

# Local Ownership in Evaluation:

## Moving from Participant Inclusion to Ownership in Evaluation Decision Making

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# Introduction

As international assistance<sup>1</sup> shifts to emphasize the importance of local ownership in ensuring relevance, effectiveness and sustainability, the ways that practice is evaluated<sup>2</sup> must also shift. To date, conversations about local ownership have primarily focused on policies or program design and implementation. This briefing paper provides practitioners – particularly international NGOs and donors – with a rationale and framework for promoting local ownership in evaluation. A forthcoming guidance document will offer practical steps for advancing it, drawing on the examples of donors and international NGOs that have embraced it in their practices. Together, these documents are meant to provide practitioners and evaluators with the tools they need to extend local ownership to evaluation.

As such, they build on InterAction’s ongoing work on the issue of country ownership.<sup>3</sup>

This briefing paper:

- Describes how international assistance is shifting and the related shift that is needed in evaluation;
- Provides a rationale for promoting local ownership in evaluation;
- Outlines a local ownership approach to evaluation, including determining who should be involved in an evaluation and how and when they should be involved; and
- Presents conditions necessary for promoting local ownership in evaluation.

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1 International assistance refers to the full spectrum of interventions from humanitarian assistance to peacebuilding to advocacy to development.

2 In this briefing paper, evaluation refers to program evaluation.

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3 InterAction papers related to country ownership include: “Country Ownership,” August 2011, <http://www.interaction.org/document/interaction-policy-paper-country-ownership>; “Country Ownership: Moving from Rhetoric to Action,” November 2011, <http://www.interaction.org/country-ownership>; “Procurement for Country Ownership and Better Results,” September 2012, <http://www.interaction.org/document/procurement-country-ownership-and-better-results-recommendations-improving-usaids-implement>.

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# Shifts in International Assistance and Evaluation

## Shifts in international assistance

### Toward country ownership

The global focus on development effectiveness and country ownership reveals a growing interest in supporting locally-driven development processes.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in humanitarian response, national governments are increasingly taking leadership or at least active roles, with international assistance providers working more closely with them, and national governments determining how citizens are involved in informing interventions. In both cases, sometimes coordination and effectiveness increase, while other times tensions emerge related to the roles of governments, local and international civil society organizations, individuals, and the private sector.<sup>5</sup> While a shift from internationally-driven to nationally-driven humanitarian response or development is clearly underway, how this is affecting citizens' abilities to influence or take ownership of response or development processes varies by context.

### Toward greater citizen voice

Technology is also affecting how citizens

engage with humanitarian response and development processes. It is connecting individuals to the world beyond their communities, as well as to each other, giving them a voice and an opportunity for influence that did not exist before. With technology, people are receiving information more quickly about disaster conditions, available assistance and development programs. They have more opportunity to voice their needs and provide input to intervention designs and management. They are also better equipped to hold assistance providers – whether their governments or international NGOs – accountable.

## Shifts in evaluation

### Greater pressure to demonstrate effectiveness and impact

Despite these changes, people who commission evaluations, the terms of reference they write and the funding they provide continue to predominantly respond to the demands of traditional donor practice, focusing on how donor funds are spent and the degree to which the results donors value are achieved. For the past decade or more, public and private donors have increased pressure on funding recipients to demonstrate effectiveness more rigorously. This has led to greater emphasis on demonstrating the causal links between interventions and desired outcomes, and debates about which methods

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<sup>4</sup> "Local Systems: A Framework for Supporting Sustained Development," USAID, 2014, <http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/LocalSystemsFramework.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Dayna Brown and Antonio Donini. "Rhetoric or reality? Putting affected people at the centre of humanitarian action," ALNAP, 2014, pp. 45-49. <http://www.alnap.org/resource/12859>.

are appropriate for demonstrating those links. These pressures have often pushed program implementers and evaluators away from participatory approaches – assumed to be too subjective and therefore biased – and toward the use of external evaluation experts, whose interaction with program implementers and participants<sup>6</sup> is intentionally limited in order to ensure their independence and therefore, ostensibly, evaluations’ objectivity and rigor.

### **A recognition that a fuller picture is required**

Many practitioners and evaluators recognize that evaluations focused primarily on donor demands and limited in their understanding of rigor, effectiveness, and impact often do not provide the full picture of what international assistance is achieving – or not achieving. The people intended to benefit from international assistance are not being heard: their needs and existing capacities, their values and interests, or their judgments of intervention success or failure.<sup>7</sup> To ensure international assistance is successful, generates sustainable outcomes and is valued by those it intends to serve, their voices must be taken into account, and not only as sources of data.

When practitioners and evaluators listen, they might hear that, yes, shelters were provided, but the materials used were inappropriate for

the climate, or the placement of the shelters reinforced community divisions, rather than helping to bridge them. Or that, yes, the project delivered seeds that increased crop yields, but the seeds are increasing farmers’ dependence on large-scale agribusinesses, rather than supporting their ability to preserve local crop varieties. Or that, yes, some community members now have better conflict mitigation skills and are helping to resolve local conflicts, but this has disrupted traditional structures and therefore created new conflict.

By only taking into consideration the values<sup>8</sup> and interests of some stakeholders (primarily donors and external actors), practitioners and evaluators miss a critical perspective on an intervention’s results: the views of the very people the intervention was intended to assist. International assistance remains something done to people rather than *with* them.

This shortcoming should be addressed by including participants as co-owners of the evaluation process, ensuring assumptions are questioned and relevant voices are heard. Particularly when participants have lacked ownership at other stages of an intervention, such as program design or monitoring, evaluation serves as a last opportunity for them to weigh in, raising questions, helping to determine criteria for judging an intervention’s success, and making future decisions related to design and implementation.

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6 In this paper, “participants” refers to those who are directly involved in and/or affected by an intervention.

7 Mary B. Anderson, Dayna Brown and Isabella Jean. “Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid,” CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2012. <http://www.cdacollaborative.org/media/60478/Time-to-Listen-Book.pdf>.

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8 “Evaluation is essentially about values, asking questions such as: What is good, better, best? Have things improved or got worse? How can they be improved?” See “Determine What ‘Success’ Looks Like,” BetterEvaluation. [http://betterevaluation.org/plan/engage\\_frame/criteria\\_and\\_standards](http://betterevaluation.org/plan/engage_frame/criteria_and_standards).

Evaluation must engage participants as co-owners of the evaluation process, ensuring assumptions are questioned and relevant voices are heard.

### Efforts to prioritize local ownership in evaluation

This shift can take advantage of good work already done. For more than 40 years, some evaluators and funders have been exploring how to ensure that all people's voices, and especially the voices of people most directly affected by an intervention, are heard and considered in evaluation decision-making processes. They have promoted such evaluation approaches as democratic evaluation, participatory evaluation, empowerment evaluation, and transformative evaluation.<sup>9</sup> All of these approaches seek to catalyze participants' efforts to become authors of their own assistance and development. Of these approaches, participatory evaluation has received the most attention, but that attention has fluctuated depending on other pressures and opportunities.

### A new trend toward listening to local voices

There are promising signs that the international assistance community is becoming more willing to listen. In the humanitarian response system, the use of feedback mechanisms to better understand and respond to participants' needs and perspectives is becoming more

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9 Please consult the Resources and References section at the end of this briefing paper for a list of resources on each of these topics.

widespread.<sup>10</sup> However, while the rhetoric of consultation is now well established and there is evidence of some successful use of consultation in practice, survey results show that many aid recipients still feel their views are insufficiently considered.<sup>11</sup>

In global development contexts, there is increasing pressure for social accountability, demonstrated in a growing number of initiatives such as the World Bank's Global Partnership for Social Accountability, Making All Voices Count, and the Open Government Partnership, among others. Many national governments are participating in these initiatives, recognizing the need for better government-civil society communication. They are placing greater emphasis on more effective service delivery, and putting in place systems, including social accountability mechanisms, that help them gauge the degree to which public services are meeting citizens' needs.

Providers of international assistance are also seeking ways to better incorporate citizen voice. In 2013, for example, the World Bank announced that it was committed to gathering participant feedback in all of its projects that have clear participants.<sup>12</sup>

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10 Brown, Dayna and Antonio Donini. "Rhetoric or reality," *supra.*, pp. 17-19; see also "Effective humanitarian feedback mechanisms," ALNAP, <http://www.alnap.org/what-we-do/feedback-loop>.

11 Taylor, Glyn et al. *The State of the Humanitarian System: 2012 edition*. ALNAP, London: 2012, pp. 48-49. <http://www.alnap.org/pool/files/alnap-sohs-2012-lo-res.pdf>.

12 Kim, Jim Yong. "One Group, Two Goals: Our Future Path," speech delivered at Annual Meetings Plenary, World Bank Group, Washington, DC, October 11, 2013. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2013/10/11/>

While this commitment does not mean that participants will decide which questions are asked, or that their perspectives will always be used to shape programs, it suggests a recognition of the importance of incorporating citizen voice. Groups like Feedback Labs<sup>13</sup> and CIVICUS, which has launched The Big Development DataShift,<sup>14</sup> are attempting to put individuals' voices at the heart of development. Story telling is becoming a popular evaluation approach because it raises participants' voices, and highlights their values, interests and needs. It can also bring to light circumstances or changes that those supporting development initiatives did not expect.<sup>15</sup> These examples represent a very positive shift toward including and prioritizing participants' values and interests in monitoring and other stages of the program cycle.

InterAction supports this shift and believes it needs to go one step further. It is laudable to include participants in deciding what should be done and in providing feedback on how well something is being done. However, participants also need to be co-owners of

evaluation processes: involved in determining the questions the evaluation asks, how to judge the quality of an intervention, and how to interpret the data collected.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the local ownership agenda must extend to all parts of the program cycle – from design all the way through evaluation, which must then inform design and implementation again. Only when participants have an equal role in evaluation – and only when those evaluation findings are used to inform decision making – can international assistance efforts be sustainable.

But the road to local ownership in evaluation is just that: a road, not something that can be achieved instantly in most cases. To that end, the balance of this paper focuses not only on aspects of the ultimate goal of local ownership in evaluation, but also on critical steps that can be taken along the way to increase the role of participants in evaluation processes. Recognizing that effective local ownership can take different forms in different circumstances, the paper also addresses a range of ownership options.

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world-bank-group-president-jim-yong-kim-speech-annual-meetings-plenary.

13 "Feedbacks Lab," Feedbacks Lab. <http://feedbacklabs.org>.

14 "The Big Development Datashift," CIVICUS. <http://civicus.org/thedatashift/>.

15 "Most Significant Change (MSC)," Monitoring and Evaluation NEWS. <http://mande.co.uk/special-issues/most-significant-change-msc/>.

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16 See work on democratic evaluation, such as "A Conversation with Jennifer Greene," *The Evaluation Exchange*, vol. XI, no. 3, fall 2005, <http://www.hfrp.org/evaluation/the-evaluation-exchange/issue-archive/democratic-evaluation/a-conversation-with-jennifer-greene>; see also work on participatory evaluation, such as Alexander, Jessica and Francesca Bonino. "Ensuring quality of evidence generated through participatory evaluation in humanitarian contexts," (method note 3, discussion series: improving the quality of EHA evidence) ALNAP, October 2014, <http://www.alnap.org/resource/19163>.

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# Rationale for Embracing Local Ownership in Evaluation

## Why local ownership in evaluation?

Organizations may have different motives for promoting local ownership in evaluation. From a rights-based perspective, including participants in evaluation decision making is the right thing to do. Individuals have a right to be in charge of their own relief and development processes, including evaluations of them.

### Inclusion in evaluation as a right

*“Children and young people have an inherent right to participate in evaluation activities because the project or programme involves ‘matters affecting the child’ (Article 12 [of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child]).”<sup>17</sup>*

–Save the Children International Evaluation Handbook

From a practical perspective, participants are often in the best position to judge how an intervention has affected their lives. They can identify the appropriate questions to ask, the causal pathways and outcomes to examine, the criteria for judging success, and the ways the results should be understood, weighted and acted upon.

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17 “Evaluation Handbook,” Save the Children International, 2012, p. 9. <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/library/evaluation-handbook>.

### Inclusion in evaluation from a practical perspective

*“The people we work with are the real experts on the results of our work. Our evaluations should pay particular attention to their views and help them – as well as us – to improve the work and achieve more.”<sup>18</sup>*

– Plan International Evaluation Standards

## The benefits of local ownership in evaluation

Facilitating local ownership in evaluation promises a number of benefits:

**Greater evaluation use:** The more participants are included in evaluation decision making, the greater the chance that they will find the evaluation findings legitimate, and therefore use those findings to help bring about positive and lasting changes in their lives. This might mean that while other stakeholders take leadership for acting on one set of recommendations, participants might take leadership for acting on another.

**A fuller and more accurate picture of an intervention’s effects:** Including participants as

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18 “Plan Programmes Implementing PALS: Evaluation Standards,” (final version 1.3) Plan International, 2013, p.3.



## Who qualifies as a participant?

Who qualifies as a participant depends in part on the nature of an intervention. While some interventions involve direct service delivery, others consist of capacity strengthening support to local organizations, and/or advocacy at local, national, or global levels. In each of these models, who is considered a participant might be different. For example, in direct service delivery, participants may be aid recipients or community members, while in organizational capacity strengthening, they may be local organization staff members. For advocacy efforts, participants may be local organizations or individuals directly and actively involved in the advocacy.

Who qualifies as a participant also depends on the evaluation questions being asked. For example, if the question is how an intervention has influenced policy change, then participants include people who advocated for the change and policymakers. However, if the question is how a policy change has affected people's lives, then the people's whose lives may have been affected are the participants.

equal partners in defining desired intervention outcomes and key evaluation questions can provide a fuller picture of an intervention's effects. Participants can also help correct false assumptions about their context and identify ways to effect change. Participants' involvement in data analysis can help provide more accurate interpretations, while their involvement in the dissemination of findings could ensure that they are used more widely.

**Capacity strengthening:** Including participants in evaluative activities also strengthens their capacity. It helps them better understand how evaluations are done, and gives them skills and knowledge they can use in the future to evaluate other initiatives to hold organizations accountable for achieving results. In this sense, evaluation is a development intervention in its own right.

**Improved communication and understanding:** Finally, including participants as co-owners in evaluation can improve communication among all stakeholders involved. This can lead to better understanding

of these stakeholders' values, needs and interests; shifts in implementation to more effectively respond to those concerns; and, therefore, greater benefits.

### Analyzing the benefits of participatory evaluation processes

*A study compared the use of standard "expert-developed" scorecards with community-developed scorecards to monitor schools in Uganda. The researchers found that using a participatory process to develop and use community scorecards had a strong positive effect across a range of school outcomes, while use of the "expert-developed" scorecard was not effective. The researchers further found that this difference could be attributed to an increased willingness to engage in collective action, which resulted from the introduction of the participatory process.<sup>19</sup>*

19 Barr, Abigail, Frederick Mugisha, Pieter Serneels and Andrew Zeitlin. "Information and collective action in community-based monitoring of schools: Field and lab

## The challenges of local ownership in evaluation

Promoting local ownership in evaluation presents many challenges, several of which are addressed in subsequent sections of this briefing paper. However, two merit special attention.

### **Reducing bias in findings and**

**interpretation:** A concern frequently raised about including participants in evaluation decision making is that their clear stakes in evaluation outcomes and potentially their lack of evaluation capacity could lead to biased and unreliable results. To address this, it is important to first acknowledge that everyone involved in an evaluation has values, interests, and capacities that affect how they approach an evaluation. Including participants' voices

adds a greater diversity of perspectives to an evaluation and the interpretation of findings, thus reducing bias. When all perspectives are heard and considered and the lead evaluator has strong facilitation skills to mediate different interpretations in a setting of trust, a more comprehensive evaluation will ensue. Triangulating data sources, data collectors, and types of data can further help increase the credibility of analysis and findings.

### **Challenging power dynamics and norms:**

Promoting local ownership in evaluation involves challenging power dynamics and norms. Doing so safely and effectively requires organizations' long-term commitment to support participants and other stakeholders throughout this process. It also requires that those conducting evaluation have strong facilitation, mediation, and conflict resolution skills.

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experimental evidence from Uganda," paper presented at the Young Talent session of the Royal Economic Society Annual Conference, December 2012, <https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/11087574/papers/m%26m.pdf> and <http://www.andrewzeitlin.com/research>.

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# A Local Ownership Approach to Evaluation

As mentioned above, local ownership in evaluation is not a one-size-fits-all concept. It is a process, and one dependent on a variety of factors. As organizations seek to increase participants' ownership in evaluation, they must consider:

- Who needs to be a co-owner in an evaluation;
- In which aspects of an evaluation participants need to be involved; and
- The nature of that involvement.

Getting to local ownership in evaluation requires making progress on all three fronts.

## Who needs to be a co-owner in an evaluation?

The first step in taking a local ownership approach to evaluation is determining who needs to be a co-owner in an evaluation. This group will not only include participants, although in a local ownership approach participants will fill important roles. A stakeholder map, developed through key informant interviews, focus groups, or participatory approaches, and with care to identify those who tend to be underrepresented or lack power in evaluation decision making processes, can provide information about the universe of people who might be included.

Once all stakeholders have been identified, organizations must decide whom to include in an evaluation. This will depend on the answers to a number of questions, some of which point to the critical roles of participants:

- *What is the purpose of the evaluation?* Depending on the purpose of the evaluation, the stakeholders identified will have different contributions to make and different interests in influencing the evaluation process, findings, and use.
- *Who is best positioned to contribute knowledgeably to the evaluation?* Certain population segments, because of their direct exposure to or participation in an intervention, will be best positioned to contribute knowledgeably to the evaluation.
- *What evaluation questions are being asked?* Ideally those involved in evaluation decision making have a role in deciding the evaluation questions, but in some cases, the questions will have already been selected by other stakeholders, such as donors or the government. In those cases, the nature of the evaluation questions can help guide who needs to be included in the evaluation in what ways.
- *Who will use the evaluation results?* Those involved in evaluation decision making are more likely to use the evaluation results, since they are more likely to feel

ownership of the results and understand the relevance of the results to their lives. Therefore, including those whose lives may be most affected by the evaluation results is important; participants fall into this category.<sup>20</sup>

In most circumstances, it is not possible to give all stakeholders and, particularly, all participants ownership in an evaluation. Therefore, it is critical to determine who can most legitimately represent the values and interests of each participant segment, based on transparent criteria and a transparent process. This must include sensitivity to different demographic segments (gender, age, ethnicity, religion, etc.) and special consideration for those population segments that are traditionally least included in decision making processes. Identifying these groups requires that organizations have a deep familiarity with participants. Since no approach will be perfect, remaining attentive to feedback related to the legitimacy of someone's representation is essential.

### Identifying legitimate representatives of population segments

*One organization addressed this challenge by identifying potential representatives of particular participant population segments, and then asking broader groups to validate the choices or suggest others. Other organizations have asked people from a particular population segment to directly select who should represent them.*

<sup>20</sup> Patton, Michael Quinn. *Utilization-Focused Evaluation, 4th edition*. Sage Publications, Inc.: Thousand Oaks, California, 2008.

## In which aspects of an evaluation will participants be involved?

The second step is determining at which stages of the evaluation process participants will be involved. Given time, budget, and human resource constraints, only a relatively small number of evaluations will be able to include participants as co-owners in all stages. Nevertheless, organizations should carefully consider whether and when participants (or their legitimate representatives) can be involved in the evaluation process.

The following is a list of evaluation activities in which participants could be engaged. They represent varying degrees of local ownership in evaluation – a point further discussed below.

### Designing the evaluation

- Developing or reaffirming the program's theory of change or logic model, including clarifying assumptions
- Identifying desired outcomes and/or impacts
- Identifying and/or prioritizing evaluation questions
- Selecting indicators
- Determining indicator targets
- Establishing the criteria for judging the extent to which an intervention has been successful
- Deciding how to weigh each outcome
- Determining evaluation methods and timelines
- Identifying possible ethical issues and agreeing to ethical standards or requirements

### Collecting and analyzing data

- Identifying the most effective and/or appropriate methods of data collection
- Assisting with data collection
- Providing data
- Analyzing data
- Determining how to resolve contradictory information or perspectives
- Determining intellectual property rights and data ownership

### Determining findings and recommendations

- Providing feedback on evaluation findings
- Validating evaluation findings
- Framing evaluation findings
- Developing evaluation recommendations

### Disseminating and using evaluation results

- Hearing evaluation results
- Advising on communications methods and outlets for dissemination
- Assisting with the dissemination of evaluation results
- Determining how evaluation results might influence decision making

There is significant opportunity to further increase participant involvement and co-ownership in evaluation. A recent survey<sup>21</sup> of a

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21 In October 2014, InterAction surveyed members of its Evaluation and Program Effectiveness Working Group about the involvement of local partners and participants in their organizations' evaluation processes. Twenty-nine individuals, representing 20-24 organizations, responded. This group was representative of InterAction's membership as a whole in terms of size of organizations and range of mandates. That they responded to the survey probably indicated a greater tendency to prioritize evaluation than other InterAction members.

small sample of InterAction members indicates that participants are rarely involved in evaluation decision making. Most often, organizations ask participants to provide data or simply share with them the results of an evaluation. Some include participants in data collection. A smaller number include participants in activities that form part of evaluation decision making: identifying desired outcomes, shaping evaluation findings, and developing evaluation recommendations.

As has already been noted, local ownership in evaluation is not something that can be achieved instantly in most cases. Participants may lack necessary skills for taking on the responsibilities of some ownership activities. Organizations conducting the evaluations may also lack skills and processes needed to support full participant co-ownership of evaluation processes. To avoid being overwhelmed by the shift required, organizations can take an incremental approach to pursuing local ownership in evaluation. The following guidance from experienced evaluators dedicated to ensuring that all voices, and especially those of the marginalized, are heard and considered can be helpful. They suggest prioritizing four evaluation activities:

1. Identifying and/or prioritizing evaluation questions;
2. Establishing criteria for judging the quality of an intervention;
3. Interpreting results; and
4. Determining how evaluation results might influence program and policy decision making.<sup>22</sup>

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22 "A conversation with Jennifer Greene," *supra.*, *The Evaluation Exchange*, vol. XI, no. 3, fall 2005.

## Ideal conditions for pursuing greater local ownership in evaluation

Where there is an already established participatory approach to project design and management, including participants as co-owners in evaluation is not difficult. In these cases, trust should already exist between participants and outside parties, participatory decision making processes are already in place, and participants understand that their input will influence policies and practice. Ultimately, this means that all actors along the aid chain – from donors to international NGOs to local partners – must believe in the value of including participants as co-owners in evaluation. A lack of commitment from any actor in the chain makes it much more difficult to promote local ownership in evaluation.

Similarly, a local ownership approach to evaluation can be more effective when evaluation is discussed at the beginning of an intervention. During an intervention's design phase, participants can be involved in determining the intervention's theory of change, the evaluation questions, and the criteria for judging success. They may also be involved in designing the data collection plan, which outlines who will collect what information when and using what methods.

## Getting to meaningful participation

A local ownership approach to evaluation requires organizations to consider not only in which aspects of an evaluation participants are involved, but also *how* participants are involved. This must begin with: building a foundation of trust to assure participants that their input will indeed influence policies and practice; strengthening participants' capacity to engage; and then taking an incremental approach to expanding the meaningfulness of participants' engagement.

### Building participation on a foundation of trust

Ensuring that participants' inclusion in evaluation is meaningful and beneficial to all requires a foundation of trust. Participants must believe that their privacy will be guaranteed, they will be protected from retribution, and the time and effort they invest will result in actions that benefit them and their community. Therefore, while advancing ownership in evaluation can be

approached incrementally, it will always demand an investment of time and financial resources, as well as staff and evaluator skills that foster inclusive practices and assure protection of data and informant identity in sensitive contexts. For those who are normally underrepresented or lack power in evaluation decision making processes, the opportunity cost associated with involvement and the risk of retribution can be high. Organizations should identify related steps they can take to lower the barriers to participation.

### Increasing participants' capacity

If participants engage in a variety of evaluative activities over time, their ability to engage in evaluation decision making processes will evolve.<sup>23</sup> This involves learning from

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<sup>23</sup> When engaging the same participants in evaluation activities over time, care needs to be exercised to ensure that doing so does not create a new hierarchy of those included and excluded from evaluation decision-making processes, but rather, those included continue to represent broader population segments.

experience, intentional efforts to help participants strengthen their capacities to engage, as well as clear guidance and coaching. It also requires recognizing participants' capacity levels and including them in ways that all will find meaningful and rewarding. While at first this might mean that participants are simply consulted, as their capacities increase, they can lead or initiate action related to evaluation activities or share decision making responsibilities with staff.

### Increasing the meaningfulness of participants' engagement

During this process of helping participants gradually increase their ownership of evaluation processes, organizations must manage participants' expectations about participants' level of involvement and the change they can expect to achieve. Participants must also understand how their input will be treated relative to the input of others. These steps increase the likelihood that participants will remain engaged and interested in how evaluative activities can serve their needs.

The ladder of participation below shows the different levels of participation and ownership that are possible. Organizations committed to a local ownership approach to evaluation should aspire to increasingly engage participants in evaluation decision making until participants are engaged in the way described in rung 8. The forthcoming guidance document mentioned in the introduction will address how to incrementally increase local ownership in evaluation in more detail.

### Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation<sup>24</sup>



- Rung 8** Participants share decision making with others as equal partners
- Rung 7** Participants lead and initiate action
- Rung 6** External actors initiate action, but participants share decisions
- Rung 5** Participants consulted and informed
- Rung 4** Participants informed
- Rung 3** Participants tokenized (non-participation)
- Rung 2** Participants are decoration (non-participation)
- Rung 1** Participants are manipulated (non-participation)

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24 Adapted from Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation in Lyford Jones, Hannah 2010. "Putting Children at the Centre: A Practical Guide to Children's Participation," International Save the Children Alliance, 2010, pp. 12-16, <http://resourcecentre.savethechildren.se/authors/lyford-jones-hannah>, which was adapted from Hart, R. "Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship," UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 1992, <http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/100>.



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# Conditions for Promoting Local Ownership in Evaluation

Successfully including participants in evaluation decision making and promoting local ownership in evaluation requires a number of conditions. Most of these apply not just to international NGOs, but to local partners and donors as well.

**1. Donors must be flexible in the parameters they place on evaluations.**

To support local ownership in evaluation, donors need to allow – and indeed, should encourage – organizations to include participants throughout the evaluation process. This will require offering a flexible timeline and enough financial support to allow for meaningful participant engagement. It also requires flexibility in evaluation design.

**2. All actors along the aid chain – from donors to international NGOs to local partners – must believe in the value of including participants in evaluation.**

A lack of commitment from any actor in the chain makes it much more difficult to promote local ownership in evaluation.

**3. Organizations must value evaluation.**

Organizational commitment to evaluation – demonstrated in time, budget, and human resources allocated to it, and in the use of evaluation findings – is necessary if local ownership in evaluation is to take hold. While organizations may focus on the additional costs and time required, it is important to recognize the long-term

benefits this investment is likely to yield.

**4. Organizations must see evaluation as an accountability and learning tool for participants and their communities.**

In addition to valuing evaluation for its ability to demonstrate accountability to donors and provide input for organizational learning, donors and international NGOs must also focus evaluation on how interventions affect participants, their families and communities from participants' points of view.

**5. Staff must value participant voice.**

International NGO and local partner staff and donors must recognize the value that participants bring to evaluation decision making, and, therefore, be willing to listen to their perspectives. Ensuring that staff have this attitude is an important prerequisite to meaningfully including participants in evaluation decision making.

**6. Organizations and evaluators must have the capacity to effectively involve participants in evaluation decision-making processes.**

This requires not only evaluation skills, but also listening, facilitation, negotiation, capacity building, and conflict resolution skills, plus a high degree of cultural sensitivity and knowledge of context.

**7. Organizations must have access to participants.**

How much access



organizations and evaluators have to participants will determine the degree to which they can include participants in evaluation decision making. Access is likely to be more of an issue in some conflict and emergency settings, where interventions cover large geographic areas, or when the issues being evaluated are sensitive. It will likely be less of an issue in politically and socially stable community settings and when the issues being evaluated are not sensitive. In the former contexts, local partners may have the greatest access to participants.

- 8. Participants must believe that the benefits of engaging in evaluation decision-making processes outweigh the costs.** Participants are often busy people who are taking time out from other important tasks to participate in evaluation decision-making processes. Organizations must be sensitive to this reality and may need to offer compensation for participants' time invested and be careful to not trigger participation fatigue.

At the same time, participants who are accustomed to being included in intervention decision making in only a tokenistic way or who have rarely seen evaluation findings used to inform decision making may hesitate to be involved or, alternatively, be shocked when they are asked to contribute substantially to an evaluation. Receiving honest input from

participants, rather than saying what they think donors or international NGOs want to hear, requires a foundation of trust, which is built by continuous engagement over time. Building their faith in the evaluation process (and participative processes in general) requires ensuring that participants see that their input is used.

- 9. Participants must have access to intervention information.** Participants' ability to take ownership in evaluation and meaningfully contribute to evaluative activities also depends in part on the amount of information about the intervention to which they have access. This includes descriptive information about the intervention (such as goals, objectives, targets, and reach), as well as information about the intervention's design, budget, and implementation, including monitoring data.
- 10. All must demonstrate conflict sensitivity when engaging participants in evaluation decision making.** Including participants in evaluation decision making could place them at risk, either because an intervention involves sensitive topics, or because their inclusion challenges existing power structures. Evaluators, donors, international NGOs, and local partners need to be aware of this when deciding if and how to promote local ownership in evaluation. Conflict resolution skills may be required to constructively transform any conflicts that arise.

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# Conclusion

Extending local ownership to all aspects of international assistance, including evaluation, is a necessary step to ensuring that international assistance meets the needs and aspirations of those it is intended to benefit most. For international NGOs and donors, doing so requires long-term commitment to participants and a significant investment of time and human and financial resources. Including participants (carefully and representatively sampled), along with other stakeholders, in evaluation decision making

processes ensures that the broadest possible spectrum of perspectives are considered when deciding what to evaluate, determining criteria for judging an intervention's success, and analyzing the data collected. By creating opportunities for participants to raise their voices and be involved as co-owners in these processes, organizations will be better able to understand international assistance from the points of view of those it is intended to serve. This in turn helps ensure that participants are truly partners rather than beneficiaries.

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