

## PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION IN THE CONTEXT OF CBPD: THEORY AND PRACTICE IN INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** This article reviews current trends in community-based participatory evaluation (CBPE) and presents an overview of related evaluation tools. These approaches have been widely implemented in an international arena, including Canada and the United States and the developing world. The theoretical approach guiding this article stems from current trends in international development thinking. The author argues that participatory evaluation is the most effective means of assessing community-based development initiatives. A comparative examination of three evaluation methodologies, however, reveals that not all those claiming to support the central tenets of CBPE actually promote democratic participation. This article reflects a growing international interest in CBPE and Canada's participation in development efforts of this nature, both locally and in the global South.

**Résumé:** Cet article constitue une revue des tendances de l'évaluation participative axée sur la communauté [*community-based participatory evaluation*] (CBPE) et présente un survol des outils d'évaluation utilisés par ces approches, qui ont été mises en œuvre au niveau international incluant au Canada, aux États-Unis, et dans des pays en voie de développement. L'approche théorique encadrant ce travail découle des tendances contemporaines dans le domaine du développement international. L'auteur soutient que l'évaluation participative représente le moyen le plus efficace de mesurer les initiatives de développement communautaire. Cependant, un examen comparatif de trois méthodologies d'évaluation révèle que ce ne sont pas tous ceux qui prétendent soutenir les objectifs principaux du CBPE qui prônent la participation démocratique de la population locale. Ce travail reflète un intérêt international grandissant dans le domaine du CBPE ainsi que la participation du Canada dans

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des démarches de développement de ce genre, à la fois localement et dans les pays du Sud.

Canadian aid agencies, academics, development practitioners, and experts are increasingly becoming involved in cross-cultural and international development. In the field of international development, two theoretical and practical trends have been developing. First, there is increased recognition that communities are an extremely effective forum and starting point for development. This is particularly true when one considers the question of scale, and the ability and importance of development initiatives to respond directly to individuals' felt needs at a local level. Second, evaluation is becoming an integral component of development initiatives from the grassroots up to large-scale efforts. Evaluations in the form of needs assessment and environmental assessment are often precursors to development, and cyclical evaluation is increasingly being built into development models, particularly in the area of community-based participatory development (CBPD).

In this context it is increasingly difficult to separate the evaluation process from the development process, as the relationship between the two is often symbiotic. Development needs are identified through evaluation, and development practitioners and program recipients utilize evaluation results to develop or improve program services. Once changes have been implemented, cyclical re-evaluation is required to determine whether changes to the program are effective and whether they have produced unintended results. Recipient needs are not static, and therefore development efforts require constant re-evaluation as a critical component of the process.

The goal of this article is to review theoretical models and tools used in community-based participatory evaluation (CBPE) within the context of international development. These models apply to community-based participation both in Canada and internationally. There are several reasons to present an overview of CBPE. First — and this point will be elaborated on throughout the text — participatory evaluation has emerged largely in response to several limitations of mainstream evaluation and, as such, merits investigation as a viable alternative to mainstream approaches that may not be appropriate or effective for the assessment of certain programs. This is not to say that mainstream and participatory approaches to evaluation are mutually exclusive; in many instances elements of CBPE models are incorporated into mainstream evaluation. This, however,

points to a second reason to clarifying what is meant by CBPE, and that is to dispel the myth that it implies “add participation and stir.”

“Participation” has become a buzzword in evaluation circles. Numerous false claims have been made asserting that conventional evaluation frameworks are “participatory” by virtue of their inclusion of selective CBPE characteristics while neglecting to respect fundamental tenets of the approach. In many cases, participation is limited to the gathering of data while the selection of evaluation tools, planning, and data analysis are conducted without the input of stakeholders. A review of fundamental characteristics of CBPE can provide important distinctions between evaluation frameworks that are genuinely participatory and those that only claim to be.

Defining CBPD is problematic in that, by its very nature, it is complex and diverse. Furthermore, while there is a general consensus among practitioners as to what constitutes the pillars of CBPE, some components are contested. For example, while some proponents of participatory evaluation feel that the role of the evaluator is that of a facilitator and negotiator, others insist that evaluators have a moral responsibility to participate in transformative action (Kidder & Fine, 1986; Weiss & Greene, 1992; Whitmore, 1988).

CBPE resists strict definitions because it offers no standard methodologies, formulas, or tools. This is largely because, ideally, the structure, methods, and tools of evaluation are determined consensually in culturally relative ways by the community or collective stakeholders (with a strong inclusion of the intended beneficiaries) who seek to conduct an evaluation. Because of this difficulty in defining, and subsequently understanding, what CBPE represents and how it might be approached, this article offers a fairly exhaustive description of its fundamental principles and criteria. This is useful both as a starting point for those interested in practicing CBPE and as a tool for gauging if, and to what extent, a particular evaluation framework or design follows a community-based participatory approach.

Finally, evaluation provides vital feedback about development programs to those involved so that they can discern if and how programs are effective and indicate where improvements can be made. This contributes to the success and sustainability of programs. In acknowledgement of the impact of evaluation in the development process, by presenting a picture of CBPE that outlines its strengths

and weaknesses, this article also seeks to highlight the importance of this approach for its contributions to successful CBPD.

To appreciate current evaluation trends for community-based development initiatives in the context of international development, it is important to understand that these trends have emerged as a response to the limitations of more traditional approaches. In order to understand the evolution of evaluation in *any* context, however, it is important to paint a clear picture of the subject of evaluation. This is because trends in evaluation are a direct reflection of, and adaptation to, the changing nature of development efforts. In turn, the evolution of development approaches correlates with the changing needs (both perceived and felt, which will later be distinguished) of communities undergoing some form of development process. These needs are often identified through evaluation processes.

With the intention of presenting a grounded and historically relevant analysis of CBPE, I will begin with a brief overview of the changing face of CBPD in the global South, and the fundamental shifts in ideology and praxis over time that underscore current evaluation practices. This will be followed by an examination of current theoretical trends in CBPE, a comparative examination of three specific methodologies, a summary of the strengths and weaknesses of CBPE, and, finally, concluding remarks.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The theory and practice of international development has undergone a series of transformations in past decades. While the term “development” has come to encompass a gamut of actions and ideologies, from capacity building and empowerment to urban agriculture and health education, it has traditionally been associated with economic development. In the 1940s, during the industrial revolution, development economics was conceptualized as a push toward economic growth (Pieterse, 2001). The ideology espoused at the time saw technological advance in areas of large-scale production as the key to a nation’s social welfare. This mode of thought permeated geographical boundaries, resulting in shifts from horticulture and small-scale agriculture to large-scale agriculture, from local business to internationally viable industry, and from sustainable forms of livelihoods to environmentally unviable social economies. This era witnessed a widening gap between rich and poor on a global level, which would only deepen years later with the introduction of the

neoliberal economic model to the global political economy (Veltmeyer & O'Malley, 2001).

The modernization period from 1950 to 1960 broadened the focus of development to encompass political modernization (nation building) and social modernization, such as fostering entrepreneurship and achievement orientation, as well as economic growth (Pieterse, 2001). Throughout the 1960s dependency theory similarly pigeonholed economic growth as the hub of development, this time through national accumulation. National accumulation, however, manifested as dependent accumulation (of developing nations dependent upon developed nations), which gave rise to the “development of underdevelopment” (Pieterse). The 1970s saw the birth of alternative development through which the idea of social and community development, and ultimately human development in the 1980s, flourished (Pieterse). The fruit of the latter concept is the understanding of development as capacity building. The origins of CBPD and CBPE are rooted in alternative development and human development.

In the period that followed, neoliberalism represented a return to neoclassic economics, with market-led forces guiding economic development. The role of state interventions to regulate economic growth was replaced by structural reform, deregulation, liberalization, and privatization (Veltmeyer & O'Malley, 2001). At first enticed by Western models of economic growth, nations of the global South turned to lending institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to finance the implementation of similar models. These institutions, under the auspices of funding regulations, imposed structural adjustment agreements upon borrowing countries, fundamentally altering their political economies and creating a vortex of dependence perpetuated to this day through foreign debt and skyrocketing interest rates. The conditions of these agreements often include federal funding cutbacks on social services and the tailoring of local industry to meet global market demands. Many development thinkers perceive this phenomenon as a blatant example of Western imperialism and the institutionalized imposition of development models on the global South (Veltmeyer & O'Malley).

The unfortunate ideological legacy of international development policy and practice encompasses a paternalistic tradition of Western experts construing the problems of developing nations according to their own cultural and systemic biases, and introducing aid

in response to needs identified by these experts, regardless of cultural viability (for the local population) or sustainability. Here I draw the distinction between *perceived needs* and *felt needs*, the recognition of which was to shape the new face of international development. I have chosen these terms to describe a dialogical and practical dichotomy that has been increasingly debated in development circles since the 1980s. Perceived needs refer to what Western experts, academics, donor agencies, and other outsiders (including local stakeholders that are not part of the target community) believe that program recipients need. Felt needs refers to those envisioned by the local recipients of program aid. International development, both large-scale and community-based, has for the most part concentrated on efforts to address perceived needs while neglecting real felt needs.

Esteva and Prakesh (1998) have argued that reality is socially constructed on the basis of subjective experience — conditions that affect and shape people's lives — as opposed to what development agencies have traditionally taken for granted to be abstract universal principles based on structural (economic) conditions. Therefore, needs perceived at a local level by local people are also largely socially constructed. Much of the current thought surrounding alternative development discourse suggests the need for communities to define their own felt needs (Chambers, 1995; Cowie, 2000; Esteva & Prakesh, 1998; Mattila, 2000; Parpart, 2002).

The pattern of overlooking felt needs while focusing on perceived needs has also applied to the profession of evaluation, which both influenced the direction and structure of development (as evaluation experts informed development experts of their perceptions of beneficiaries' needs via needs assessments), and was influenced by it (as evaluation frameworks tended to mirror the hierarchical structure of development programs). In my opinion, it is precisely the perceived needs/felt needs gap or inconsistency that recent shifts in development and evaluation ideology and practice have sought to address.

Development agencies as far back as the late 1960s and 1970s began to understand that in many instances development efforts failed because they did not take local realities into account, including social, cultural, political, and environmental factors that would affect the feasibility and sustainability of programs. From these circumstances emerged a new approach to development that recognized the value of local knowledge and experience in shaping development plans to meet the felt needs of community members.

The key ingredient in this new recipe for development was participation: participation on all levels — from the most marginalized community members, to program staff and donor agencies — and at all stages — from needs assessment and implementation to monitoring and evaluation (Fetterman, 2001; Parpart, 2002; Schneider & Libercier, 1995). By the mid-1980s, CBPD had gained prominence and credibility within the field of international development, influencing the emergence of CBPE. Both CBPD and CBPE are widely practiced today.

#### WHY CBPE?

Conventional approaches to community-based evaluation in international development have been structurally hierarchical on several levels. Okail observes that in this field, “the term ‘Evaluation’ has always carried a considerable sense of higher authority” (Okail, 2002, p. 2). First, the principal interests represented in evaluations were characteristically those of the funding agencies; evaluations were often conducted above all for the purposes of enforcing accountability (of program managers and staff) and justifying continued funding. Second, the evaluator or “expert” has typically assumed an authoritative role. She or he would often rely on reports compiled by external evaluation consultants and periodical reports written by program managers (who had their own interests to protect and promote in the process).

Evaluation frameworks were constructed according to standards put forth by development officials who typically had little or no knowledge of the social, cultural, and environmental conditions of the beneficiaries. Evaluators relied heavily on written reports and mission statements that could not offer a clear or holistic picture of the lived realities of recipient populations or their experiences with programs. The data gathered would then be measured against standard blueprint formulas created by Western scholars and practitioners, most of whom had no cultural contact or program experience with beneficiary communities.

These conventional approaches to evaluation have increasingly been met with criticism for several reasons. First, they are generally unable to produce a clear and comprehensive image of local realities and experiences because evaluators are not socially immersed in the context that the evaluation seeks to assess. Second, they often lack the flexibility and adaptability necessary to reach the most

marginalized groups who have the most to gain from the evaluation process.

Finally, in support of the argument raised at the outset of this article, the current ideological shift toward CBPE reflects a parallel shift in international development toward CBPD. International development organizations and donor agencies have come to realize that as programs become more democratic and participatory, the evaluation process must incorporate these same principles. CBPE is therefore the only viable means of assessing their progress and success because it is based on the fundamental principles of democratic participation.

Similarly, programs that maintain a top-down, paternalistic structure have little to gain through CBPE because they are founded on principles that run counter to the tenets of CBPE:

The ability of producing a realistic and informative evaluation report is highly dependent on the way in which the project was initially designed... projects that are designed as fixed blueprints can hardly be evaluated in any other way than the conventional methods of top down evaluation where there is no room for engaging people affected by the project. (Okail, 2002, pp. 5–6)

#### WHAT IS CBPE?

CBPE is people-centred. It encompasses a gamut of methodologies that engage stakeholders, program staff, and target beneficiaries in generating measurable tools and standards for assessing the programs that they are involved with. In order to develop a comprehensive picture of CBPE, I have compiled a profile of the fundamental characteristics and principles that overlap in an extensive body of literature on the topic.

The starting point for divergent strands of CBPE is the fundamental assumption that local people, including the poor and marginalized, possess the collective knowledge, tools, and capacity to improve their conditions (Mulwa, 1993; Owen & Rogers, 1999). In fact, many proponents argue that it is precisely the poor and marginalized who should be at the center of CBPE. This is because often the most vulnerable segments of communities are either ignored by virtue of their marginalized position in the existing order

(Cowie, 2000), are constrained by local power structures (consider, for example, the complex nature of gender subordination), or lack access to the participatory process due to time or geographical constraints or responsibilities such as domestic commitments.

This argument highlights the most important principle of CBPE: democratic participation. This entails the acknowledgement of power relations and inequalities on a societal level, as well as among participating stakeholders (Gardner, 2003; Whitmore, 1998). As House and Howe (2000) point out, evaluation occurs within a complex social fabric. King (1998) furthers this claim by arguing that participatory evaluation (PE) must address not only the lack of power from the bottom, but a common unwillingness of those with power to give up control, particularly if stakeholders and outside evaluators maintain considerable responsibility for the outcome of the evaluation.

Herein lies what is perhaps the greatest challenge: participatory democracy, in most instances, calls for a reversal of power relations. This is especially true if the following principle of CBPE is to be established: local ownership of the evaluation process (Gardner, 2003; Miyoshi, 2001; Okail, 2002). This implies the restructuring of the role of the evaluator from expert (the owner of superior knowledge) to facilitative friend (who seeks to gain important local knowledge). It also illuminates an ultimate goal of CBPE — self-governance and self-determination (Fetterman, 2001; Owen & Rogers, 1999). This goal is, of course, more easily attainable in cases of endogenously owned and managed programs, or where decision-making and management are already democratically participatory.

Another important principle that is in many instances a prerequisite for successful CBPE is capacity building (Gardner, 2003; Moore, Rees, Grieve, & Knight, 2001; Owen & Rogers, 1999). It is important to note that capacity building begins with the development of knowledge and tools that a community possesses collectively. It is common in CBPE to employ exercises designed to highlight individual skills, talents, and knowledge and then hone these tools to contribute to the evaluation process. While the focus is generally on endogenous capacity building, it is not uncommon for an outside evaluator to introduce new knowledge and tools. It is important to clarify here that the role of the evaluator is facilitative, not authoritative, and in fact the term facilitator is generally preferred, as it is more reflective of CBPE philosophy. The facilitator's role is essentially to help people help themselves, and she or he should therefore

be keenly aware that her or his contributions should be made following terms outlined by the local stakeholders.

As a key element of the capacity-building process, CBPE emphasizes collective methods of knowledge generation. Evaluation is a collective learning process that is meant to be useful to the program's beneficiaries (Whitmore, 1998). It should be cyclical and involve constant critical reflection (of attitudes, behaviours, and ideas) and re-evaluation. According to this model, evaluation is seen as a process (which many feel should be of equal or superior value than the end result), not a product, involving multiple methods and knowledge. The notion of multiplicity applies to valuing the different experiences, knowledge, and voices of stakeholders, acknowledging a diversity of social, cultural, and economic backgrounds (with particular sensitivity to gender, race, and class), and using a variety of evaluation tools and methods.

The use of mixed methods or triangulation, a standard methodology borrowed from the broader field of evaluation, is common in CBPE. This approach encourages the simultaneous use of different evaluation methods (use of specific methodologies, techniques, tools, indicators, etc.) Practitioners often approach a particular question from at least three perspectives on methods, location, and groups, which allows for cross-checking, comparison, and knowledge generation from distinct angles (Burke, 1998).

Mixed methods are advantageous for several reasons. It helps to ensure that the analytical methods used are relevant to local contexts and local people (Burke, 1998). An obvious benefit of using mixed methods is increased credibility in the evaluation process and outcomes. If diverse evaluation methods produce the same conclusions, then it can safely be assumed that the findings are accurate. On an epistemological level, this approach acknowledges that there are multiple ways of knowing things, and encourages the generation of a broad knowledge base.

On a political level, Greene (2002) argues that knowledge is always partial, and therefore multiple knowledge is diverse knowledge that can generate a more holistic and realistic picture of a program and the ways in which it can be improved upon. Gardner (2003) points out that it is important for beneficiaries to have different forums through which they can participate so that they can identify ways they feel comfortable communicating and contributing to the evalu-

ation process. Mixed methods enable communities to use their own knowledge and resources in the evaluation process; in emphasizing the value of local capabilities, this contributes to confidence building, community building, and empowerment.

Increasingly, thinkers and practitioners in the field of community-based international development are embracing the concept of empowerment as an important goal of development and evaluation. In the context of evaluation, empowerment refers to “the use of evaluation concepts, techniques, and findings to foster improvement and self-determination” (Fetterman, 2001 p. 3). Some proponents argue that the process of empowerment involves the valuing and collective construction of participants’ local knowledge (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). This is based on Paulo Freire’s notion of *conscientization*, whereby individuals develop a critical consciousness of their context and social location, leading them to identify their agency in terms of their ability, legitimacy, entitlement, and capacity to (individually and collectively) make decisions and act upon them (Freire, 1972). Accordingly, in the context of CBPE, the construction and control of local (participants’) knowledge should frame the entire evaluation process, from when, why, and how to perform an evaluation, to the interpretation of evaluation results, and informing the direction of subsequent action.

Empowerment is a vital element of CBPE because it supports the action component of the approach. It is widely argued that the evaluation process should encourage social action for change in order to be useful to the program beneficiaries (Owen & Rogers, 1999; Whitmore, 1998; World Bank, 2004). An action component might include the implementation of mechanisms designed to support program users by helping them prepare for future action and change that may result from the implementation of evaluation findings.

Given the scope of this article, it would be impossible to discuss the principles of all participatory evaluation models located within the matrix of CBPE. However, I would like to conclude this section by highlighting some additional attributes that should be kept in mind when planning an evaluation of this nature. Flexibility is a key concept for successful PE. The most marginalized sectors of communities are generally the most likely to benefit from the fruits of development programs and evaluation processes. They are also, frequently, the most difficult to reach. This is often due not to a lack of interest, but to a lack of time, access, and means. Evaluation frame-

works must be sensitive to the responsibilities (i.e., domestic) and constraints (i.e., financial, temporal, geographical) of beneficiaries and allow the evaluation to be molded to meet their needs.

Transparency is often cited as fundamental to the evaluation process. This means making data and results available to all stakeholders, including beneficiaries (Miyoshi, 2001), which may entail modifying language or information to meet the needs of individuals' varying levels of (il)literacy. Social and environmental sustainability are also key to the CBPE process. Once evaluation is initiated, communities must be able to continually re-evaluate programs in the absence of outside evaluators. CBPE is a continual process, not a product, and therefore flexible or open-ended timeframes are preferable.

Autonomy and self-reliance (to the greatest level attainable) are also valued, as well as building local organizational and management capacities. CBPE also promotes the legitimization, utilization, and dissemination of local knowledge, conscientization, confidence and esteem building (individual and communal), and local, participatory accountability and responsibility for evaluation (including constant self-reflexive re-evaluation). While I have delayed, until this point, discussion on responsibility and accountability, these principles are far from secondary in the evaluation process, and in fact are prerequisites for the success of CBPE. Fetterman highlights the need for "an environment conducive to sharing successes and failures" and an "honest, self-critical, trusting and supportive atmosphere" (Fetterman, 2001, p. 6). Ultimately it is hoped that participation will lead communities to take interest in and responsibility for evaluation, consequently inspiring a sense of ownership of the process, which in turn promotes greater accountability. Evaluation then becomes part of the development process.

## METHODOLOGIES

This article has outlined characteristics, principles, and goals that can be used as a set of criteria with which to determine what methodologies adhere to the CBPE approach. Based on these criteria, I will present a comparative examination of three methodologies that claim to promote the tenets of CBPE. This will serve to illustrate how characteristics and principles are integrated into methodological frameworks, and to demonstrate how to employ the criteria outlined in this article to assess whether, and to what degree,

methodologies reflect CBPE philosophy. I have chosen to examine Beneficiary Assessment (BA), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), and SARAR.

This selection was made based on two criteria. First, these approaches are widely practiced in the context of international development in both rural and urban settings. The expanse of their implementation warrants a critical investigation as to the authenticity of claims that they promote democratic participation. Second, because they differ, these approaches serve to demonstrate that the degrees to which participatory evaluation practices can reflect and support the foundations of CBPE varies according to how they stand up to the criteria previously outlined.

### Beneficiary Assessment

BA is a consultative methodology of investigation and evaluation designed to generate the views of beneficiaries and other local stakeholders concerning development policy and programming. Developed in the early 1980s through WB-funded studies of Latin American urban slums, it is widely utilized by this and other lending institutions in various sectors internationally. BA has been implemented in approximately 80 WB-funded activities in over 30 countries (World Bank, 2004).

This methodology is meant to help stakeholders identify and design development activities, identify constraints to stakeholder participation, and generate feedback on participant perceptions of ongoing activities. It is argued that the purpose of BA is “to undertake systematic listening, by giving the poor and other ‘hard-to-reach’ beneficiaries ‘a voice’” (Centre for Informatic Apprenticeship and Resources in Social Inclusion, 2004), with the intention of integrating beneficiary feedback with quantitative data. This is to be accomplished by uniting the local community, implementing agencies, and policy-makers in governmental and donor agencies.

This methodology is most often applied to programs with a delivery component where it is particularly important to gauge recipient needs and satisfaction. The BA maps out techniques that facilitate understanding program contexts (socio-cultural setting and institutional environment), goal-setting, selecting evaluators, setting sampling frames, selecting methodological techniques, training, conducting institutional assessments and reports, and disseminating findings (Salmen, 2000).

Techniques used to identify the program context include extensive literature reviews, and formal and informal onsite interviews with key stakeholders to solicit their perceptions and concerns. The data derived from context analyses are used to set objectives, such as assessing degrees of beneficiary participation. Evaluation teams, generally composed of internal and external “expertise,” are selected by aid and development agencies in partnerships with an NGO, a university research centre, or a consulting firm. Following a top-down approach, ultimate responsibility for BAs is assumed by directors and managers.

Beneficiary assessments commonly employ three qualitative methods for data collection: semi-structured interviews (the most popular method), focus groups, and participant observation. Semi-structured interviews are designed to be quantified while the latter two generally provide the contextual background of the program and local socio-cultural, political, and economic conditions. Borrowing from mainstream evaluation practices, BA evaluation designs can be broadly classified into three categories: experimental, quasi-experimental, and non-experimental.

It is argued that the experimental design is free of selection bias as it consists of selecting a group of eligible individuals and randomly dividing them into control and treatment groups (World Bank, 2004). Differences are measured by comparing means between both groups. The quasi-experimental design creates a comparison group using matching or reflexive comparisons. Matching identifies a non-program population that has similar fundamental characteristic traits as the recipient population and then compares the two, while reflexive comparison assesses a participant’s progress by comparing oneself before, during, and after intervention. This design is flawed, however, in that it does not account for secondary change agents. Finally, non-experimental designs use statistical methods and controls to account for differences between program participants and non-participants (World Bank, 2004). This is generally used as a last resort when random selection or matching methods are impossible.

### Participatory Rural Appraisal

PRA, also known as Participatory Learning and Action (PLA), was developed in the 1980s by Chambers (1994, 1995), drawing from an interdisciplinary base of activist participation research, applied anthropology, field research on farm systems, agro-economic analysis,

and rapid rural appraisal (Brisolara, 1998). While initially designed for rural settings, this methodology is now transcending the rural/urban divide and is being used in research studies (World Bank, 2004).

PRA is an outgrowth of three fundamental conditions: a frustration with traditional biases of urban-based professionals in rural environments, the ineffectiveness and inaccuracy of large-scale surveying to represent social realities, and the quest for more cost-efficient methods of learning about local contexts (Chambers, 1994). In response to these conditions, evaluation practitioners called for a more holistic, people-centred evaluation paradigm that sought to highlight the importance of local knowledge, participation, and partnership. The goal of this participatory approach was to empower people in order to foster their ability to challenge social, political, and economic inequalities, stressing social transformation from a grassroots position. Chambers' approach is widely used today in evaluation circles.

Centred on local knowledge and analytical skills, PRA uses collaborative methods of generating information that is produced and owned by local participants. It attempts to dethrone the notion and power politics of the Western "expert," transforming her or him into a facilitator who works in partnership with members of the given development process. This bottom-up approach seeks to empower the most marginalized people in society, particularly women. The facilitator takes on the subordinate (but active) role of learning local knowledge from the experts: the locals.

PRA techniques use visual tools and local materials to solicit dialogue among, and analysis by, participants. Exercises are designed to be accessible to all community members, and involve "skits, role playing, sorting exercises, and hands-on exercises such as matrices, ranking, community mapping, force-field analysis, historical timelines, gender division of labour, and transect walks" (Coupal & Simoneau, 1998, p. 73). PRA techniques invert the usual hierarchy between experts and locals by cultivating recognition for and appreciation of local abilities. One technique entails PRA facilitators learning local skills and then participating in local activities. Another is the *analysis of difference*: locals identify differences, problems, and interests according to gender, age, social groups, and wealth (identifying gender and class inequalities within local institutions and practices) and create solutions. *Participatory mapping and model-*

ling has local people carry out mapping and modelling exercises to explain and explore their social realities, demographics, health patterns, and natural resources (Parpart, Shirin, & Strandt, 2002).

Like other CBPE frameworks, PRA relies heavily on semi-structured interviews and observation. However, this methodology has the distinctive feature of engaging communities in creating collective visual representations as part of the local assessment. Some other techniques include:

- *They-do-it*: Local people investigate and research
- *Participatory analysis of secondary sources*: such as aerial photos to identify natural resources
- *Time line, and trend and change analysis*: such as chronologies of events that have led to present conditions
- *Livelihood analysis*: individual and group
- *Venn diagramming*: identifying key individuals and institutions such as community leaders
- *Participatory linkage diagramming*: of linkages and causalities
- *Well-being and wealth grouping and analysis*
- *Ranking*: problem ranking, preference ranking (of services, products)

(Chambers, 1994)

The techniques outlined in PRA literature are not meant to be employed exclusively. The fundamental principle espoused by PRA is “using your own best judgment at all times” (Chambers, 1994, p. 959). This principle also applies to the use of evaluation techniques. Creativity and flexibility are essential to this approach, and local participants are encouraged to develop their own techniques.

## SARAR

SARAR (acronym explained below) was developed in Indonesia, India, and the Philippines in the early 1970s and then in Latin America in the late 1970s in the context of training extension workers in the field. In the next decade SARAR approaches were introduced to the water supply and sanitary sectors in East and West Africa, Nepal, Indonesia, Mexico, and Bolivia (SARAR, 2004). While this methodology remains oriented toward education and training for working with different levels of stakeholders, its implementation has expanded to include institutional use in both rural and urban settings.

SARAR is currently applied in such sectors as rural development, agricultural extension, health, water and sanitation, wildlife conservation and utilization, and HIV/AIDS related education (World Bank, 2004). This methodology has been successful in promoting the participation of particular populations, such as women, whose input and needs are more difficult to assess through conventional development approaches (World Bank, 2004).

An acronym of its goals, SARAR stands for: Self-esteem; Associative strengths (capacity to form a consensual vision and work toward common goals with trust, respect, and collaborative efforts); Resourcefulness (capacity to envision solutions to problems, commitment to be challenged, and assumption of responsibility for actions); Action planning (combines critical thinking and creativity to develop effective plans for action, where all participants have a meaningful role); and Responsibility (to commit to fulfilling plans for change).

This methodology is founded upon the principle of developing and strengthening these five attributes among the stakeholders involved in the evaluation. The process is designed to foster the development of local participants' own capacities for planning and management and improve the quality of participation among all of the stakeholders (SARAR, 2004). Participants are encouraged to appreciate and learn from local experience rather than looking to and relying on external experts. SARAR also seeks to empower individuals and communities to take initiative for action.

SARAR hosts a web of creative, investigative, analytical, and planning techniques. Creative SARAR techniques include non-serial posters (using poster-sized pictures to construct real-life scenarios and concerns) and participatory mapping using PRA techniques. A popular investigative technique used in this methodology is called "pocket charts." This entails the use of poster-sized charts designed with "pockets" in each cell of a matrix. Drawings indicate the subject of each row and column. Participants then rank their preferred situation by placing objects (such as stones) in the pockets.

Three-pile sorting is the basic analytical tool employed in this model. Techniques include the use of a set of cards depicting various scenarios, village or community conditions, and behaviours. Participants then sort the cards into piles according to what is considered good, bad, or in-between. In the case of community health issues for example, piles can indicate good, bad, and ambiguous hygiene. Cards

can also be used to depict community problems where participants indicate (by pile) who they feel is responsible for addressing the problem (i.e., household, local government, both). A further technique involves gender analysis regarding access to resources. Three large drawings of a man, a woman, and a couple are presented along with cards depicting different resources. Participants then match the cards to the pictures according to who has access to what resources (i.e., cattle, currency, and food).

Planning techniques include “story with a gap,” whereby two pictures depicting a problem scenario before and after (resolved) are presented, and participants fill in the gap by discussing steps that would have led to the change. A second technique is a “software-hardware” exercise designed to establish communication between program staff and local people regarding the necessary components of program planning. This technique highlights the links between hardware activities (technical inputs and physical infrastructure) and software activities (organizational and capacity-building components). What is perhaps the most impressive aspect of SARAR techniques is accessibility. SARAR tools can be used by any community member, regardless of literacy levels. This methodology encourages participation of even the most marginalized individuals.

#### BA, PRA, AND SARAR: DO THEY MEASURE UP?

While participation has become a popular theme in the field of evaluation, it is evident that many approaches claiming to be democratically participatory fail to uphold the principles and objectives that constitute the foundations of CBPE. Furthermore, as there are varying degrees of participation in the evaluation process, it is at times difficult to draw a line between what does and does not constitute CBPE. Chambers (1995) offers a helpful synopsis of three categories of participation into which evaluation methodologies and practice can be classified: (a) a candy-coated feel-good phrase used to give evaluation plans appeal in the eyes of donor agencies and local communities; (b) getting local people to participate in “our” evaluations; and (c) an empowering process whereby local people design, execute, and control the evaluation, developing a sense of confidence in the process. It is, of course, the latter concept that reflects the aims of CBPE.

Into what categories of participation might we classify BA, PRA, and SARAR? A cross-comparison of the three methodologies might

shed some light on this question. The first step is, of course, to determine levels of participation, and whether participation is democratic. Ideally, democratic participation refers to the decision-making process among all of the stakeholders, at all levels of the evaluation process, from developing an evaluation framework to interpreting data and initiating a plan for action based on the information that is produced through the evaluation. House and Howe (2000) assert that beyond being inclusive (of all relevant interests), this process must be critically dialogical and deliberative.

While the Beneficiary Assessment has a participatory component, it can be argued that participation is neither democratic, extensive, nor accessible to all stakeholders. First, the objectives, direction of implementation, and use to which a BA is put are determined for the most part by managers, making this methodology structurally and organizationally hierarchical. Beneficiary participation is limited to the data collection stage, and even here, participants have little, if any, control over this process. PRA and SARAR, on the other hand, uphold the fundamental principles of democratic participation by encouraging all stakeholders (particularly the most marginalized) to contribute their knowledge and skills to the evaluation process, and allowing participants considerable freedom to collectively mold the evaluation to meet their vision.

This highlights another important principle of CBPE: respect for and employment of local knowledge and skills in the evaluation process. In all three methodologies, local knowledge is valued and utilized in the process of evaluation. The degree to which participants contribute their knowledge to BAs appears to be limited to the data collection phase. Levels of local contribution to the evaluation process are considerably higher with PRA and SARAR, however. These two approaches attempt to generate local input at all stages of the development process. This is particularly evident when examining tools for data accumulation. Local people are encouraged to apply their knowledge, experience, and resources in identifying the questions for evaluation (i.e., problem-ranking exercises), problem solving (i.e., “story with a gap”), and action planning for change.

Both PRA and SARAR seek to integrate local knowledge with the introduction of new skills (such as planning and management) to help people make informed choices about identifying problems, collectively envisioning goals, and developing the tools necessary to work toward achieving them. BA offers little in the way of capacity

building, as its methodology does not indicate that participants, other stakeholders, and evaluators work together to strengthen communities. Capacity building is an essential element of CBPE for the simple reason that it advances this ultimate goal: helping people to help themselves.

Capacity building also serves to provide communities and programs with the tools and skills needed to exercise maximum control over the evaluation process. There is evidence that PRA and SARAR support local ownership of the evaluation by promoting democratic participation and facilitating the cultivation of local capacities to enable local people to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance. These methodologies also support local ownership by ensuring that evaluators assume subordinate (but active) facilitative roles and encourage local responsibility and accountability for the evaluation process. It is apparent that these are not central goals of the BA methodology. The lack of local participation beyond the level of information gathering, whereby field experts and not beneficiaries gather data through methods provided by evaluation experts, indicates that the local population is not in control of the evaluation process.

This also highlights a lack of flexibility in the BA framework, as it does not encourage evaluators or participants to adapt or change evaluation tools to address specific contexts or beneficiary interests, nor create new tools for evaluation. It appears that evaluation tools and practices outlined in methodological frameworks are meant to serve as blueprints in the case of BAs, but act more as guides for evaluators and facilitators using PRA and SARAR approaches. PRA and SARAR encourage participants and evaluators to creatively seek out evaluation techniques that are appropriate and relevant to the context, and collectively envision and implement action for positive change. This leads to the final measure of CBPE: collective action for change.

Building local capacities to develop and manage the evaluation process ultimately empowers communities and groups to exercise what they have learned through the evaluation process to initiate change. To critically assess whether a methodology warrants inclusion within the rubric of CBPE, one must ask this question: does the evaluation process empower people to use it as a catalyst for development and change? Once again, the BA fails to meet this fundamental tenet of CBPE.

The BA framework does not provide participants with the tools or opportunity to exercise their agency in terms of applying skills and knowledge gained through the evaluation process in transformative ways. Ultimately, CBPE should lead participants to initiate action toward affirmative change. In this regard, PRA and SARAR have an advantage over BA in that they were developed primarily within the context of CBPD, and remain intimately connected with the development process. Participants of PRA and SARAR can use information, skills, and confidence generated through evaluation to promote community well-being and assert their independent right and agency to make choices and control resources (including knowledge). Ideally, this will lead to social action to challenge and overcome constraints or subordination.

A comparative examination of BA, PRA, and SARAR confirms the argument that not all evaluation methodologies claiming to fit the CBPE mold actually uphold its central tenets. This is found to be the case with the beneficiary assessment. It can only be concluded that this methodology fits into Chambers's (1995) category of "getting local people to participate in 'our' evaluations." Participatory Rural Appraisal and SARAR very closely reflect the principles and goals of CBPE, and uphold Chambers's vision of evaluation as an empowering process, whereby local people exercise control over the evaluation and build confidence and skills that can foster action toward self-determination and community well-being.

#### STRENGTHS AND LIMITATION OF CBPE

While this article highlights the many strengths of CBPE, to avoid romanticizing this approach it should be noted that, like any other framework, it has its weaknesses. Some of the limitations of CBPE revolve around the element of time. It has been argued that evaluation, in this context, should be conceptualized as an ongoing process that should allow for flexible timeframes. For many funding agencies, time is simply not an abundant commodity, nor is the evaluation funding that needs to be stretched across open-ended timeframes. This is particularly the case when empowerment is the central goal of evaluation, as it is a long and difficult process. Furthermore, the benefits of empowerment processes generally become evident only over a long period of time. It is often difficult to justify to donor agencies and aid agencies the quantity of time and funding necessary to produce long-term results, particularly when such agencies have historically relied upon results-based outcome evaluation.

In the end it is impossible to gauge in a quantifiable manner the benefits of CBPE over conventional approaches, but then again that would defeat the purpose of CBPE. Empowerment, capacity building, esteem, and self- and collective worth cannot be measured with a magic formula: "Poor people measure progress and well-being in terms not just of income, but of health, security, power, and self-respect" (Lean, 1995, p. 5). CBPE tends to be more effective than conventional approaches because it generates interest among participants and it values local knowledge and skills, which in turn increases participant confidence and the desire to be involved. This encourages ownership of the evaluation process and consequently local responsibility and accountability.

## CONCLUSION

It has been my intention in this article to review CBPE in the context of international development from its inception in CBPD to its current practice in the global South and, increasingly, in North America. I have focused particular attention on developing a comprehensive picture of CBPE by highlighting its guiding principles and conducting a comparative examination of three evaluation methodologies that are currently proliferating CBPD efforts internationally. The principles of CBPE highlighted in this work include democratic participation, the employment of local knowledge and skills, capacity building, ownership of the evaluation process, flexibility, social action, and empowerment.

CBPE is difficult to define because it encompasses a gamut of methodologies that utilize diverse tools and techniques. It is increasingly important, however, for evaluators to be clear about what constitutes CBPE. This is due both to a broad recognition of the limitations of conventional evaluation models to respond to local needs, and consequently a growing demand by development, evaluation, and aid agencies, as well as beneficiary populations, for evaluation approaches that are more compatible with the goals of CBPD. As a cyclical component of the development process, participatory evaluation is invaluable to CBPD.

Evaluators are responding to a growing demand for CBPE by modifying their methodological approaches, but do new evaluation designs really promote democratic participation? A comparative inquiry reveals that methodologies currently being identified with CBPE in the fields of evaluation and international development may fail to

support its fundamental principles. This underscores the need to promote ongoing critical discourse to address the problematic pattern of conventional methodologies being disguised as participatory to appeal to donor agencies and local communities.

It also highlights the need for evaluators and development practitioners aspiring to promote democratic participation in their fields to critically examine their current practices to determine if, in reality, they support the core tenets and goals of CBPE. Ultimately, these goals envision the empowerment of local communities to critically assess their own context and develop local capacities in order to promote positive community growth and well-being. CBPE begins and ends with the community, providing the tools for a community to build upon itself and make improvements that will truly benefit its members.

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