

Changes that Matter: A Participatory Approach to Monitoring and Evaluation in the Pacific

*Associate Professor Barbara Pamphilon, Australian Institute for Sustainable Communities,
University of Canberra, Ross Hardy UNICEF Pacificⁱ*

Participation, self-determination, inclusive practice, and empowerment—these catch-cries typify the challenge to top-down externally driven (neo-colonialist) orientations to international development. In response programs now place local people central to development with the aim to increase local ownership, local capacity and local control. From the early work of innovators such as Robert Chambers and the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex, international development participation theory has moved from PRA (participatory rural appraisal) into PR &A (participatory reflection and action) and PLA (participatory learning and action) (see <http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/information/index.html>). Whilst the limitations of participation rightly continue to be a focus for reflective practitioners working in international settings (Cooke & Kothari 2002 are just one example), along with many others we too assess our work against the participation continuum (non-participatory practice (informing) through tokenism (placation, consultation) to full participation (partnership and citizen control) (Arnstein, 1969). This paper describes the on-going development by the Pacific Children's Program (the Program) of evaluation methods that determinedly work towards fullest participation through a commitment to local capacity building, collaborative partnerships and the reciprocal creation and sharing of knowledge.

Introduction to the Pacific Children's Program

Many forms of child abuse for both boys and girls exist in Pacific Island countries with the basic manifestations of abuse similar to those recognized in Western countries. In the Pacific abuse is often exacerbated by family isolation, disruption/disconnection from the extended family or community and is further influenced by poverty, some cultural and religious practices, family structure, gender relations and rapid social, economic and political transformation of societies. Statutory capacity in the Pacific to deal with child abuse is severely limited. Nevertheless, religion and some traditional practices in the Pacific do offer strong protective factors for children and their families.

In response to growing concerns, the Australian Government aid agency (AusAID) developed the Pacific Children's Program in 2001, then implemented in Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatuⁱⁱ. The Program works to increase protection from abuse and neglect by using prevention strategies that build on existing strengths and by increasing the participation of communities, governments and stakeholders. Key components include: encouraging development of an overall intersectoral framework to prevent child abuse and neglect; developing appropriate country level information on child protection; supporting family and community preventive action programs and

networks; developing national and local advocacy; and increasing regional coordination. Activities are implemented and coordinated through:

- The Ministry of Women, Social Welfare and Housing in Fiji;
- The Ministry of Women Community and Social Development, in Samoa;
- Save the Children Australia, Vanuatu and Ministry of Education in Vanuatu

The Program has achieved much in its first four years as reflected by its key principles which include: highly consultative approaches within and across countries; participatory learning methodologies at community level; ongoing capacity building for community facilitators; informing and involving children and youth; participatory monitoring and evaluation methodologies; utilising a strengths-based approach that builds on cultural and faith-based protective principles; a focus on child development and positive parenting; a focus away from ‘dysfunctional’ families to engaging the whole community; a rights-based approach supported by strong dialogical methods to avoid conflict at community level and institutional level, where this clashes with cultural beliefs; advocacy for inclusion of greater primary prevention approach within government and civil society organizations; and cross-sectoral collaboration.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Challenge

The logical framework analysis model (logframe) has enabled accountable monitoring and evaluation to be conducted and has informed the development of the first phase of this Program. The logframe approach to program planning and evaluation has been the preferred approach to program design of many Western government aid bodies as it delineates program elements and their relationship (goals, purpose, inputs and outcomes) and produces verifiable indicators and sources for this data. However criticisms of this approach include that it is primarily an ‘accountability mechanism’, ‘requiring minimal empirical evidence’ and most importantly ‘cannot inform implementation decisions as the Program proceeds’ (Owen, 2006, p. 199). And indeed this was the experience of the PCP Program; as the Program developed, staff, community members, partners and donors were seeking to answer the harder evaluation questions: *how and why is this program making a difference and how can we understand and demonstrate the changes that are happening for individuals, families and communities*. There was a need to move beyond the logframe approach in a way that was congruent with participatory strength-based practice. A formative, interactive approach was key. Further as the Program works with a range of stakeholders from local village members to regional staff and national leaders and institutions, any model had to be effective in engaging these different participants.

Towards a more participatory evaluation model

As the Program is multi-level and seeks integrated and sustainable change, evaluation practice must support the ownership of the work at every level. It was for these reasons that Empowerment Evaluation (EE) became the basis for the second stage of this program. EE ‘the use of evaluation concepts, techniques and findings to foster improvement and self-determination... is designed to help people help themselves and improve their programs using a form of self-evaluation and reflection...a collaborative activity...examining issues of concern to the entire community in an open forum’ (Fetterman 2001, p.3). In this process, the role of the evaluator becomes one of critical friend, coach and guide. Three participatory stages are the hallmark of EE: defining/reviewing the mission, vision and expected results; taking stock of what

has been done to identify, prioritise and understand program activities and planning action towards shared goals with an explicit emphasis on program improvement.

The other approach to building this participatory evaluation model drew on narrative theory. Put simply narrative is one of the key ways we make and share meaning — Bruner (1986) has argued that narrative is one of only two primary knowledge forms, the other being the paradigmatic form typified by scientific logic. To narrate an experience is to *tell* a story and to *create* a story, in a way that is coherent to both the narrator and the audience. As such individual narratives are not unique to that person and do not take place in a vacuum but rather are embedded within a particular cultural, historical and economic context. This is the power and potential of narratives as they can show us both individual and collective ways of knowing. As Wadsworth and colleagues (2004, p.13) have stated ‘[t]his is a kind of hermeneutic—just as a grain of sand helps characterise a beach, so also the beach helps to characterise the grain of sand’. Given that the Program was implemented in three unique countries, and in diverse locations within each, it was important that the narratives of change and challenge also be harnessed.

One strategy that we are modifying to enable narrative/storying and dialogue is that of the World Café, a discussion process that draws on individual and collective learning through ‘conversations that matter’. Underpinning the World Café process is the belief that the future is created in webs of human conversation and that intelligence emerges as systems connect in diverse and creative ways (Brown & Isaacs, 2002). We have used the process with people from diverse educational backgrounds and ability, with paid staff, government and NGO representatives and with local community members. Like Brown and colleagues we have found the process encourages (but of course does not guarantee) meaningful conversation (narratives) and in-depth exploration of key issues, stimulates innovative thinking, deepens relationships and ownership of outcomes and encourages more meaningful interactions between participants and the external evaluator.

•There are a number of good web-sites that explain the World Café process (see for example <http://www.theworldcafe.com/knowhow.html>) which put simply creates a number of tables or circles through which the participants progress having conversations and dialogue about the question on the table with each writing on the butchers paper tablecloth as they go. After a given time (15 - 30 minutes) people move on to their next table where they add to, challenge or extend what has been written on the table paper and thus an increasingly rich collection of information evolves. We have found 4 or 5 tables to be ideal and on the third and fourth table change people are encouraged to look for patterns, insights and emerging perspectives; that is *they* begin the data analysis. Once all participants have been to each table, a large or small group process is used to ask people what has emerged in their Café rounds that have been most meaningful to them. Most importantly the World Café process moves from simple participation to a contextualized, collaborative co-construction of meaning. The participants create *and* take away meaning *and* the evaluator takes away meaning as it emerged from local relationships.

In the following section we will elaborate on how the Program is developing the participatory evaluation processes

The Empowerment Evaluation Process

In Vanuatu, because Save the Children Australia (SCA) and the Ministry of Education implement the Program jointly Zonal Curriculum Advisers (ZCAs) (teacher mentors) have been trained to implement child protection workshops with primary school teachers, who in turn are encouraged to implement activities in their communities. Both ZCAs and a number of teachers have implemented workshops or awareness activities on a voluntary basis and whilst many are motivated to do this and see the benefits in terms of parental attitudes and community support for education, their concern has been that these activities are on top of their already diverse range of “Ministry” tasks, that is there is a sustainability issue. With minimal priority setting or role clarification provided by the Ministry, ZCAs are under demand from other projects and programs to take various education messages to children and communities. They were feeling stressed and somewhat confused about their role.

SCA and Ministry staff attended a Program regional training on EE in early 2006. Subsequently they have utilized the approach to conduct 4 day Pacific Children’s Project (PCP) Review and Planning Workshops in each of the 3 provinces, with a view to a) assess results of child protection efforts conducted by ZCAs b) better clarify ZCA work functions c) establish a vision for children’s education in their province and d) develop detailed plans for the next six month period.

In Sanma Province for example, participants were divided into two groups – a teacher group and a ZCA group in order to a) identify group visions for children by 2010 b) identify and prioritise key teacher/ZCA activities and c) individually rank activities and discuss ranking variations. Various issues emerged from this “taking stock” process: planning skills; community support; relationships with students, teachers, communities and parents; policy; classroom management; staff management / appraisal; faith-based training; resource and time management. Following discussions the participants were asked to group the various activities into main work function areas. The participants grouped activities under finance, planning, monitoring and evaluation, and protection. After further discussions there was an emerging and crucial recognition that PCP ‘volunteer’ tasks are not separate from their ongoing ZCA roles. The exercise also assisted them to identify how they could better support teachers in schools. The weaknesses identified under the issues provided a focus for the ‘Planning the Future’ stage. Time frames and responsibilities were identified.

Everyone attending the workshop commented that it was helpful and they particularly expressed its usefulness in assisting them to carry out their own monitoring and evaluation as well as to identify their weak areas. Everyone expressed difficulties in writing school child protection policies and requested assistance in this activity. They expressed an increased understanding in relation to how PCP/child protection activities can be integrated into their normal school activities and of the need to raise awareness amongst leaders and communities about child protection.

A similar EE workshop was conducted with ZCAs in Tafea province where UNICEF also funds the Child Friendly Schools Project. ZCAs are also key to the success of that project. The evaluation enabled a realisation that both projects support the key tasks of ZCAs and complement each other, with one focusing primarily on child-centred learning and the other building support in the community for child

development and protection. As part of the evaluation participants developed a plan for the next six months and determined that monitoring and evaluation would be conducted on a six monthly basis. Following this workshop the participants were more clear about their roles and were able to recognize that it is within their capacity to integrate the projects to achieve the vision they have identified for children in the province.

Both EE workshops brought about increased clarity in relation to structural and organizational aspects that had been hitherto confused. Thus, perhaps the key success of the approach was to establish a clear framework with which projects can interact to build capacity and achieve a range of specific outputs, including child protection.

The World Café Process

In Fiji, the Program team has found that the World Café process is particularly suited to the evaluation of community level program activities. The approach is fun, very participatory and stimulates discussion about positive results and constraints that are being experienced at the local level. The process has been used in several communities using questions that were adopted from the relevant “Questions to be Answered” in the 2006 enhanced Results-based Logframe approach of Program.

In Naviago village, in western Viti Levu, the question sheets were placed in five different spots in the room and participants (men, women and youth) were divided accordingly into five groups. Each person was provided with a pen and encouraged to write their own ideas and, as they moved to other questions, to add or comment on other people’s comments. On average, the participants were encouraged to discuss for 15-20 minutes at each question before moving in random to another question. Project team members provided clarification as required. As can be seen below, the process enabled thoughtful responses, particularly as people were able to converse and respond in their first language (which was later translated).

Have you seen any changes in your village in terms of child protection? If you have, please describe these changes

- Yes, I believe most parents are beginning to listen to their children more to their children and providing them with basic needs. This rarely happened before.
- For me, as a father, I have learnt to be more responsible. I used to drink kava and alcohol with friends not knowing how important it is to put my children and family first

Are there actions or observations that show that parents and your community understand the importance of Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Development?

- Pre-school has eased the responsibility by being a mother alone; fathers are becoming more responsible by dropping the kids to pre-school.

What does your community understand about child safety and protection?

- To move away from harsh disciplinary measures and spend more time to talk with our children.

What types of child services are available for parents and your community and who is involved?

- There are religious groups in place who provide guidance and counsel with parents

Are there any challenges regarding the mentioned changes and what could these mean?

- People are still hitting their children and at times when they realize it, they try and make amends with their children. It is hard not to hit children sometimes, but it seems people are showing children more love by talking to them more.

After the whole process was completed, a person at each station read out the responses. A facilitator noted the key phrases coming forward and used these to generate further discussion and to assist the participants to develop a broad vision for children in the community. The following points came out of the discussions:

- People were able to recognize the various changes that came out of the workshop conducted earlier in the community. Those who missed the workshop expressed a wish to participate in a workshop.
- There are other organizations going in and out of their community to assist with various issues. It would be good “if there could be a team working together in addressing all these issues to see how they are interrelated”
- The youth requested a workshop to specifically address their issues, other than child protection
- Some of the men in the group suggested that the church be mobilized to advocate child protection with other denominations not only in the village but outside as well
- Physical discipline still occurs but not as harsh as before and some parents are trying hard to look at other alternatives and are using much more dialogue with their children
- In particular, everyone agreed that children have become more acknowledged during big village occasions. For example, children are now fed first rather than last during these festive occasions and their meals are much better catered (instead of feeding them with a big pot of soup or stew whilst adults enjoy better spreads on the main table).
- The participants expressed a wish for ongoing support to reinforce their capacity to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Once again, as an indicator of the success of the participatory process, the community identified the need for the responsible community welfare officer to plan with the community, planned another child protection workshop and agreed to liaise with the Department of Youth to conduct a life-skills workshop with the village youth. Whilst not a perfect evaluation tool, the World Café approach is proving very useful at community level as it enables full and more equal participation from the community.

The Narratives Process

The Program field staff and partners have utilized narrative formats in regular reporting to management for several years. For example, in Fiji narratives were obtained from people in communities during the compilation of radio and TV documentaries.

This is a really good package. I have learnt so much from it. It emphasizes our roles as fathers and its importance - the respective roles both — for

fathers and mothers. This has been a big lesson for me. I was separated from my wife and children for four years. After doing this package, it gave me the opportunity to fully appreciate the importance and value of my role as a father — we have since reconciled and are now together again. This is one of the main reasons why I think it is so important to support parents with parenting skills as it does with this package Man in his '40s in Matacaucau Village, Tailevu (about 100kms from Suva)

In Samoa, narratives were obtained as part of an evaluation of a community grants scheme (SGS).

As a result of SGS activities, there is more caution on the part of children to avoid walking alone at night or long strip of road without houses. Increasingly children are now seen accompanied by grown-ups when they go to school. (village respondent)

In Vanuatu, narratives have been documented as part of ongoing evaluation of community child protection workshops.

This workshop was a real eye opener for me. I am one of those who always spoil the children—a no care attitude. Since this workshop I will try my best to control my anger in the classroom and be more patience with children. If I have children of my own, I will know how to care for them and make sure that they grow up in a safe environment (village teacher)

Whilst narratives such as these were always incorporated into reports it was only when the Program re-oriented to a 'results-based' log frame with an emphasis on participatory processes that a more structured and inclusive analytical approach to looking for patterns of change has emerged.

Community facilitators and partner agency staff now complete a simple “Activity Record for Monitoring and Evaluating Outcomes of Community-level Activities” after completion of their community activities (grant, workshop, meeting etc) or at regular area-level refresher/exchange meetings. Apart from conventional output information about location, process, date, participants and the like, the form now asks for any observations, stories or quotes that emerged from participants and what has been learnt as a community facilitator. The Program staff consolidates the information and, with community facilitators, consider any patterns that are emerging from the information.

Table 1: Narrative Analysis Examples

Participant observations, stories, quotes	What did you learn from them?	Patterns / Area of Change
When we gather together or party all the children will have to eat outside	What I learnt is that children should come first	Parenting Children's rights
They want to have more workshops. Our eyes have been enlightened after them.	I learned the urgency of this topic to the community.	Program management & implementation Community participation
Three Church leaders were there	First time all the churches have worked together. PCP approach fits well with the church teaching.	Role of local leaders Developing links with other agencies
A father shared his view on daily living in terms of meals. “Chosen dishes is kept aside by Mum for Daddy	Praising our children in all aspects of our life. Children deserve to be given the chosen one rather than	Parenting Children's rights

while the leftovers are being dished out to the children”	himself. He lives to meet the expectation of his children.	
---	--	--

It is anticipated that ongoing collection of narratives through regular use of this format and analysis process will build up a collection of stories and community facilitator lessons that will encompass the various elements of a broad-based protective environment as well as program management issues. The approach also engages community facilitators in a process of mutual learning through the exchange of experiences and in a regular assessment about the effects of their efforts.

The Challenges of Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation

After a one-week regional training on these participatory evaluation approaches in January 2006, staff and partners were keen to trial the various approaches to enhance evaluation of the program. Each of the processes above utilizes fairly straightforward procedures and staff have not had any trouble in mastering the ‘mechanics’. Participants, too, become engaged as they see themselves as equal partners in the evaluation process, which further enhances their ownership of the program. These processes enable participants to work together and analyse in their own language whilst still sharing the key findings in English, the language of the other stakeholders involved in development projects.

We have found that EE is more suited to program implementers than participants at community level as local participants often have more familiarity with their own community activities (religious gatherings, for example) than with Program activities such as “small grants scheme”. When EE is used at community or area level considerable flexibility is required to take on board non-Program activities as well as program activities. Ultimately this can be very revealing and can bring out information that would not surface otherwise. It was common after conducting an EE for participants to become inspired and to enthusiastically commence planning together for their next set of community or area activities. However EE, to be done properly does require considerable time; a day is not really sufficient to take people through the whole process and it has worked better when 2 or 3 days have been allocated in order to address the various issues that arise. EE also works best when participants have a common understanding about the program or similar tasks. For this reason it worked particularly well in Vanuatu where it was conducted at provincial level with groups of Zonal Curriculum Advisers. Taking a “holistic” approach that incorporated a wide range of ZCA functions was effective as it enabled staff to see where child safety fits within their broader education responsibilities.

The World Café approach can be implemented in less time, and therefore lends itself to use in communities who can only commit certain amount of time away from their normal daily activities. Everyone has an opportunity to make comments and to comment on other people’s views. However we found that a number of people, especially youth, were keen to express comments “anonymously” through the box provided as well, even though these were mostly positive comments. In Fiji where efforts were made to implement the World Café approach in an afternoon or evening session, most of that time was taken up with the writing down responses to the various questions. As time was also needed for discussion of the key elements or messages and to develop a broad ‘vision’, there was little or no time for planning the next steps. Further as the Program team identified World Café questions on the basis of

“questions to be answered” to identify outcomes from community level activities, it will be important to now assess these questions and to ensure that appropriate questions are being asked of the different layers of participants involved in the program. As with all evaluation the art of crafting questions is key.

Finally the more systematic documentation of people’s narratives has validated individual/community knowledge and reinforced their determination to strive for individual behaviour change. However, whilst activities have been implemented in communities and with various partner organizations it has not been easy to obtain individual written narrative reports in a Pacific culture that prides itself on oral communication.

The key to the success of all the approaches does hinge on the capacity of the evaluation facilitator to pull together the threads of information that are emerging in a way that encourages deeper analysis of the findings. Therefore the approaches need a skilled facilitator; hence the need now becomes capacity building in facilitation techniques.

A lot of information can emerge during the participatory process, and whilst the process itself is important as means of enhancing involvement and ongoing action, it is also important to document the process and findings. Where this documentation is undertaken by the recently trained workshop facilitator there might be a tendency to report on positive outcomes from the process and to not adequately identify or document negative elements or to take account of participant ‘silences’. Translation for non-local management and for inclusion in donor reports is another challenge and there has been a tendency for field workers to conduct participatory evaluation processes but to not adequately document the findings for future reference or to feed into the overall evaluation reporting.

As with any activity involving partners or communities, considerable effort is required to set up the activity and to remind people to come along. This, in itself, tends to restrict the number of periodic evaluation workshops that can be conducted, particularly given the remoteness of some areas and communities. Some care also needs to be taken in determining which groups should be brought together for an evaluation exercise. Groups that are not very involved in the program will not be able to contribute much input no matter how participatory is the process.

Country teams are aware of the benefits of applying participatory evaluation techniques to find out if activities are producing the desired outcomes. However, they are now seeking ways to integrate the various approaches in an effort to find the right approach for the right occasion and group. For example, the team in Fiji has already integrated the visioning part of the EE process into the World Café process — at the end of the session, when people are discussing thematic issues that arise out of the various comments. Reaching a vision as a result of the process forms a sound foundation for future planning with the group.

Conclusion

In their provocatively titled book “*Participation: the new tyranny?*” Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari challenge us to consider three tyrannies (2002, pp 7-8): the tyranny of

decision-making (do participatory facilitators override existing legitimate decision-making processes?); the tyranny of the group (do group dynamics lead to participatory decisions that reinforce the interests of the already powerful?) and the tyranny of method (have participatory methods driven out others which have advantages participation cannot provide?). We must each ask these hard questions as we develop our practice. As we have said, whilst we have gained rigorous data to feed on to other stakeholders and donors, we believe that the most important part of participatory evaluation is that 'lessons learned' are analysed in the community, owned by the community and progress forward is decided by the community. Yes, there are power dynamics in that community that may impact on the process, but they are very different power dynamics to those created by an expert evaluator's visit. Power circulates in all human interactions. It is up to us to ask 'who benefits most'. Participation and human rights are closely linked, for without the ability and opportunity to participate individuals and communities may not have the resources to make name and make visible the dynamics of colonisation, oppression and inequality. They may not recognise when rights are breached and cannot influence decisions that affect them, nor determine and advocate for local solutions to local problems. Participatory practice can be tokenistic or it can be collaborative, mutually educational and reciprocal. The latter is what we are working towards.

References

- Arnstein, S. 1969 "A ladder of citizen participation" *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, vol. 26, no.4, pp 216–224
- Brown, J. & Isaacs D (2005) "The world café: shaping our futures through conversations that matter" Berrett-Koehler, San Francisco,
- Bruner, J. 1990 "Acts of Meaning", Harvard University Press, Cambridge.
- Cooke, B. & Kothari, U 2002 "Participation: the new tyranny?" Zed Books, London.
- Fetterman D. 2001 "Foundations of Empowerment Evaluation", Sage Publications. London
- Owen, J. 2006 *Program evaluation: forms and approaches*, 3rd ed, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest
- Wadsworth, Y with Wieranga & Wilson, G 2004 "Writing narrative action evaluation reports in health promotion; training guidelines, resource kit and case studies" Institute for Social Research, Swinburne University of Technology for Department of Human Services, Melbourne, Victoria

ⁱ This paper has been inspired by the ongoing efforts of the staff of various partner organisations in Fiji, Vanuatu and Samoa to implement and evaluate community-based approaches to prevention of child abuse and neglect. In particular, the authors are grateful for the participatory evaluation activities and documentation provided by Malinda Tugaga, Laisani Petersen, Vetaia Vuinakelo, and Bale Cavu (Fiji); Carol Aru, Pierre Gambetta, and Kalchiare Vatoko (Vanuatu); and Kuiniselani Tago, Louisa Apelu, Henry Levasa, and Lesley Mariner (Samoa).

ⁱⁱ The initial 3 years program and one year of a 2 year extension phase were managed by International Development Support Services (IDSS) based in Melbourne, Australia. In July 2005, the Program became the responsibility of UNICEF Pacific to manage and develop under a proposed 5 year program of assistance.