.

### **Challenges**

There are also a number of challenges that need to be recognised and considered when using the collaborative approach to evaluation. However, it is important to note that these challenges need not impede the process; in fact, they can become opportunities!

- *Converging Diverse Skills and Experiences*

Participants in a collaborative evaluation enter the process with different knowledge and skills bases. It is important to acknowledge individual ideas, experiences and knowledge, and utilise them in a meaningful way that enriches the focus of the task, namely, the programme evaluation. In an attempt to address these divergencies, it is important to encourage co-operation among participants so that everyone can learn from each other. In this way, new skills are learned by all involved in the process.

Also, a systematic decision making strategy should be employed so that more vociferous participants are prevented from intimidating more timid ones into acquiescing without full discussion when important decisions are before the group. Good facilitation skills are called for in this situation.

- *Collaboration takes time*

The collaborative approach to evaluation can be a very time consuming process. This is particularly true if building capacity in evaluation skills is of prime importance. During the NGO/IEQ INSET evaluation, addressing NGO representatives' feelings of being under threat and instrument development were two activities that took a fair amount of time. Taking time was important to building NGO capacity rather than imposing designs and instruments.

There were occasions when the IEQ took the lead in the evaluation process because of constraints on time and other resources. An example of this was in data analysis. In such instances the delineation of tasks needs to be negotiated so that all participants are involved and each understands the other's role.

The literature on change and the change process is quite clear, however, that any type of change, and particularly complex changes such as those involved in learning and using monitoring and evaluation tools, takes time; there is no “quick fix” in human resource development (Fullan, 1993; Hall & Hord, 1987).

- *NGOs have high staff turn over*

High staff turnovers which are common in many NGOs impede the collaborative approach to evaluation because new staff frequently enter the evaluation process without appropriate research and evaluation skills. This could contribute to new individuals on the evaluation team feeling lost and thus losing interest, especially if they perceive the evaluation as being overwhelming. This could be addressed by pairing a new staff member with someone who has been involved in the process from the beginning, with an understanding that it is her responsibility to assist the new person. Also, it would be beneficial to involve more than one representative per organisation in the evaluation process.

One unintended positive outcome of the high staff turnover was that as the new provincial departments came into being in South Africa, NGO personnel were often hired in key positions, bringing their experience in monitoring and evaluation with them. This may be viewed in the long run as another form of capacity building, as the skills in monitoring and evaluation are carried over into new settings--ones which may have even more potential for affecting change in the system.

- *Unrealistic expectations*

NGO staff may have expectations that exceed what a collaborative approach to evaluation can fulfill. Thus, NGOs may perceive the capacity building in evaluation skills as being only nominal. Although they would have gained some skills, they may have expected to be able to conduct an evaluation on their own without extensive training. It should be understood from the outset that being involved in a collaborative evaluation study does not necessarily enable one to conduct an evaluation after one collaborative experience. It is very important that unrealistic expectations are not set from the perspective of both the organisation and the evaluators' perspectives.

- *Reactions to Results*

The IEQ team anticipated that there may have been negative reactions where there were poor results, creating disillusionment with the entire process. What happened instead was quite the opposite: NGOs were very self-critical. In one case, in particular, teachers with high training had lower raw classroom observation ratings than teachers with medium training. The differences were not statistically significant, and IEQ team members tried to explain to the NGO

representative that there was “really no difference” between the groups. However, the NGO representative countered that the problem was that they weren’t rated significantly *higher*, as this was an important aspect of their programme. Since they were not, those responsible for training immediately began to examine their programme and make plans to interview teachers about ways to strengthen this component.

- *Cost Implications*

The time-consuming nature of the collaborative process has financial implications. It can be more costly to embark on a “collaborative” one than on an “external” one. While the costs of collaboration yield a pay-off in capacity development, these costs need to be considered in planning for evaluation.

## **Conclusions**

The work of the IEQ Project in conducting collaborative programme evaluations represents a dramatic shift away from the traditional approach to evaluation by external evaluators, toward the use of evaluation as a tool for improving programmes and making informed decisions by those involved. For many of the South Africans involved in this project, it was the first time they were involved as participants in *planning with* evaluation specialists rather than being *subjected to* evaluation scrutiny. Collaborative programme evaluation, while requiring an investment of time and money--and creative problem solving at times to make it work--has a tremendous potential payoff in terms of human resource development. For the IEQ team, sharing responsibility for planning and carrying out the evaluation studies and building the capacity of others to use evaluation were key to the success of the project.

So in the end, what changed? Perhaps the most important outcome in the long run is the new mind-set toward evaluation that became evident as participants began to view evaluation as a tool for informed decision making rather than something to fear. They now have a beginning knowledge and some experience in the use of systematic, data-based ways to monitor and evaluate their programmes and make adjustments as needed. A few examples that have come back to the IEQ team after the collaborative experience show that the impact has gone well beyond the more typical “filing of the evaluation report”:

*We're beginning a new book mobile, a circulating library made possible by a vehicle and colourful, appealing trade books donated by the Japanese government, to provide books for recreational reading to children in rural areas. But before we start, we've got to collect some data! How else will we know if it's making a difference? How much are children reading now? What are their attitudes towards reading? What are their reading levels?*

Training Coordinator, INSET Programme

*We constructed classroom observation protocols for one of our training programmes, but we have five! We can't just evaluate one. Our teachers and trainers are working together on #2, discussing what's important to measure and how it can be measured. It won't happen overnight, but eventually we'll get all five. We have to.*

Training Manager, INSET Programme

Collaborative monitoring and evaluation efforts are important on a larger scale as well. With the development and implementation of educational reform initiatives by the new democratic government comes the need to monitor and assess implementation and results at the classroom level--a process that yields important information for policy makers. From policy to practice to policy, the cycle is informed by the use of data from the classroom. This utilisation of evaluation findings will be explored in detail in the next section.

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### PART III

#### RESEARCH UTILIZATION IN SUPPORT OF EDUCATION POLICY REFORM: REFLECTIONS ON THE WORK OF THE IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL QUALITY PROJECT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Policy researchers throughout the world constantly lament the poor utilization of findings or the extent to which important findings do not find their way through the labyrinthine circuits of the policy process, to finally make a meaningful impact. This paper tries to reflect on, and share, the Improving Educational Quality (IEQ) Project's experiences in the conceptualization and implementation of a research utilization strategy.

The work of the IEQ has mainly been characterized and driven by the maxim "IEQ begins and ends in the classroom." While the primary aim of the IEQ has been to improve the quality of education in participating countries through engaging in classroom-based research, the study of classrooms could be seen as an entry point. In order to influence and improve the quality of teaching and learning, the IEQ realized and built into its mode of operation a cyclic interactive process. This cycle began with a rigorous assessment of classroom processes, and the classroom environment in which they took place. Evidence of classroom practice, the difficulties and the opportunities that exist for improved teaching and learning are assimilated in dialogues with all those involved at all levels of the education system: the teachers, non-governmental organizations, educators, government departments of education and policy makers. The third leg of the cycle is the implementation of ideas and policies that emerge from the dialogues, or even further examination or in-depth assessment of particular areas of teaching and learning.

As shown above, utilization was therefore conceived of as an integral component of IEQ South Africa's overall strategy for fulfilling its mission of improving educational quality. One should hasten to clarify that "policy" in this context carries a broad conception which does not assume government decision-makers as the sole targets of a utilization strategy for policy-related work. There exists today a valuable literature on the complex relationship between government policy; *de facto* policy at the coal-face; and the link between policy and practice in the context of an understanding of educational change. Based on this literature we felt that whilst acknowledging the primary role of government in shaping the policy context, the role of other actors cannot be ignored in developing a utilization strategy. We also learn from international literature that the promotion of research utilization by governments is a very challenging enterprise. Further, as it would appear, the fact that the government may commission research is no guarantee of optimal utilization, provides (worrying) perspective to the nature of the challenge of promoting utilization of unsolicited research. The research utilization strategy formulated by IEQ identified a range

of target audiences, the most important of which were the participating NGOs and USAID (the primary audience) and government departments and other influential people in the education policy community in South Africa (the secondary audience).

The IEQ began its work in South Africa by adapting its overarching goal of supporting the policy reform process to the specific brief in South Africa to evaluate the impact of NGO interventions in the area of teacher development. The brief was obtained from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and focused on the work of particular NGOs who were funded by USAID. At some levels the specificity of the work imposed a narrow scope for utilization. Although the questions for the studies were shaped entirely by this purpose and by what the participating NGOs felt was important to assess, we were able to look at policy implications to the extent that the findings helped to illuminate questions of national importance.

### **The Policy Context**

Because educational change and, consequently, policy development is shaped by the context in which it is occurring, research utilization and evaluation studies need to take cognizance of the major impulses which shape the context. This is a central theme of the analysis in this paper (and perhaps an implicit caveat?): that the utilization strategy adopted by the IEQ in South Africa has been shaped by contextual factors - or, more accurately, by how the IEQ team interpreted contextual factors and their import for utilization. However, we do not believe that our experience is so specific, and therefore, of no consequence to the contexts of other countries - assuming, of course, that transferability of insights is not a simple and technical enterprise. The following overview of the policy context in South Africa is intended to highlight those factors, as we understand them, which have shaped the utilization process of the IEQ's work.

The policy context in South Africa, though not entirely unique, does offer some important opportunities which would be welcomed by many charged with the responsibility for utilization. The prevailing climate is one in which all or most of the dominant social forces have accepted the need for far-reaching educational change. Indeed, most factions of society are involved, to varying degrees and with various degrees of passion, in the process of trying to ensure that change comes as quickly as possible and in a shape that marks a decisive break with the apartheid past. But, as in all similar situations internationally, the policy process often moves in stops and starts, sometimes meandering and sometimes hurtling, always underpinned by heated debate. Underpinning these intense and often complex debates is a general consensus that change is both inevitable and urgent. Education was arguably the most politicized of the social institutions under apartheid rule, seen as a powerful expression of apartheid domination and injustice at both a material and an ideological level. This context of change,

given the attendant need for new conceptions and analyses, presents a very positive climate, but perhaps a contested terrain, for research utilization.

South African society is highly differentiated along a number of cleavages. This is not unusual in the modern world, except that these differences have become the basis (and the object) of fierce political struggles. Today the political landscape and political power continue to be defined along these lines. Despite these differences (and certainly because of them) the new government has embarked on a process of inclusive policy formulation. There has been an attempt to institutionalize inclusivity through public hearings by the parliamentary portfolio committee on education, publication of draft policy for comment, and conferences of stakeholders for consultation and discussion. Given the sheer scale of this enterprise, it is difficult to assess the influence of these processes on the final policy and legislation adopted by government. However, it is important to acknowledge that not all policy is enshrined in legislation or in government policy documents. Government's sometimes less formal pronouncements and statements are powerful mediating influences on policy. Ultimately, most "policy" is defined, constituted and reconstituted by agents in the field. The question of "what is policy?" is a complex one and falls outside the scope of this paper. However, we raise it here to illustrate the significance of non-government actors as targets for a utilization strategy. At one level, many conceive of education policy as that which is contained in government statements, white papers and green papers. Policy is ultimately intended to guide practice, and in the real world, government policy does not enjoy an instrumental relationship with practice at the coal-face. Here teachers and other agents innovate, experiment, confront challenges or respond in a manner that has been ossified over many years without any regard to relevance or desirability. This is true of South Africa as it probably is of most countries. Many institutions such as NGOs, teacher organizations and institutional structures (parent-teacher associations) constitute strategic targets for a research utilization strategy.

The political will of government cannot be stronger, comprised as it is of erstwhile freedom fighters who have been elected into power by an electorate impatient for substantive change. The political culture being nurtured by the new government is one of consensus-seeking, inclusivity and consultation. This culture, which has resulted in a government who is prepared to "listen" and consult, has also resulted in a government which is faced with a flood of people and organizations willing to help or state their views. Further, the historical conflicts in society militate against inclusivity. However, there are a number of issues that bring complexities to the process. First, the history of inclusivity makes it difficult to manage the process, which is characterized by tension between the government of national unity and strong, mass-based political movements. Even the historical solidarity between mass-based organizations in the liberation movement shows considerable strain at times as the inevitable

fracturing between interest groups and classes makes consensus-seeking difficult. All these processes complicate the process of inclusivity. Added to this is the sheer difficulty of formulating policy in a truly democratic and inclusive fashion.

The IEQ began its work in South Africa at a time when much attention was focused on trying to clarify the role of NGOs in relation to government education departments. There was general agreement that this process (clarifying the role of NGOs) should be predicated on an analysis of the quality of their teacher development programs and on the impact of these programs on the quality of education.

These NGOs, many of whom were established during the days of apartheid, are now operating in a rapidly transforming terrain. A notable feature of the new terrain is that even though a democratic government is now in place, the challenges in education are simply too vast and too urgent to be dealt with exclusively through the mobilization of government capacity and resources. Indeed, many are arguing that the new government should not, even in the future, strive to meet all of the educational challenges on its own. Instead, every effort should be made to establish creative and synergistic partnerships with institutions and organizations in civil society. This debate is a complex one and need not concern us within the bounds of the scope of this paper, save to say that there is a compelling need, given the challenges, to assess the potential role of NGOs in the reconstruction of education in South Africa. The immediate relevance of the IEQ's work to debates around the role of NGOs created a very favorable atmosphere for the utilization of findings.

Given the national concern (obsession?) with bringing about a comprehensive and fundamental transformation of education, much of the emerging policy has concentrated on establishing the macro parameters for policy. The reason for this is that the process must begin with policy on national priorities, ideology and philosophy. Once agreed, these broad parameters will serve as guidelines for the elaboration of more detailed policies. This has to happen in a context where the entire system is up for revision and transformation. Although the elaboration of detailed policy happens in tandem and in dialectical synchrony to "developing the big picture", the balance is certainly in favor of the latter. With time, and as the policy environment achieves greater stability, this balance will hopefully tilt toward the former. But for the present, not much attention has been focused on policy in respect of the institutional and classroom levels.

Given the relative newness of the government departments and the policy vacuum consequent to the political change, there are no established institutional mechanisms to consider evaluation research of the nature that we had embarked on. Although this presented us with some difficulties, government officials were also very eager for assistance in clarifying how they should run the system. These officials are newly appointed and are expected to operate within

a policy climate that is politically dysfunctional; having to work with a new ethos in an old institutional environment and alongside colleagues from the old order. Given the paucity of alternative conceptions to the old order, most of the new officials welcome the guidance that can be derived from new research.

The new government, like most other governments, have come to rely strongly on commissions. These are legal institutions which can formulate policy proposals for the government. Perhaps due to our history, technical expertise is not the major criterion for the appointment of members to these commissions. Great care is taken to ensure that these commissions are representative of all the major political and other social interests. The composition of all government commissions have to be approved by the cabinet of the government-of-national-unity.

The institutional settings of NGOs and of the new government officials are very different to that of teachers. There is an ethos and, in some cases, a contextual pressure to innovate and be different. NGOs traditionally, and now the new government officials, are under pressure to demonstrate how they are different from the traditional reactionary approaches of apartheid officials. Teachers in the country embark on much extra work to innovate without any pecuniary reward. NGOs and government departments, ignoring for the moment the feeling of being overwhelmed that most of them experience, are keen for new ideas and information that will support them in their mission to innovate.

The above context presented many favorable opportunities and, simultaneously, presented obstacles for the implementation of the utilization strategy. Our analysis of the contextual factors produced the following factors which we accounted for in proceeding with the utilization process:

- Non-government stake-holders were very important audiences given their role in the policy-making process.
- It was important to reach stake-holders across the political spectrum.
- Government officials were facing many requests for meetings to receive presentations of research findings. We needed to demonstrate why it would be important to meet with us.
- It was important for us to demonstrate how the focus and findings of our work resonated with the key policy concerns at the time (the “current debate” as it is referred to in South Africa).
- There was a strong political will, making government officials eager for support and assistance. We aimed to capitalize on this, in a manner that made the relevance and utility of our work apparent from the first request for a meeting.

The following section will elaborate the details of the utilization strategy which resulted from our analysis of the context and based on the goals of the IEQ.

### **The Utilization Strategy**

The detailed utilization strategy adopted was only partly pre-planned. The research team tried to ensure from the outset that a sufficient degree of flexibility was built into the plan to accommodate new developments and requests as they occurred. This is not always possible with many studies as total flexibility is contingent on discretion over budgets and deadlines, and resources that are often in very short supply. However, creative juggling of time and other resources allowed us limited flexibility. Mostly, we tried to adapt the content of pre-planned (and pre-budgeted) activities based on reflection on past activities.

Research utilization generally presents many difficult challenges. It is difficult to anticipate all the challenges, and there always appear to be some problems which are intractable. One can therefore only hope for the best - hope that the clients and audiences considered to be most important are receptive to the findings and have the wherewithal to act on them. However, although there can be no guarantees, it probably helped that much of the IEQ's work was purposefully utilization-focused. This meant that utilization questions were posed from the beginning and that utilization considerations became an intrinsic part of the methodology adopted. One person on the team was allocated the specific brief for overall coordination of the conceptualization and implementation of the utilization strategy. This ensured that someone was at all times trying to keep us utilization-focused at all stages of the work. The specific dimensions of the IEQ's utilization strategy is summarized in the sections below. The careful reader would note the overlap between some of these dimensions and other pieces in this monograph (collaboration and evaluation methodology). This is intentional and relates to our conception of utilization as being inextricably linked to these aspects of our work.

### **The Collaborative Approach**

As far as possible, a collaborative approach was followed in undertaking all the studies and other work of the IEQ. In addition to the many virtues of this approach (such as the positive impact on capacity building, democratic practice, and team building), it was essential to draw on the disparate strengths which the range of people brought to the project. No single person or defined entity of individuals could have commanded the wealth of intellectual and other resources which enriched the final products and the utilization process. Collaboration occurred along many axes. First, and perhaps most intense, was the collaboration between the IEQ team and members of the participating NGOs. This collaboration allowed for the formulation of research questions and research design in a manner that addressed their needs and, thus, maximized the

potential for utilization of the research by the primary audience. A second axis, by no means as intensive as the first, operated between the donor (USAID) and the IEQ research team. Their busy schedules permitting, we tried to solicit their feedback during all stages of the project and to keep them in the loop. Much emphasis was placed in these discussions on the implications of the IEQ studies beyond the more obvious issues of impact assessment and program improvement.

The IEQ draws on international experience and expertise which is brought into a collaborative working relationship with full-time local researchers and part-time local consultants. This *modus operandi* proved to be very valuable for two reasons. First, it helped to circumvent the often justifiable criticism of foreign expertise being imposed on developing countries. Second, it allowed the project to draw on international knowledge and "best practice" and to combine these with local knowledge and insights in respect of history, context and nuance. There is probably (if any) only a tiny and declining minority who continue to think of evaluation research and policy support in purely scientific terms, denying the additional dimensions which constitute the "art". Local researchers played an important role in developing the project's ability to practice the "art". Should this be necessary, we should hasten to disabuse readers of a view that local researchers operated mainly in the realm of the "art", while the scientific or "hard skills" were mainly the preserve of foreign (US- based) researchers. This certainly was not the case.

We paid particular attention to and worked very hard to avoid being encumbered in our free expression and analysis by the nature of our relationship with the primary audience (the NGOs and USAID). Some findings which may have been less than complimentary to certain NGOs were debated and reflected on; but these were not censored in any way from the final reports.

There was an emphatic agreement from the outset of the project that all information generated would be available to serve the wide policy-making process in the country. It was clear that sponsorship did not confer any special claim, and it is notable that USAID did not seek to exert undue influence on the research design, analysis or utilization process. In fact, all parties were looking for the widest possible utilization - particularly by the government. Both the NGOs and USAID made valuable contributions to the conceptualization and implementation of the utilization process.

### **Use of Reference Groups**

In order to canvass the views of as many stakeholders in education as possible, reference groups for individual studies were set up. Reference groups, comprising of education and research experts, educators at universities and colleges of education, and representatives of organizations involved in similar

work, were involved from the initial stages of the studies to provide a wide perspective on IEQ studies. Each of the various stages of the study - the study design, methodology, sampling, and dissemination of findings - were discussed with a view to deliver maximum utilization of IEQ studies. Each participant in the reference group brought a particular view and concerns that could be addressed in the study.

### **Discussions and Consultations with Local Members of the Education Policy Community**

A reference group comprised of influential players and researchers in the policy community was established to guide all stages of design, analysis and development of a utilization strategy. Discussions and interviews were conducted with people involved in the policy process in the country. This strategy served as an additional source of information to guide the utilization process and to ensure that our work was “speaking to the major concerns of the day”. Much time was spent with participating NGOs to get them on board and to exchange ideas on how best to reach out to the rest of the NGO community, the government, and the policy, research and academic communities.

### **Review of International and Local Literature**

A review of local literature was used as a basis to assess the policy implications of the work of the IEQ. A review was also conducted of the international literature pertaining to the studies to draw on the wider education policy knowledge base. At each major stage of the project, we solicited reviews of ongoing design, conceptualization and analyses from outside consultants so as to draw on a wider geographic pool of expertise. In this way we hoped to be in a position, not only to respond to the major concerns in the country at the moment, but also to assess whether our studies raised additional concerns which should be brought to the attention of the policy community.

### **Written Products**

The form and dissemination of written products was shaped by the overall aims of the utilization process. There was an explicit attempt to cater for varying needs and expectations. A full technical report was written and disseminated to participating NGOs and to USAID. Reports were supplied to government officials who expressed an interest in the full reports. A combination of the following forms were used to disseminate information to other audiences:

- Executive summaries of various reports.
- Verbal presentations.
- Brief summaries of reports.
- Overview papers focusing entirely on policy implications.

- Written pieces to target the academic/research communities.

It is very important in the South African context to target the academic and policy research community, as many from these ranks participate on government commissions, policy research units and serve as part-time consultants to the government. An attempt was made to share information with the international community of policy researchers and evaluators through presentations in local and international conferences and through journal publications.

### **Presentations to NGOs**

One of the biggest challenges that the IEQ faced in its assessment of NGO intervention programs was to facilitate in the mindset of NGO staff members a dramatic shift away from an expert-driven, "fault finding" summative evaluation. It was important that IEQ evaluations were understood to be collaborative, formative investigations that were supposed to contribute towards program improvement. This meant that NGO staff needed to understand that good evaluations were those that succeeded in identifying both strengths and weaknesses in the programs, which point out opportunities for strengthening the programs, and which help in identifying obstacles threatening the success of the programs. The intense collaboration already established in the conducting the studies was a mediating factor that enabled NGOs to trust the intentions of IEQ researchers even when it came to discussing findings that were perhaps not too affirming.

While IEQ researchers took greater responsibility for data analysis and report writing, there were constant discussions between researchers and NGO staff about the meaning of the findings and the manner in which reports could be made accessible and meaningful to NGOs. This was primary to the utilization of the findings to facilitate NGOs taking correctional action. This was the first leg of presentations to the NGOs, a process that was participatory in nature. The second was the formal presentation to all staff of the NGOs participating in the study. The object of this presentation was to facilitate discussion about the implementation of the program and to get all to think creatively about program improvement. Discussions seemed to center around a number of issues: effective ways of teaching and learning, time spent on training workshops with teachers, the training level of teachers and the impact it had on instructional practice, and improvements of the teacher training curricula. There was one main difficulty that confronted NGOs in their endeavors to achieve their goals. On one level it had to do with the fact that their work was contingent upon securing funds; and some organizations therefore spread their resources thinly across a number of projects so as to access as much funding as possible. This lack of focus reduced quality of training programs. On the other level the second difficulty, also related to funds, was the incapability of NGOs to take on corrective measures that would be costly, such as providing intense teacher support

through regular classroom visits.

### **Meetings with Government Departments of Education**

The confidence (be it real or imagined) that one has generated important research findings is by no means a sufficient condition for getting government to pay attention. Further, not even the acknowledgment by government officials of the value of the research will automatically lead to utilization on a scale that researchers consider to be satisfactory. Many factors conspire with each other to militate against government receptivity to research findings and their utilization. Government officials find it difficult to sift through the huge throughput of research findings which are often in a form far upstream from policy implementation. They are working to tight deadlines and sometimes in even tighter line-functions. In any case, they embark on their own processes of innovation and policy research which are structured, focused to their needs and time-consuming. There is little spare time to listen to what must appear to be an endless parade of researchers exhorting the virtues of their work.

One necessary condition to attract government interest in research which is not directly commissioned by them revolves around the extent to which the studies in question resonate with their concerns. These concerns are generally immediate concerns, where the pressure for delivery and implementation is greatest. The overall concerns of the departments and the policy community in South Africa at the time when we were promoting utilization, cohered mainly around priorities and imperatives grounded in a concern with macro issues - "getting the bigger picture clear before filling in the detail". This is perhaps a natural continuation of the historical trajectory in South Africa and illustrates the difficulties and issues at play in encouraging utilization of studies which, though related in many ways, go further downstream in the prevailing process.

Even though we were aware that government departments would be interested in our work, it was clear that their collective priorities lay in dealing with the bigger picture. The challenge was to draw attention to research that focused on the micro level by providing empirical evidence at classroom level and which demonstrated the implementation of a particular methodology for doing this research. At one level the work we had done was consistent with the dominant thrust of educational transformation in the country. But in some senses it was dysfunctional because it went beyond systemic policy proposals to looking at the classroom level. It was necessary to cross the bridge between the concerns and interests of the primary audience (the NGOs and USAID) and the secondary audience (the major players being the government departments). We did this by adapting the presentations to government officials to engaging with issues at a higher level of abstraction; by focusing on policy implications of the findings and exploring the applicability and usefulness of the methodologies employed to

address some of the concerns of the day. In this way we tried to show a link to the immediate concerns while, at the same time, trying to introduce the importance of policy issues at other levels. We found through our presentations and the ensuing discussions that a number of issues arising from our work were of interest to government officials:

- outcomes-based education,
- quality assurance in education,
- learning-centredness,
- evaluation and monitoring,
- in-service teacher education, and
- the role and impact of NGOs.

All departments conveyed a sense of great urgency to make progress with the process of transforming the education system. We found ourselves speaking with colleagues, many of whom had occupied similar professional locations to the members of the IEQ team in the not-too-distant past, about the educational challenges facing the country. They appeared to be nurturing a sense of idealism while dealing with tasks of mind-boggling scale under conditions where time, capacity and the policy environment appear to be uncooperative partners. This situation presented opportunities and threats to our utilization project. The shortcomings in respect of capacity and the sense of being overwhelmed and overloaded all conspired to reduce the receptivity of government officials to new information. On the other hand, the strong desire to deliver helped to encourage the officials to solicit as much information and insights that would assist them in their work.

The process of making contact with government departments began in May 1996. We were very aware that government departments were faced with an extremely high volume of requests for meetings. On reflection, it appears that our success in making presentations to five provincial departments of education (out of a total of nine) and the national education department was to a large extent aided by the fact that members of the IEQ team had a professional relationship with influential people appointed by the new government. The shared history suggested to them that we shared similar concerns about education and were seeking solutions within a compatible, albeit critical, conceptual framework. All the meetings, which took place in the months of July and August 1996, were attended by senior decision-makers of the respective departments. They participated in the presentations and discussions with much enthusiasm. Although the meetings were primarily intended for the IEQ to present its work, we structured the agenda to encourage dialogue which resulted in much reciprocal learning. Subsequent meetings and other activities in the utilization process therefore benefited from the earlier meetings.

Although the discussions at each of the meetings were varied, the following summary reflects the general outcome of the meetings in respect of the utilization of the IEQ studies. Officials felt that the IEQ's work may be useful in:

- Assisting the department to develop its capacity to conduct monitoring and evaluation. They felt this to be particularly necessary in assessing the NGOs which they are considering for future partnerships and for the purpose of policy analysis.
- Establishing and implementing an evaluation and monitoring mechanism which was posited as an integral part of the implementation of their strategic plans.
- Providing practical insights into the development of classroom-based evaluation and monitoring that were aimed at improving practice and informing policy.
- Formulating strategies aimed at improving the quality of learning and teaching in the classroom.

### **IEQ National Exchange**

A lot of time and effort went into conceptualizing the nature and objectives of an IEQ exchange of experiences and learning with other interested parties in the country. Finally it was decided that it would be a conference in which representatives from various research institutes, educators at universities and teacher colleges, government departments of education, NGOs and others would gather to share experiences on educational quality-related work. IEQ researchers in their planning of the exchange chose to be guided by the real meaning of "exchange". The main feature of the meeting was not simply to be a platform for IEQ to present its work as this had already been done with most of the sectors. Rather, it was to be a platform for all to share on their work that would enrich the dialogue on the IEQ goals of improving the quality of education. The theme of the conference, "Quality Assurance through Monitoring and Evaluation," was strategically selected to attract people working in the areas of curriculum development, teacher development, setting standards for quality education, monitoring, research and evaluation. The attendance was very good, despite the timing of the exchange which coincided with the closing of many education institutions for the year-end season. The multiple areas of interest reflected in the title of the exchange, the richness of the presentations and the guest speech by a widely respected politician and an educationist could have attributed to this attendance.

The IEQ presentation provided an opportunity to introduce the nature of the work of the IEQ, its goals, approach and methodology. Central to the approach was the participatory or collaborative nature in which studies were undertaken (which was later illustrated by a presentation by one of the staff members of a participant organization). The core of the presentation comprised the principles relating to research/evaluation methodological issues that guided and underpinned the impact assessment studies undertaken by IEQ, and only to a lesser degree the findings of the studies. The methodological issues discussed were those relating to validity and reliability of findings.

The keynote speech, presentations by others, group discussions and plenary discussions all contributed to an effort to explain "education quality". A broad conception of quality whose elements people began to identify, emerged as a consensus. The usefulness of this concept of quality was that it was arrived at through a process of inclusivity involving various stakeholders at different levels. On one hand it was clear there were those whose brief was to look closely at macro issues, such as setting standards of national quality education and designing assessment systems commensurate with accepted notions of quality. On the other hand there were many who could tackle quality from a micro point of view, including those whose work focused on the classroom elements, classroom practice, teacher development, school governance, learning assessment, teacher appraisal, and program evaluations. This suggested that many of the people attending the exchange had a role to play, in various ways, in contributing towards improving education quality. The high level of interest in the issues discussed was clearly evident when people began articulating concerns and concrete suggestions for the way forward. The general feeling was that something of great importance had been initiated and everything possible had to be done not to lose it, and that it had to be done almost immediately so as not to lose the momentum. The very concrete idea that received consensus was the need for a follow up meeting that would accelerate and maintain the passion for understanding issues of education quality.

## **Conclusion**

The completion of the utilization plan meant the completion of the assimilation leg of the interactive cycle of IEQ operation, and regrettably it also coincided with the end of the contract for the IEQ project. The one leg of the cycle, viz. "action", remains undone. Many questions arise in relation to this: Who will continue to play the role of the catalyst in the specific area of work that IEQ had crafted for itself?; To what extent could the IEQ assist in the re-formulation of policy?; and, What could be its role given the nature of its goals for improving education? It would be erroneous to conceive that research or evaluation should, no matter what conditions exist, lead to concrete policy changes. As shown in the paper, it takes much time and many resources to achieve this. The IEQ's work has contributed to establishing a dialogue towards that direction.

The utilization strategy of the IEQ confirmed the assumptions and principles that guided the plan, but it also was a learning curve for all those involved with the IEQ. The fact that the utilization strategy was purposeful and was incorporated in the program from the beginning was perhaps the biggest strength. It was flexible enough to accommodate conditions emerging from the ground, while retaining its purpose. We learned that it was important that everyone understood and agreed upon the different elements of the utilization plan. This was especially crucial as each researcher was assigned a project wherein it would be necessary to conceptualize utilization as an inherent aspect of all projects. Also, we learned

that the utilization needs to have a specific budget which then assists in terms of working out the parameters of the plan.

IEQ researchers knew that the work of the IEQ stood a better chance if it resonated with major concerns and was consistent with the historical trajectory. Imperatives on the ground would compel policy makers to notice the relevance and value of our work not simply because the researchers believed so. The value of the work could also be illuminated through the appropriateness of the presentations in terms of the tools employed.

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