

Katherine Eve Hay and Shubh Kumar-Range (eds.). (2014). *Making Evaluation Matter: Writings from South Asia*. SAGE Publications. ISBN 9789351500278.

Reviewed by Katrina Rojas and Madeline Doyle

South Asia has strong experience in development evaluation. Thanks to the efforts of the editors and a diverse collective of authors from the community of evaluators (CoE), this experience is now richly captured in *Making Evaluation Matter: Writings from South Asia*. The first publication of its kind, the collection focuses on evaluation from and on South Asia. The process for producing the volume is as interesting and valuable as the content, beginning with efforts to build a community of evaluators in the region and organize 'write shops.' Editors note the challenges of compiling such a collection, and several of them will resonate with other evaluators in that we are often grounded in the everyday conduct of evaluation, but without experience in publishing rigorous work about the practice of evaluation and with limited opportunities for reflection and writing. The 312-page collection is divided into three sections that address the context, use, and methodology dimensions of evaluation, with the added value of a final chapter showcasing the opinions of evaluators in the field. The volume represents an important contribution for practitioners in development evaluation around the globe who are looking to expand their horizons and develop a more global perspective on their evaluation practice.

The first chapter sets the stage by providing a good overview of the central elements contained in the three thematic clusters, the background of the contributors, and the relevance of their experience. Most importantly, the introduction draws out themes that cut across the volume and that have implications for development evaluation practice in the region, namely the importance of exploring and responding to inequities and ensuring that evaluations are used to foster change in public policy and programs. Readers begin to see the variety of ways in which the South Asian community of evaluators is grappling with these challenges.

The next few chapters focus on context and build a comprehensive portrait of the development environment in South Asia. A complex and rapidly changing South Asian context is depicted through a discussion of shifting aid paradigms, governance environments, market reforms, political culture, and the growing importance of social accountability and of how these factors support or constrain evaluation. Subsequently, the state of the field of evaluation in South Asia is presented in five essential elements: people, spaces and forums, knowledge, norms

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guidelines and standards, and institutional context. Suggestions are proposed to improve each of these elements, and more general strategies for building the field are explored. In the context section, a particular focus is placed on the importance of participatory, as well as rights- and justice-based, evaluations and on how context influences participatory evaluation, how participatory evaluation can be leveraged to begin to change social structures of the context, and how rights- and justice-based evaluation, with their focus on use, can lead to more sustainable outcomes.

Three chapters offer a diverse set of reflections on practical and conceptual approaches that can facilitate stakeholder use of evaluation findings and recommendations. One chapter provides an account of an evaluator's journey in applying the steps of [Patton's \(2008\)](#) utilization-focused evaluation in information and communication technology for development research projects involving various implementing organizations. It gives us a practitioner perspective on the application of this framework, the challenges in doing so, and how the approach ultimately benefited the stakeholders involved and shaped the author's evaluation practice. Another chapter uses the experience of an evaluation organization that is using participatory approaches with development organizations in India to trace the factors that enhance the use of evaluation findings and recommendations in different phases of the evaluation process. Their approach illustrates the role of the evaluator as a facilitator who can continuously discuss issues related to implementation in the field and help agency staff to analyze their own practice in a way that allows stakeholders to internalize the evaluation findings throughout the process. The final chapter in this area reminds the reader of the importance of the broad set of contextual factors that can affect a program's uptake of evidence from monitoring systems and evaluation. The authors explain a conceptual approach to program evaluation that considers both the necessary (appropriate technical solutions, financial outlays, and institutional arrangements) and sufficient conditions (contextual and structural factors) for a program's ability to influence development change. Using a case study on HIV/AIDS programming, the chapter provides a compelling rationale for ensuring that the focus of program evaluation encompasses the broader social, economic, and political conditions of the society, which can provide insights on why a program worked or failed.

The next chapters focus on methodology, theoretical elements, and more pragmatic discussions of operational challenges specific to South Asia. Diverse issues in methodology are explored through case studies. A public health project to reduce the incidence of low birth weights in India is used as a basis to explicitly demonstrate why complex interventions, involving both communities and health systems, necessitate a diversity of methodologies, including qualitative research methods, to assess not only whether an intervention works but also how it works. Elsewhere in the methods section, the capability approach is laid out and promoted as an exceptionally relevant approach for evaluating community-level development interventions, with the support of a case study of development initiatives by a women's group in Nepal. One chapter is dedicated to "impactful"

impact evaluation, from planning to implementation, with eight digestible lessons in the conclusion. Finally, the relevance of value-relative pluralist approaches to evaluation, promoting sensitivity toward, and empowerment of, marginalized groups (as opposed to a strictly objective, value-neutral approach) is discussed in the South Asian context with lessons learned from the field.

A valuable addition to this collection is the chapter that seeks to underscore the opinions of those actually involved in the field of evaluation in South Asia. The chapter serves to synthesize the offerings in the preceding chapters, integrating quotes gathered from participants at CoE meetings across South Asia. The result is an analytical conclusion, but one that is deeply rooted in the evaluators' experiences on the ground as they advocate for change. *Making Evaluation Matter: Writings from South Asia* fills an important gap in the global literature on development evaluation in that it identifies different approaches, challenges, and opportunities for the evaluation field that are emerging in South Asia. This is refreshing in a sphere where much of the literature in development evaluation reflects on experiences in the North. South Asian voices and perspectives are highlighted, and the particularities of the specific context are explored. Nevertheless, the volume reflects themes that are significant for evaluators in all regions of the world. We look forward to seeing these types of efforts sustained and continuously shared with other regions.

REFERENCE

Patton, M.Q. (2008). *Utilization-Focused Evaluation*. (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.