

Balancing practice ideals and the diverse needs, values and expectations of local, national and international stakeholders – How World Vision Australia optimizes value in evaluation in international community development.

Evaluation in World Vision aims to meet the dual objectives of accountability and learning. The stakeholders in evaluations are many – they include communities, donors, policy and programming staff, marketing teams, as well as external partners. For those facilitating the evaluation process this poses a significant challenge: How do we ensure that the evaluation optimises value for the different stakeholders in a program? This paper describes the experiences of four evaluation practitioners working with different community development projects in Australia and overseas.

Local overseas programs - Fostering new partnerships in design, monitoring and evaluation, Honduras (Francois Tsafack)

World Vision Australia places primacy on evaluation practices which are consistent with the key community development principle of participation. The ideal is for high levels of community participation to occur through all stages of the project life cycle. This is articulated in the World Vision Partnership's framework for programming - LEAP (Learning through Evaluation Accountability and Planning) - in particular the third of the five key foundational principles, participation. LEAP aims to produce quality programs with strong community participation and ownership.

The evaluation of Monquecagua ADP, Intibuca region, Honduras, therefore combined participatory research, community-based research and program logic. The aim was to foster stronger partnerships between the community and World Vision and to bring the community to the forefront of evaluation and development activities.

For their part, the community embraced the evaluation and its approach. For World Vision Honduras however, this approach represented a deviation from usual evaluation practices. As such the evaluator faced some initial resistance from design, monitoring and evaluation (DM&E) staff. Through a series of discussions, staff came to appreciate the potential and benefits of this new approach. A consensus was reached. A shift in mindset occurred. There was agreement that the community, as the primary stakeholder in all interventions, should be the owners of information collected and the drivers of process during evaluations. Learning and downward accountability came to be seen as the primary purpose more so than accountability to donors.

This new partnership approach increased mutual understanding and community ownership. The Monquecagua community embraced program logic theory and identified future activities where it would be useful. WVH has adopted community-based participatory evaluation approaches as their preferred evaluation approach and are now working on integrating program logic into all their community intervention activities for planning, designing, monitoring and evaluation.

The presenter has also used this approach in evaluating other World Vision programs, including as the Reberro Enhanced Food Security project in Rwanda; the Makuyu Food Security project in Kenya; the Monquecagua Agriculture Diversification project in Honduras; the El Porvenir ADP in Colombia; and LaGonave ADPs in Haiti. The experience in these countries has been that the main challenges are usually related to getting program staff to see things differently and to break away from habitual ways of

interacting with the community that are less conducive to true community participation. The Monquecagua ADP evaluation in Honduras taught that the key to overcoming these challenges is ensuring that staff and community concerns around taking a new approach are properly addressed as early as possible.

Overall, this evaluation experience demonstrated how foundational principles of community development are compatible with good evaluation practice and evidenced how evaluators can be catalysts for national office policy change.

Regional projects – Building community resilience, Africa (Emma Pritchard)

The Africa Community Resilience and National Capacity (ACRANC) project, a regional project funded by World Vision Australia, ran from October 2001 to June 2007. The project aimed to develop and strengthen the disaster management capacity of World Vision African National Offices (NOs), and through them, to develop the capacity of local WV program staff and communities to prepare for and respond to small and medium scale emergencies. The Africa Relief Office (ARO) conducted workshops with NO on emergency response and disaster mitigation (ERDM) topics and training on how to develop disaster preparedness plans and reserve funds for emergency response. To complement and strengthen this capacity building approach, the ARO also created a Regional Rapid Response Team (RRRT), whose trained members were to continue ERDM capacity building within the NO they were based and to be second wave responders to the Global RRRT in the event of an emergency. It was then the role of NOs to develop the capacity of local program staff and community members, assisting them to create ERDM committees, to prepare Initial Disaster Preparedness Plan (IDPPs) and to undertake mitigation activities. The overarching goal of the project was to increase community resilience to natural and man-made disasters. Within this framework, each NO had considerable scope to undertake ERDM capacity building as appropriate to their context and resources.

The end of project evaluation used a case study approach to identify promising practices and significant learnings to inform the next generation of resilience building and disaster management capacity building activities to be implemented by World Vision in Africa. Cases comprised two model countries where the project was strongly established (i.e. longest and most comprehensive implementation of activities) - Kenya and Rwanda; and one non-model country (i.e. project activities underway but yet to be fully implemented) - Uganda. The case study design was chosen to allow for a holistic, systemic exploration of the way all aspects of the ACRANC project combined to achieve strengthened disaster mitigation capacity and to enable complex, unpredictable and unique elements to be captured and understood.

Stakeholders with an interest in the findings of this evaluation were numerous and varied, ranging from members of communities vulnerable to disasters, through to the regional ARO and across the other side of the globe, World Vision Australia. Though the evaluation was relatively small and short, the case study approach produced a depth and richness of information that generated valuable insights for each in this diverse group of stakeholders. WVA and the ARO took away learnings about project design and accountability and reporting, NOs gained practical insights around funding and staffing and community members were able to share and inquire about mitigation activities of their neighbouring countries. This symposium presentation will describe the ways in which qualitative methods were well suited to the types and levels of learning this project required and how the case study approach would be used and expanded in future.

Urban programs - A meta-evaluation to support the development of World Vision's urban approach to programming (Lucia Boxelaar and Joyati Das)

For World Vision, urban poverty is a major development and programmatic challenge. While World Vision's focus has traditionally been in rural areas, an increasing number of its programs are located in urban or peri-urban settings. In 2007, World Vision Australia initiated the Urban Program Initiative to develop and test community development approaches specifically designed to deal with development challenges in the urban context. Six urban pilot programs have been launched - in India, Cambodia, Indonesia, South Africa, Bolivia and Lebanon. Within these a variety of urban programming approaches will be explored. To maximise learning, a meta-evaluation strategy is implemented across these urban programs.

Urban issues cut across many stakeholders, different sectors, and multiple perspectives on desirable development outcomes and pathways to achieve them. Moreover, urban environments are dynamic, where relationships between people constantly shift and change. This complexity makes it difficult to develop a comprehensive understanding of the situation and a concomitant 'solution' for addressing it, prior to acting on it. Facilitating change in these situations is necessarily an ongoing 'reflective' process that involves all stakeholders in a learning process.

By taking a constructivist approach to the meta-evaluation, World Vision Australia recognises the complexity of urban programming. Central to constructivism is a focus on learning and reflection to continuously redefine goals and objectives in relation to specific concerns. Within a constructivist approach, the development process that World Vision contributes to, is conceived of as an exploration of an issue, rather than as the implementation of a pre-defined solution.

With this in mind, the meta-evaluation strategy of the urban program deliberately differs from more conventional two staged approaches that focus initially on model development and subsequent testing of a small number of pilots. Rather, the urban team has taken the view that complex issues are best managed by means of an ongoing action research approach that involves all stakeholders in a reflective process to learn their way forward.

World Vision Australia's urban team has developed a meta-evaluation methodology that is framed around an action research process that aims to capture and share the knowledge-in-action as it emerges from the six pilot programs. The urban program team is in the process of establishing six action research teams around each of the pilot programs. These teams bring together program staff, program managers of other urban programs in the country and the region, the WVA UPI team members, local community stakeholders, as well as global partners with an interest in urban programming. All participants have an interest in the development and implementation of urban programs. During the course of UPI, these action research teams convene regularly to reflect on and plan program implementation, including during the design of the program, the interim evaluation and end of program evaluation.

At key points during the pilot process, representatives from the six action research teams will convene in international learning events to share emerging findings. The role of the WVA team is to ensure coordination between the action learning teams. They play an important role as knowledge brokers within the international World Vision partnership. A key challenge for them will be to ensure the meta-evaluation adds value to stakeholders at all levels (WV agencies globally, World Vision Australia, the implementing National Offices, program staff, external stakeholder), with very diverse stakes in the urban program (funding and marketing, program design, policy, advocacy, humanitarian relief, different sectoral interests). The success of the meta-evaluation hinges on their ability to do this effectively.

Indigenous Australian projects – an innovative way of facilitating participatory and interdisciplinary project design and evaluation Companion Modelling (Christine Soulier)

The domestic community development environment is equally as complex as the international one – different cultures, with different representations of the world, different semantics and sets of assumptions, different social organisations and political power co-exist and share a common spatial territory. How to efficiently design, implement and evaluate projects in such an environment and happily marry complexity and participation at each stage?

World Vision Australia Programs sought to implement innovative approaches to tackle these issues by using “Participatory Modelling” methods and tools, in partnership with HEMA Consulting, a consulting firm based in Canberra¹. “Working with models and games is a mean to cross disciplines’ boundaries and to acknowledge the complex nature of the systems under study... Modelling is an intermediary object facilitating our collective and interdisciplinary thought”. (ComMod²)

Participatory action and learning methods were used in a development programme with our Aboriginal partners in the Perth metropolitan area over the past 4 years. Viewed diagrammatically, Participatory Learning and Action is a loop, where the results of one course are fed into the next, but such that participants have as much agency as possible. Further design then, is based on what is learned at the last iteration of the activity. The programme in Perth came to the end of the first loop - time to evaluate and re-design the next loop. Participatory Modelling operation was then launched. First, a model of the system at play was designed in a participatory manner, involving the diverse actors of the system, and embracing the diverse representations of the world, the diverse social structures, and the diverse decision making processes. This served as the foundation for the development of a “role-playing game”, which modelled and simulated reality, embracing its complexity as much as feasible.

Playing the game means becoming an actor of the system in a role other than that played in real life. It is about collectively experiencing the realities of a life situation which is not ours, life in a virtual laboratory. The role play game is about understanding the idiosyncrasies of a system whose structure and characteristics often escapes attention in day-to-day life; it is about making decisions that the day before, we may have considered absurdities.

The use of the participatory modelling approach enabled project participants to:

- Validate our learning (as an evaluation tool) and confirm our assumptions for future development;
- Understand the complexities of the system at play, in a dynamic manner;
- Share this understanding with all other stakeholders;
- Identify some of the maladaptive characteristics of the system;
- Create a platform of understanding for the all stakeholders to collectively embark on a new project design.

Major positive outcomes to date include the following:

¹ Human Ecosystem Modelling with Agents. Information can be found on: <http://www.hemaconsulting.com.au/>

² Companion Modelling Approach, Background information and field projects can be found on: <http://cormas.cirad.fr/ComMod/en/index.htm>

- Assumptions have been validated and key concepts are now shared by the group. This provides the group with an opportunity to further explore the system failures and avenues for change;
- Other issues which had not been factored into the model came out during the game and proved more pertinent than anticipated;
- “The Game” proved a powerful advocacy tool as it provided an experiential opportunity to understand the realities experienced by “the other”;
- In an environment where uncertainty is high and success scarce, “the Game” proved an effective tool at a project design stage, to experience success, generate confidence and identify and address anticipated hurdles;
- The Game can also be utilised as a “virtual laboratory” to test policy decisions and visualise their impact on the system at hand.

During the symposium presentation, we will open a window on this virtual laboratory.