Evaluating participatory projects

Professor Marilyn Taylor
Institute for Voluntary Action Research
Who am I?

- 40 years working in community development field
- Evaluations of community development and participation projects
- Ranging from £multi-million programmes to working with small projects to help them evaluate themselves
- Using participatory approaches
What am I talking about?

- Evaluating participatory projects
- Participatory evaluation
• Why evaluate?
• What are the challenges
• How to approach evaluation
• A theory of change approach
• Methods etc.
• What have we found out from previous evaluations?
Why it is important to evaluate

- To find out whether you have achieved your objectives
- To improve effectiveness, to find out what works, what doesn’t in what circumstances
- To be accountable
- To provide evidence for, and promote the benefits of, participation
- To make a case to future funders

Different stakeholders will have different reasons
Why use participatory methods?

- Ethics
  - To reflect the principles of participation in your programme

- Empowerment
  - It builds confidence and capacity in the community

- To benefit from the knowledge of local people

- To build understanding and ownership among and between all stakeholders
Involving the community can help you...

- Understand the problems being addressed and how they are experienced on the ground
- Identify meaningful measures of success
- Access the people and information you need
- Bring in new knowledge
- Validate the findings - a reality check
Realistic expectations of evaluation

- Attribution - determining causality
- Timescales for change
- What is measurable
  - "Everything that can be counted does not necessarily count; everything that counts cannot necessarily be counted", Albert Einstein
- Time and resources
- Will anyone listen?
Additional challenges of participatory evaluation

- Demystifying evaluation
- Objectivity
- Familiar challenges of any participation (e.g. reach)
- Reconciling conflicting pressures and expectations among stakeholders
How to approach evaluation I

- What do we want from the evaluation?
- Who is the target audience for our findings?

Types of evaluation
- Confirmatory/legitimising and largely symbolic
- Audit/target driven
  - Criteria externally driven
  - Often focused on cost-effectiveness
- Pluralist - involving all stakeholders
- Democratic - social justice

Sam Aaronovitch
How to approach evaluation II

- Who needs to be involved?
- Who can help us?
- What time and resources do we need to allow?
The theory of change approach

• A theory of change approach specifies:
  • the assumptions about the process through which the process of change will occur
  • The ways in which all of the required outcomes related to achieving the desired long-term change will be brought about and documented as they occur

• It is an on-going process - learning in real time and involving all stakeholders
### A theory of change framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. What is the nature of the problem we are trying to address?</th>
<th>2. Where do we want to get to; what will be different in x years time?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. What needs to happen to achieve change? How do we plan to make a difference?</td>
<td>Rationale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How will we know if we have made a difference?</td>
<td>Inputs and outputs; A pathway of change: now, soon, later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. How will we measure this? And when?</td>
<td>Indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures: Simple, reliable, relevant and measurable</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes; goals</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Pathways of change I

Building individual and organisational capacity and identifying local needs

Developing ways forward based on local solutions

Resident led change making a difference to local communities
Pathways of change II

- Local networks and activities
  Bonding social capital
- Linking groups together to have more impact
  Bridging social capital
- Developing partnerships with the municipality
  Linking social capital
## A theory of change framework II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator/measure</th>
<th>What do we already know? (Existing information)</th>
<th>What more do we need to know?</th>
<th>Method for gathering information</th>
<th>Who will gather/analyse the information</th>
<th>Timescale: when will we gather this information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Need to focus</td>
<td></td>
<td>Including comm’ty members</td>
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</table>
Methodology

- Scoping interviews with all stakeholders
- An initial workshop to establish the framework
- Data collection
- Interim and closing workshops to test out findings, encourage application in real time
Methods for gathering data

- Existing records
- Evaluation sheets at events
- Surveys, questionnaires
- Interviews

BUT also

- Visual techniques, film and video
- Workshop exercises - timelines; snakes and ladders; power maps
- Social media
- Action learning sets
- Peer-to-peer evaluation
Assessing the findings

- When it is realistic to expect change
- What got in the way (context)
- Were our initial assumptions right - did we understand the problem correctly? And how change might be achieved?
- Did we do what we set out to do?
- How are we going to apply what we found out?
- How are we going to disseminate what we have found out? And to whom?

Honesty: We learn from what we don’t get right as well as what we do get right
Some key principles

- Inclusive
- Reliable (would someone else come up with the same findings?)
- Valid (does it match our experience?)
- Relevant (is it useful to us?)
- Worthwhile (did we learn?)
And finally...

- A dearth of research evaluating participation
- Incredibly difficult to tease out causality
- Easier to demonstrate benefits to those involved than to the wider community

BUT

- The benefits outweigh the costs
- The weight of evidence points in a positive direction
Does it work?

- World Bank: Participation by beneficiaries was ‘the single most important factor in determining overall quality of implementation, and made a significant contribution to project effectiveness including resulting in lower operational costs’

- Health surveys suggest that those who feel they have a say and are engaged in community activities are more healthy
Some resources

- **Fair Shares**
  - [http://fstimpact.org.uk/](http://fstimpact.org.uk/)
  - [http://www.fst-impact.org.uk](http://www.fst-impact.org.uk)

- **Benchmarking Community Participation**
