

Chapter 4

Participatory Evaluation in the Municipality of Putaendo

A Mid-Term Evaluation of the Social Intervention of the Servicio País Programme (Chile)

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Abstract

This chapter examines participatory evaluation in the municipality of Putaendo, in the context of the SERVICIO PAÍS programme managed by the Foundation for Overcoming Poverty (Fundación para la Superación de la Pobreza, FOP) in Chile. This programme seeks to overcome multidimensional poverty through the technical support of young professionals to rural communities. Between 2021 and 2024, an intermediate evaluation was implemented that integrated participatory methods, enabling communities to define evaluation criteria and reflect collectively on progress in cultural, environmental, and productive areas. The process included participatory workshops, playful tools, and in-depth interviews to gather perceptions of programme outcomes. The findings highlighted significant advances in the promotion of community cohesion, the valorisation of cultural heritage, and local economic development, although major challenges persist, related primarily to water scarcity and linkage to the public offer of opportunities. The experience demonstrates the value of combining quantitative and qualitative approaches in the evaluation of social programmes, fostering the active participation and empowerment of local actors. It also underscores the importance of designing inclusive processes that recognise collective achievements and promote learning for the continuous improvement of interventions.

Keywords

Participatory evaluation, Servicio País programme, social intervention, community participation.

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Introduction

The Foundation for Overcoming Poverty (Fundación para la Superación de la Pobreza, FOP) in Chile has almost 30 years of experience in social intervention in areas of high poverty and isolation through its Servicio País programme. In this context, the institution has developed a monitoring and evaluation system which, since 2015, has incorporated participatory evaluation as a complementary element alongside quantitative measurement — both being necessary to assess the results and outcomes of the programme’s interventions.

This chapter presents the experience of participatory evaluation of an intervention carried out between 2021 and early 2024 in the municipality³ of Putaendo, in the Valparaíso region. This evaluation was commissioned and led by the technical team of the FOP in the Valparaíso region, which accompanies the region’s interventions, with the support of the Foundation’s central evaluation team.

The chapter first provides a general overview of evaluation in Chile, followed by a detailed presentation of the intervention, a description of the participatory evaluation conducted, and a deeper exploration of the reflections and lessons learned from the experience.

³Throughout this chapter, “municipality” refers to the administrative division known in Chile as *comuna*, the political body governing this divisions, *municipio*, is referred to as “municipal government”.

The institutionalisation of evaluation in Chile⁴

In recent decades, evaluation has acquired a fundamental role globally in the design, analysis, and improvement of social policies and programmes. To understand the Chilean reality in this area, one must bear in mind that over the last decades, the country has been governed primarily by the concept of *results-based management*, which materialised with the creation of the public administration system in 1990, known as the Monitoring and Evaluation System (M&E). Its primary objective is to ensure transparency and efficiency in public spending (Olavarría & Peroni, 2022), and it is responsible for monitoring, analysing, and reporting on how public policies and programmes —as well as state-funded private programmes— are functioning, ensuring that they contribute adequately to their purpose and achieve the expected results.

Currently in Chile, various governmental institutions and specialist bodies participate in M&E processes. The Ministry of Social Development and Family (MSDF) and its Undersecretariat of Social Evaluation, created in 2011, play a fundamental role in this task. The Undersecretariat, now with over a decade of experience, has the specific function of designing, coordinating,

⁴ A large part of what is presented in this section corresponds to the chapter “Evaluation in Chile” (Olavarría & Peroni, 2022), supplemented with information presented by the various Chilean state entities on their websites, as well as other references and academic publications.

and evaluating the government's social policies, with a view to contributing to improve the targeting of social spending through the continuous evaluation of state-implemented programmes. It works continuously on identifying priority areas to be monitored and evaluated, on the selection of programmes and policies, on the implementation of *ex-ante* evaluations, and on establishing and monitoring results indicators. Through the Integrated Social Programmes Database (Banco Integrado de Programas Sociales, BIPS)⁵, it implements these periodic evaluations using methodologies designed to measure the impact, effectiveness, efficiency, and relevance of social interventions.

The information gathered and the results of M&E processes are for the most part published and disseminated online through the Ministry's website, for the reference and use of government authorities, civil society organisations, academia, and the general public. This contributes to transparency and accountability in public management, as well as to the generation of knowledge and collective learning, while also promoting a culture of evaluation within the state and society — on the one hand, this legitimises the importance of evidence and evaluative analysis in public policy decision-making, and on the other, it installs high evaluation standards within a framework of continuous improvement to strengthen public management capacity.

While the Ministry of Social Development and Family has played a significant role in establishing the

evaluation-based approach, M&E processes are also conducted by other governmental institutions and specialist bodies. A key player in this area is the Budget Directorate (DIPRES), which is attached to the Ministry of Finance and is responsible for the financial administration of the state. It proposes economic and financial policy on matters within its remit and coordinates and supervises the actions taken pursuant to that policy. Its work includes the meticulous monitoring of macroeconomic and social indicators to inform governmental decisions; in other words, it is the technical body responsible for ensuring the efficient allocation and use of public resources, through the application of financial management systems and instruments, programming and management control within the framework of fiscal policy, analysing the performance of public institutions to support decision-making, and incorporating the concept of *results-based budgeting* (Olavarría & Peroni, 2022).

Both the Social Evaluation Undersecretariat of the MSDP and DIPRES make widespread use of positivist and quantitative evaluation approaches, most of which are based on methodology of logical framework — the design and monitoring of quantitative indicators for measuring results — and which also link their evaluative function to public expenditure. That is to say, the M&E system is designed, planned, and executed with the primary objective of maximising the distribution of state resources (Ubillo, 2021). Thus, the institutional mission of DIPRES and the objectives inherent in the evaluations it carries out inhibit the development of evaluations that incorporate different approaches and

⁵ Guide to Chilean State Social Programmes (ministeriodesarrollosocial.gob.cl).

methodologies, and that adopt objectives which focus the evaluation on elements other than efficiency and effectiveness (Ubillo, 2021).

In this regard, consideration is given to the use of new evaluation paradigms that embrace the need to advance towards more democratic societies, engaging in dialogue both with the political sphere and with civil society. Understood in this way, evaluation acquires capacities that go beyond effectiveness and efficiency, or the need to be highly technical and objective, becoming tools of social transformation capable of engaging with different actors (Neirotti, 2015). This also poses technical challenges, such as the training of human capital with expertise in more complex M&E methodologies, such as impact evaluation, qualitative approaches, participatory approaches, and so forth (Olavarría & Peroni, 2012).

Civil society organisations in Chile have demonstrated greater influence in the use and promotion of innovative methodologies for evaluating the achievements and impact of social programmes in the country. Examples of this are TECHO and the FOP's own Servicio País programme itself, both of which have incorporated various traditional and also novel strategies for the monitoring and evaluation of their interventions. In particular, the Servicio País programme has integrated participatory evaluations since 2015 as a tool designed to critically examine the interventions carried out, drawing on lessons that contribute to improving the implementation of the programme in the field, as well as building evaluation capacities among its participants.

Unlike conventional evaluations, these participatory evaluations are qualitative and collective, allowing the participants themselves to define the evaluation criteria.

Description of the evaluated experience

The FOP is a private, pluralist, non-profit civil society institution with a public interest mission, whose aim is to contribute to overcoming poverty by promoting greater degrees of integration and social equity in the country, so as to ensure the sustainable human development of those currently living in poverty and social exclusion. Its origins date back to 1994, in a context in which Chile was consolidating its recent return to democracy while simultaneously a public debate was unfolding around what was referred to as the '*social debt*' —the state's pending commitment to citizens affected by the economic and political restructuring of the preceding decade —. This debt was manifest in problems such as low-quality public education, insufficient healthcare provision, and a housing deficit, as well as political, social, and economic exclusion.

Consequently, in 1994, President Eduardo Frei called for the establishment of the National Council for Overcoming Poverty, which convened various specialists in the field with the aim of addressing the challenge of reducing poverty, which at that time stood

at 27.6% (CASEN, 2006). In that context, that same year, the FOP was formed to continue the council's work, its first major action being the creation of the Servicio País programme to implement the social intervention strategy, whose aim is to strengthen the capacities of communities and organisations residing in small localities and areas with high levels of multidimensional poverty, isolation, and socio-territorial segregation.

This programme, which has been in operation for almost 30 years, is implemented through the selection of young professionals and technicians from diverse disciplines and with a strong social commitment, who live and work for one year in the country's most remote and impoverished rural municipalities. Through these young people, the programme seeks to connect communities with opportunities of the public and private sectors, for which purpose it establishes partnerships with local governments and other local organisations and private entities. Since its inception, more than 6,000 professionals have taken part in this experience contributing their skills and commitment to thousands of organisations. The programme currently collaborates with the state and the governments of more than 80 municipalities across the country's 16 regions.

Funding comes primarily from public funds provided by the Chilean government through ongoing partnerships, which are renewed annually with Ministries — currently with the Ministry of Social Development and Family, and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Planning. From this perspective, while the programme belongs to a private non-profit foundation, its implementation is in the public interest and is funded through partnerships

with the state, which makes it similar to a social policy, but in this case carried out by private actors and backed by the state. This is an uncommon arrangement in Chilean practice, which gives it quite a distinctive character: being a private programme, it could well function as a social policy. Moreover, the programme's long track record and scope have earned it prestige in the public, private, and civil society sectors alike.

In this context, the case presented in this chapter corresponds to the participatory evaluation of the ServicioPaísinterventioninthemunicipalityofPutando, in the Valparaíso Region of Chile. This intervention began in 2021 and is projected to conclude in 2028. The participatory evaluation carried out corresponds to a mid-term evaluation, developed by the 2023–2024 programme team, evaluating implementation from its inception to that date and taking into account its continuity and projected duration of four further years. To provide a framework for this evaluative process, a description of the socio-territorial context and the progress of the intervention is presented below.

The municipality of Putando belongs to the province of San Felipe de Aconcagua, in the Valparaíso Region, in central Chile. It has a high percentage of rural population (57%) (Plan de salud comuna de Putando, 2023). The lack of adequate infrastructure and services affects the residents' quality of life, generating migration to urban areas in search of better conditions and opportunities. As of 2017 (National Population and Housing Census), Putando's population stood at 16,754 people, with a high concentration of older adults, particularly women.

The municipality has a unique history in terms of encounters between cultures, economic development, and struggles for independence and progress. During the process of Chilean independence, Putaendo was the first town to be liberated in 1817, when the liberation army crossed the Andes through the Los Patos mountain pass. Owing to the presence of gold in the valley, at the beginning of the twentieth century Putaendo consolidated itself as a hub for both mining and agricultural production, which led to the town's development and the installation of the first railway branch line in the area. Today, the territory has a wealth of heritage resources, sites of archaeological interest, and rural architecture from the colonial period. For this reason, in 2021 the municipality was declared a Zone of Tourist Interest (Zona de Interés Turístico, ZOIT) by the Ministers' Committee on Tourism.

The Servicio País intervention focuses on Putaendo and specifically on the localities of Casablanca and Los Patos, with a combined population of 650 inhabitants, located in the pre-Andean foothills, in a climate transition zone between semiarid and temperate Mediterranean conditions. Despite their geographical proximity to the national capital (132 km away), these localities are rural, considerably isolated, and have limited access. In terms of productive activity, they are characterised by agricultural and livestock farming, which have been severely affected by drought and water scarcity for decades. As for community participation, in Los Patos and Casablanca, the main form of involvement is through the Rural Drinking Water Committees, where attendance is compulsory and men make up the majority

of participants. There are also functional grassroots organisations made up of women, addressing primarily cultural and productive issues.

In February 2024, the Servicio País programme's intervention focused on this territory completed its third year of operation entering phase II of the scaleup process (presented in detail below). At the outset, it carried out a participatory diagnostic process to identify the community's most pressing concerns, which revealed a strong intention to advance towards sustainable local development, taking into account the promotion of a rooted community identity and the improvement of employment opportunities, all of this affected by the severe drought situation. Thus, the intervention set as its general objective the strengthening of the participation and cohesion of the community and organisations residing in Casablanca and Los Patos, in order to drive sustainable local development by revaluing their heritage and natural resources and improving employment opportunities in a context of water scarcity. Furthermore, it has deliberately sought to incorporate a gender perspective across all lines of action.

With regard to the progress made over these three years of work, some of the key achievements have included applying for funding and implementing projects and initiatives aimed at environmental conservation, specifically along the banks of the Putaendo and Rocín rivers, as well as the revitalisation of environmental heritage through educational initiatives. In the cultural dimension, resources from the National Fund for Regional Development (Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo

Regional, FNDR) were secured and allocated for the Los Patos Community Museum project, which led to the creation of a book highlighting local traditions and flora.

Regarding the productive line of work, the Servicio País Young Professionals promoted the creation of networks among tourism entrepreneurs from different localities, giving rise, among other things, to the community-led idea of the Paso La Frontera Los PatosCasablanca Tourist Route. Training sessions were also held to strengthen the productive capacity of micro-enterprises. Finally, the intervention has carried out cross-cutting actions promoting reflection on and the valorisation of the gender perspective, particularly through the identification of gender gaps and the development of information and training spaces on the subject. These actions have been implemented through the building of strategic partnerships with academic institutions, local governments, and others.

From a theoretical standpoint, the programme has, from its outset, promoted innovative, promotive and participatory approaches to social intervention, understanding the overcoming of poverty as a process of human development and fulfilment of collective dimension. For this reason, its strategy goes beyond overcoming poverty and exclusion; the programme's primary objective is to make communities and their own resources visible, to activate them, and to connect them with the opportunities offered by their context. The Servicio País programme refers to this as *Inclusive Local Development*.

The intervention model is based on 4 phases:

- Phase I, *Meaningful Bonds and Active Communities*, involves young professionals integrating into the community and establishing bonds with prioritised human groups alongside whom they identify local needs and collaborate in the design and implementation of projects valued by the community.
- Phase II, *Associative Scale-up*, is the stage at which initiatives are promoted between groups that do not ordinarily collaborate with one another. The focus shifts from projects associated with immediate problems towards projects that address more complex and demanding challenges.
- In Phase III, *Strategic Scale-up*, an inclusive local development plan is drawn up for the locality or neighbourhood, in conjunction with partner municipalities and institutions in the territory, through the implementation of associative initiatives that contribute to that type of development.
- Finally, Phase IV, *Strategic Consolidation*, involves the Servicio País Young Professionals providing technical support for the community's project portfolio and contributing to the processes that will ensure the sustainability of the inclusive local development plan. At this stage, strategic partnerships are established with universities, businesses, and public and private agencies. In order to plan and carry out the programme's activities over the course of a year, a *Territorial Intervention Plan* is prepared, enabling the deployment of various projects, initiatives, and activities with the community, mediated and/or coordinated by the young professionals or technicians.

The participatory evaluation of the Servicio País programme in the municipality of Putaendo

To contextualise the evaluation presented here, it should be noted that since 2013 the Servicio País programme has been implementing an evaluation system aimed at capturing the extent to which the programme's purpose is being fulfilled, while also drawing on lessons learned, reporting on the achievement of outcome targets defined in agreements with ministerial counterparts, sharing results with partners, reporting back to the individuals and communities with whom it works, and making pertinent adjustments or modifications. In its initial design, this system included a series of instruments—all quantitative—to gather evaluative information about the programme from its various participating actors, including Servicio País Young Professionals (professionals and technicians, trainees, volunteers, and dissertation students), municipal partners, and community members and organisations. In turn, depending on each specific stakeholder, instruments are considered to measure gaps in change (pre- and post-programme) as well as instruments to assess satisfaction or perceived achievement.

In 2014, the programme leadership identified the need to incorporate other qualitative evaluations and, in particular, collective evaluations that would better align with the programme's promotive approach and would succeed in gathering collective learning and

achievements, which appeared not to be adequately captured through the application of quantitative instruments administered individually to different participating actors. Additionally, evaluation methods were needed that would allow for a more specific assessment of the interventions, in line with their individual plans and the achievements reached. Thus, in 2015 a participatory evaluation pilot was launched in two programme interventions. The results of these evaluations were very positive, and the method was progressively incorporated over the following five years into interventions across all regions of the country. Participatory evaluation is currently part of the programme's evaluation system, specifically within the dimension of evaluating intervention achievements, with a participatory evaluation being incorporated at each scale-up phase.

Servicio País uses participatory evaluation from a mid-term evaluation approach—that is, a process evaluation—as it proves especially useful for evaluating intermediate achievements and using the results as an input to adjust the planning and implementation of interventions. It can also be used in the *ex-post* mode, for example in cases where the intervention comes to an end at the conclusion of phase 4 or due to early closure⁶.

The participatory evaluation carried out in late 2023 and early 2024 in the municipality of Putaendo is the first participatory evaluation of this intervention, associated with the transition between phase I and

⁶ The 4-phase scale-up intervention model began in 2019, and as a result there are currently no interventions that have completed phase 4.

phase II of the intervention scale-up. It is an intermediate evaluation, given that the intervention being evaluated is in full development. It was commissioned by the regional director of the Foundation in the Valparaíso Region and was led by the Foundation's technical team in that region.

The evaluation was planned around seven stages, all of which were implemented with the exception of the last (dissemination and action plan), which was still in progress at the time of writing this chapter. The stages are described below, indicating specifically who participated, the roles of each participant, and the level of participation achieved in relation to the roles adopted.

Initial design of the evaluation proposal

The programme's technical team in the Valparaíso Region, made up of two territorial coordinators who lead the teams of Servicio País professionals—a sociologist and a socio-economist respectively—together with the regional director, convened an initial planning meeting with the national technical evaluation team with the aim of jointly developing a preliminary proposal for the stages to be carried out in the participatory evaluation in Putaendo. The main agreement reached was to form an evaluation team, bringing together different representatives of the three main stakeholders participating in the Putaendo intervention: individuals and representatives of community organisations, the

Servicio País programme team, and the municipal counterpart team.

In this initial stage of designing the evaluation proposal, only individuals from the central and regional levels of the Servicio País programme were involved; consequently, it was not participatory in nature.

Formation of the evaluation team

The participatory evaluation in Putaendo was grounded in the formation of an evaluation team—that is, a group of people representing the most significant stakeholders that had participated in the intervention, who were brought together to play an active and leading role in the design and implementation of the evaluation itself—. The aim was thus to avoid the more traditional evaluation approach, in which evaluators are external and the criteria to be evaluated are neither consulted with nor defined by the participants or beneficiaries. In this context, the Valparaíso regional team drew up a list of people representing the three most significant groups—the community, the municipal government, and the programme—who had been actively involved over the previous year, arriving at a total list of two people from the municipal government, three from the community, and two from the programme to be invited.

Subsequently, the Servicio País Young Professionals visited the community and municipal members in person to invite them to be part of the evaluation team. This invitation needed to be accompanied by

an introductory conversation about the existence of a programme evaluation system, which involves convening people to form an evaluation team to carry out a participatory evaluation. Although all those invited agreed to participate, depending on their individual availability, the team was ultimately constituted by four participants:

- one community member representing the Paso la Frontera Cultural Organisation of Los Patos;
- two people from the Servicio País team (a young professional and a member of the central-level evaluation area); and
- one person representing the municipal counterpart, specifically the Director of the Municipal Community Development Department (Departamento de Desarrollo Comunal, DIDECO) of the Putaendo municipality.

This stage of forming the evaluation team takes on a participatory and binding nature insofar as members are invited to play an active role in decision-making regarding the evaluation to be carried out. However, the selection itself of the individuals invited was initially determined by the Programme's technical team, which led the evaluation and subsequently confirmed the selection based on the availability of those invited to participate and attend the sessions. In this sense, the selection of evaluation team members was not participatory but consultative.

Implementation of the evaluation team's participatory workshop

Once the evaluation team had been formed, it was convened for a first session, which took the form of a participatory workshop. This workshop had two main objectives: to provide the evaluation team with initial training on what an evaluation is and how it is conducted, and to collectively select the evaluation criteria and jointly design the next steps to be taken in the participatory evaluation in Putaendo. The four evaluation team members participated, along with the facilitator, who is also the current *Territorial Coordinator*⁷ of the Servicio País programme in the municipality. Also present, in an observer capacity, were one person from the Foundation's central-level evaluation team, a Servicio País Young Professional who had joined the programme a few months prior to the activity and would continue as a regular member of the intervention team, and a person who fulfilled the role of systematiser and also used audio recording to document the activity. The workshop was held in January 2024 at the Profesor Bernardo Parra Leiva cultural centre, located in the centre of the municipality of Putaendo.

⁷ The role of Territorial Coordinator involves providing technical support to the Servicio País Young Professionals based in the municipality, as well as acting as the Foundation's technical counterpart with the municipal government. In this regard, the role is more closely associated with coordination and liaison tasks, and thus involves a more distant and less frequent relationship with the field, whilst the Servicio País Young Professionals are those who carry out day-to-day work with communities, the municipality and other local actors.

To achieve the first objective —familiarising team members with the concept of evaluation— the exercise *Chocolate Assessment: Approaching evaluation* was used. Three types of chocolate were handed out to each person and they were asked to collectively define some evaluation criteria (flavour, texture, appearance, etc.) and then to assess each chocolate using those criteria. The group subsequently reflected on the exercise, on the process undertaken to collectively define the evaluation criteria, and on the game as an example for understanding the essential characteristics of an evaluative exercise. Discussion was held on the differences between an informational/consultive evaluation process, in which evaluation criteria are defined beforehand and/or without the participation of relevant stakeholders, and a participatory one — such as that carried out in the chocolate tasting exercise — in which the evaluation criteria are defined collectively.

In a second part of the session, the group proceeded to discuss and agree on which criteria would be most appropriate for evaluating the Servicio País intervention in the municipality. To this end, the participatory technique of *brainstorming* was used, based on the question: *What do we hope to achieve through working with Servicio País for Los Patos and Casablanca?* Small sheets of paper and coloured pencils were used to record and organise the ideas. The facilitator played a leading role at this stage in recording and systematising the discussion and agreements. At the end of the session, three main themes were agreed upon which, in the evaluation team's view, should be considered in evaluating the intervention: Environment, Culture, and Economy.

The evaluation team then planned a second evaluation workshop to be attended by a wider range of stakeholders who have an influence on the programme's intervention. This would be the most significant space for carrying out the participatory evaluation. It was also collectively decided that this broader session would evaluate progress on the three themes identified, using a set of guiding questions: *What have we achieved? What do we need to achieve this? What are we missing? What could we improve?* Finally, the facilitator proposed a set of visual aids for the extended participatory workshop, which were discussed, adjusted, and approved for use.

Based on the characteristics of the participation achieved, it can be established that this stage reached the *interactive* level, taking into account the levels set out in the *Sowing & Harvesting handbook* (Tapella et al., 2022), and the extent to which the local stakeholders convened through the evaluation team participated in the formulation and decision-making regarding the design of the evaluation to be carried out.

Implementation of the extended participatory workshop

The invitation to attend the workshop was deliberately issued in print form, written in formal language and delivered to 13 representatives of local organisations (the governing boards of the residents' associations of Los Patos and Casablanca, of various Rural Drinking

Water Committees⁸, of the Paso la Frontera Cultural Association and of the Paso Histórico women's workshop) and representatives of the municipal counterpart (DIDECO⁹ and the Mayor). Members of the Servicio País team were informed by telephone, with the regional director of the Foundation, the two Servicio País Young Professionals working in the municipality, and one person from the central-level evaluation team being convened.

The participatory workshop was held at the Los Patos Community Centre, in the locality of Los Patos, municipality of Putaendo, in January 2024. Twelve people representing the community and the municipal government attended, including the mayor, along with the two Servicio País Young Professionals, the regional director of the Foundation in Valparaíso, the Foundation's central-level Evaluation Coordinator, and the workshop facilitator. In total, 16 people were present in the participatory space.

As defined by the evaluation team, the extended participatory evaluation workshop was carried out in three stages. First, a presentation and *icebreaker* space was held, with the workshop opening with a brief introduction by the facilitator and the regional director of the Foundation on the purpose of the participatory evaluation, highlighting the importance of this participatory process for the future development of the programme in the locality. In addition, the members of the Evaluation Team were introduced.

⁸ Local organisations for Rural Drinking Water (APR).

⁹ Director of the Municipal Community Development Department.

The icebreaker space aimed to create an atmosphere of trust and horizontality, and consisted of several short activities led by a member of the evaluation team. It began with an introduction activity in which each attendee gave their name and a word that summed up their expectations for the workshop. This was followed by a two-minute meditative breathing exercise called *the lion's breath*, then a round of the *telephone* game¹⁰, and a *place-swapping* game¹¹. These activities promoted a relaxed, comfortable, and trusting atmosphere.

The second stage of the workshop consisted of a Timeline exercise, led by the Servicio País Young Professionals, whose purpose was to prompt participants to recall significant milestones in the community's joint work with the programme. A flip chart and various photographs were used to illustrate moments, events, and activities that had taken place since the programme's arrival in the area. Participants identified each photograph, recounted the importance and impact each moment had had on their lives and on the community, and arranged them in chronological order.

The third stage of the workshop consisted of an evaluation exercise, designed by the evaluation team, called *The path along the Putaendo river*, in which the

¹⁰ In Chile, the telephone game involves one player whispering something to the person next to them; that person tries to repeat what they heard to the next, and so on, going around the group one or more times. The last person says the message aloud and it is confirmed with the first player to see whether it matches the original.

¹¹ Each player is assigned a number. One person leads the activity by quickly calling out two numbers, at which point the corresponding players must swap places.

achievements of the intervention were evaluated through a representation of the Putaendo valley. For this purpose, a graphic representation of the river was used on a large colour poster, depicting the municipality's river divided into three streams, where the river and the mountain symbolised the journey ahead, and each stream represented a goal or ideal reality to be achieved. These goals corresponded to the three main themes addressed in the intervention: cultural, environmental, and productive development. Using guiding questions¹², the facilitator encouraged evaluative discussion and asked participants to reach a consensus on what the current level of progress towards each goal was, representing that progress graphically on the map using a small image of a bird typical of the area. In this way, the exercise focused on sharing the reflections and perceptions of the various actors, highlighting actions that were significant for the community, evaluating what had been done, contributing new ideas for development, and raising improvements that would help advance towards the stated objective.

To close the workshop, a wrap-up session was held, to summarise the main ideas that had emerged and gather the general impressions on the results and the methodology used. After thanking each person for attending, the importance of community participation in these evaluation processes was emphasised, and participants were informed that further participatory spaces are expected to be held to share the results and lessons of the participatory evaluation process.

¹² What have we achieved? What are we still lacking? What do we need to achieve it? What can we improve?

Regarding the characteristics of this extended workshop, it can be said that in this space, an *interactive* level of participation was achieved, insofar as the evaluation team participated in and had an influence on all stages of the workshop. This was collaborative and binding participation, in that the results gathered will influence decision-making regarding the planning of the programme's intervention for the following cycle.

In-depth interviews with key stakeholders

Both the initial workshop with the evaluation team and the extended evaluation workshop were collective spaces that brought together several people simultaneously and therefore had a limited duration (2.5 hours each), which proved insufficient for exploring certain topics in greater depth. The Foundation's central evaluation team suggested the evaluation team to conduct some in-depth interviews with community and municipal members to explore the topics evaluated in the participatory workshops in greater depth, as well as to gather evaluative insights regarding issues that did not arise spontaneously during the workshops. In particular, it was of interest to enquire about the programme's work on gender perspective, a topic that had not been addressed in the participatory workshops.

In this context, three in-depth interviews were conducted with community members from Putaendo who had been present at the extended workshop,

and one interview with the workshop facilitator. Given that these were planned and implemented by the Foundation's central evaluation team, this activity is classified as *functional* participation, as the local actors and the evaluation team participated by providing information, but did not participate in the design of these spaces.

Systematisation and results report

To record and systematise the information gathered throughout the evaluation process, the Foundation's regional team engaged an external professional as a consultant to carry out the tasks of recording, systematising, and carrying out a preliminary analysis of the information. The professional, a sociologist by training, carried out audio recording, note-taking, and observation of all the participatory spaces, with the exception of the in-depth interviews. Once the participatory workshops had concluded, she delivered a systematisation report and an initial analysis of results, which was shared with the Foundation's regional team.

Subsequently, once the in-depth interviews had been completed, the Foundation's central evaluation team (one member of which also belongs to the Putaendo evaluation team) carried out a second round of results

analysis, drawing on the external consultant's report and the individual interviews. This report is expected to be supplemented by further analyses from the regional team and presented to the evaluation team, in order to later develop a plan for dissemination with the community and an action plan for the utilisation of the results.

Dissemination of results and design of an action plan

As noted above, this stage had not been implemented at the time of writing this chapter. However, based on the findings of the in-depth interviews, the evaluation team will be asked to design a strategy for disseminating the results, and efforts will be made to ensure that the evaluation team itself plays a leading role in sharing these results, thereby enhancing the relevance of the process and fostering community engagement. In line with the initial suggestions gathered during the interviews, the dissemination strategy should focus primarily on visual materials that allow people to understand the results in a straightforward manner. It is thus expected that the stage of information dissemination and the development of an action plan will be framed within an *interactive* level of participation, insofar as local actors will play a leading role in the design and implementation of this process.

Reflections and lessons from the participatory evaluation case

The results of the participatory evaluation are presented below under two broad categories. First, the evaluation of the intervention's results in the municipality of Putaendo, and second, reflections and learning from the participatory evaluation methodology used.

Main results of the evaluation in Putaendo

With regard to the first category, which systematises the specific results of the Putaendo intervention, the findings are presented organised according to the dimensions evaluated, namely: *cultural*, *environmental*, and *productive* —which were defined by the evaluation team—.

From the *cultural* dimension, based on the evaluative and participatory exercise carried out, the group collectively agreed that the goal '*The communities of Casablanca and Los Patos achieve a local tourism development that values, safeguards, and transmits their culture and traditions*' stands at approximately one third of the way (symbols were used to mark the agreed level of progress on the poster). The principal remaining challenges relate to the submission and development of projects with a cultural purpose; collaboration with authorities, other institutions,

and communities to advance cultural and tourism development; making progress in informing and educating local people and tourists —especially young people— so that they understand and care for their culture; and working to raise awareness of the area's culture on a wider scale.

From the *environmental* dimension, the attendees agreed that the goal '*The communities of Casablanca and Los Patos achieve a local tourism development that respects and conserves the environment*' stands at approximately 50% —that is, halfway along the journey—. They recognise and value concrete actions supported by the programme that have had tangible impacts on raising community awareness of environmental protection. Among the challenges identified are the need for greater education and tools for environmental protection and care, and greater involvement of authorities in implementing environmental projects proposed by the community.

From the *productive* dimension, it was agreed that the goal '*The communities of Casablanca and Los Patos achieve a local tourism development that generates quality paid employment*' stands at close to 50% — also roughly halfway. However, from the discourse analysis it is concluded that the progress achieved in the employment/productive area is the most significant in comparison with the cultural and environmental dimensions. The community mentions that the programme, through its professionals, has helped them to recognise and appreciate the existing tourism potential, enabling them to identify new employment opportunities associated with tourism and to enhance

the value of other productive activities. The workshops and training sessions managed by the programme in the productive area are very well regarded, particularly among women. Among the challenges cited are the difficulty and frustration caused by the complexity of obtaining state support for business growth, as well as the need for greater access to training and commercial infrastructure.

Analysis of the interviews and of women's discourse in the workshops reveals progress in the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women in the community. These achievements are particularly evident in the productive sphere, where a path towards economic autonomy has been initiated through the programme's training and support. Furthermore, in the participatory workshops, there are early signs of an intention on the part of women to participate more actively in community spaces where usually only men take part, such as decision-making on issues relating to water scarcity. As this is such an important topic for the whole community, women feel they should be given greater consideration and are venturing to claim those spaces for themselves as well.

In subjective terms, the discourse shows that the community perceives progress in the empowerment and the strengthening of community organisations—particularly among women—as well as increased enthusiasm, mutual support, learning, and motivation to work collectively and bring about concrete actions that improve their quality of life. At the same time, a profound sense of gratitude towards the programme is apparent. Relational achievements are also noted,

including an improvement in the community's relationship and rapport with the authorities, better links with other local actors to address common problems, and greater connection with public and private opportunity structures.

Results concerning the participatory evaluation methodology

As to the second category, which systematises the results of the participatory evaluation methodology, a variety of reflections and lessons have emerged from this experience in Putaendo. These reflections are presented below, organised under seven thematic categories.

Methodological and technical aspects

With regard to the selection of criteria for evaluating the intervention, the evaluation team determined that these should address three major expected outcomes, which were set out in the intervention's purpose (cultural, environmental, and productive results for the development of the Putaendo community). At this point it is worth reflecting on how the criteria to be evaluated are selected; in this case it was the Foundation's technical team that commissioned and led the evaluative process, and therefore evaluation criteria could have been established in advance in accordance with the expected achievement dimensions that

already existed in the *Intervention Work Plan*. However, it was decided not to define all criteria beforehand, but only to establish those that arose spontaneously from the community and municipal representatives.

This decision had the consequence that the criterion for gender-related intervention achievements —a highly relevant dimension from the programme’s perspective— did not emerge spontaneously among the criteria raised by the evaluation team, and was therefore not explicitly evaluated in the participatory workshops. A more guided design of the criteria definition process could have been chosen —ensuring, for example, that certain baseline achievement criteria were included from the programme’s technical perspective—. This situation raises the question of whether it is better to leave room for spontaneity on the part of the evaluation team or to establish evaluative criteria in advance. An intermediate option could have been for the programme to put forward an initial proposal of criteria to the rest of the evaluation team, to be jointly reviewed and analysed. To address the absence of information on progress in the subject of gender, subsequent interviews were conducted, though this resulted in unplanned additional work.

Another relevant methodological decision relates to the timing of the evaluation process: the participatory evaluation was proposed as a results evaluation, but at the same time from the perspective of process evaluation (mid-term), insofar as it is carried out during the development of the intervention and not only upon its completion.

Approaching the participatory evaluation in this way —during the course of the intervention— produced various noteworthy consequences:

- The evaluative exercises enabled participants to recall and reflect on the specific activities carried out and achievements reached to date, which allowed them to visualise, collectively, a recap of events that fosters awareness of what has been done with the programme —in turn enabling them to recognise those achievements, value them, and build motivation for taking on new related challenges—.
- The evaluation itself also took on an interventive character, insofar as, on the one hand, it yielded intermediate results that serve for planning, projecting, and designing adjustments to the intervention, and on the other, the formation of the evaluation team entailed a training process for its members on evaluation methodology —and in this specific case, on participatory evaluation—. The latter created an opportunity to gradually build evaluation capacities in the community and participating municipal teams. Thus, the evaluation became both an evaluative and an interventive tool simultaneously.

With regard to motivation in particular, the participatory evaluation space —as an experience that explicitly visualises the expected objectives and achievements— had the potential to reinforce participants’ motivation to work towards those shared challenges.

Participatory tools

The participatory tools used in the evaluative workshops also played a fundamental role in the development of the sessions and in the effectiveness of the evaluation. Some of the techniques used and related reflections are highlighted below.

Given that the first participatory workshop held with the evaluation team had as its objective training the participants in the evaluation methodology (what it is, what it is for, and how it is used), the *Evaluate the chocolate*¹³ game was employed. Although this technique proved effective in illustrating the evaluation process and reflecting on the different levels of participation in evaluation, it was identified that alternatives to chocolate should be available to ensure the activity is appropriate for all participants.

Additionally, visual and playful materials were deliberately used in all activities, designed specifically for the group of participants; this helped to capture their attention and to make the content of the topics under evaluation more accessible, while also helping participants to develop greater ownership of the activity and its content.

The *Timeline* technique, developed using photographs, was positively received by participants, as it enabled them to easily recall important moments from the programme's arrival in the intervention territory up to the present day. This tool inspired motivation in

participants as they recalled events and actions that represent significant achievements, and consequently, a feeling of satisfaction was observed regarding all that had been accomplished so far, along with motivation to keep moving forward.

The extended workshop used the technique called *The path along the Putaendo river*, created by the evaluation team for this space. It is worth noting that the choice of the river as the central element was not made at random, but was rather a deliberate selection designed to make the activity more relevant to the group involved, capturing their attention and enthusiasm. For this reason, images representative of the local culture, environment, and economy were also included in each stream of the river depicted on the poster. Representing consensus in this way proved effective, straightforward, and highly relevant for participants.

Stakeholder participation

The convening process entails an important decision regarding the selection of those invited. Participatory workshops cannot be excessively large, as it becomes difficult to coordinate and listen to the entire group; for this reason, the people invited were carefully selected. However, it is also recognised as a learning experience to have a prepared explanation ready should some people raise the concern of not having been invited. A key consideration was to issue a relevant (personalised) and formal invitation, so that participants felt valued, given that their presence is essential to the development of the activity. Some

¹³ In this workshop the technique was specifically called Chocolate Assessment: Approaching Evaluation.

lessons learned to improve convening and attendance were as follows:

- Involve the evaluation team itself in the convening process, making its members responsible for inviting their peers from the community and the municipality to help increase the commitment of those invited.
- Prepare printed invitations that can be delivered in person to those convened (this lends greater formality to the invitation and helps those invited to remember and/or note the date and location).
- Convene at least 2 or 3 more people than the minimum number required to run the workshop, thereby reducing the risk of cancellation due to low attendance.

Furthermore, in participatory evaluation it is essential to include diverse actors in order to guarantee the quality, representativeness, and relevance of results, as well as to foster commitment to and ownership of these results by the community and local authorities. The participatory evaluation presented itself as an opportunity to bring together actors who do not ordinarily meet: people from different localities within the same municipality. This was also the case with the convening of actors from different institutional levels: the evaluative workshops brought together and included the simultaneous presence of the mayor (the highest municipal authority), programme professionals, and community members representing various grassroots organisations —something that does not ordinarily occur—. Thus, this gathering

presented enormous opportunities for the influence of the results, insofar as all actors evaluated jointly, improving ownership of the results and the level of commitment to the results and reflections arising from the workshops.

Facilitation of participatory spaces

In this specific evaluation (as in any of this type), the facilitation of participatory spaces played an essential role. The facilitation process highlighted the fact that specific skills are required to guarantee the effectiveness and smooth development of participatory activities. In particular, on the basis of this experience, a number of lessons were learned:

- Both in the participatory spaces with the evaluation team and in the extended workshop, the facilitator had to synthesise information quickly and accurately as the sessions progressed, in order to propose conclusions and agreements arising from the discussion on the spot. This was especially important in the workshop with the evaluation team, where participants needed to reach consensus on dimensions or criteria of expected achievement.
- Given that it is usually complex to bring together diverse actors —especially authorities— it proves very useful to have experienced facilitators who can spontaneously systematise information within the participatory space in order to contribute to the generation of agreements and commitments. This also contributed to making more efficient use

of time in the workshops and of the information gathered.

- Given the variety of actors participating in the workshops, *flexibility* in adapting certain methodologies or elements of the planning also stands out as a desirable facilitation skill.
- It also proved essential that the facilitator maintained an *attitude of openness, active listening, and respect* at all times, demonstrating that all opinions were genuinely valued and taken into account.

It was also very important that the Foundation's regional technical team—which commissioned the evaluation—together with the evaluation team defined what the specific role of each person would be in the participatory workshops. It was particularly complex to define the Servicio País Professionals would play, given that they are part of the day-to-day intervention and belong to the Foundation, but at the same time reside in the same locality as the community members and have direct working relationships with the municipal team.

Thus, they were part of the regional team leading the evaluation while simultaneously being subjects of that evaluation. Excluding them from the process had the advantage of avoiding potential biases in the evaluation expressed by other actors regarding the programme, but it also affects the representativeness of the evaluation by rendering invisible their own perceptions and assessment. In the end, it was decided that the Servicio País Young Professionals would participate in the workshops but would not be members of the evaluation team. That is to say, their

participation was *functional* in character (not in the design of the evaluation, but in its implementation).

Finally, in the experience described here—as in all others within the Servicio País programme (and almost certainly in the reality of many other civil society organisations in Chile and the region)—the difficulty arose of not having financial resources to contract external facilitators. As a result, in this case it was the Territorial Coordinator of the programme in the Valparaíso Region who fulfilled the role of facilitator in all participatory workshops. The decision that she should take on this role was based on her training as a sociologist and her prior experience facilitating group activities. However, while the participation of actors who are relevant to and influential in the evaluated intervention is highly valued in collective evaluation contexts, it also poses a risk when facilitators are people who occupy roles affected by the evaluation, opening up the possibility of evaluative biases associated with the inhibition that other participating actors may feel, or with the lack of candour that might arise in relation to the presence of facilitators who also hold a significant role in the programme or initiative being evaluated.

Furthermore, given the inability to rely on external facilitators, there is also a risk of not having facilitators who meet the minimum requirements to perform the role adequately. All of these risks were taken into account in the evaluation process and must be considered as part of the context for the interpretation of results.

Use of the results

This use is fundamental to ensuring that the work carried out has a real impact on the community, as well as to motivating their ongoing participation.

As noted above, at the time of writing this chapter the use of results stage was in design and implementation. Nevertheless, it is possible to highlight some reflections in this regard, based on the in-depth interviews conducted with relevant actors. They were specifically asked about how the results of this evaluation could be used, to which community members mentioned the importance of sharing them with others to spread the word of what is being done and to show that there is progress:

Sharing (the results) with other community members who were not there that day at the workshop, showing that things are being done... mainly so that they are informed and can participate too, especially the younger people. (Luz, resident of Los Patos)

They also suggested that a good way of disseminating the results would be through different channels, emphasising the use of graphic media (leaflets), local media (radio), and social media to reach particularly the younger population. While larger meetings may have limitations in terms of convening and community participation, they remain an important means of sharing information and discussing evaluation results.

In short, sharing the results of the participatory evaluation with the community is fundamental to promoting transparency, participation, and the impact

of the work carried out. Using different channels and concrete materials can facilitate the communication of results and motivate the community's continued participation in the local development process.

Policy impact potential of the findings

When comparing this exercise with other evaluations it becomes evident that in a traditional format—for example, a quantitative evaluation based on surveys of relevant actors—each person responds individually and has no knowledge of the perceptions or assessment put forward by others, nor do they participate in the design and selection of evaluation criteria. In the case of participatory evaluation, such as that carried out in Putaendo, the participants in the evaluative workshops were able to conduct a group evaluation in which the criteria were designed by their representatives, and in which various people from the territory shared their knowledge and opinions. This exchange fostered ownership of the results, the drawing of group conclusions, and the reaching of agreements, all of which are associated with a greater impact.

Final reflections

Taking into account the progress made in establishing M&E systems in Chile—primarily within the state

structure— the reflection arises that the evaluation of programmes and policies in Chile has reached advanced levels in comparison with other countries in the region. However, these systems have been predominantly quantitative and positivist in nature, and centred on the efficient management of resources. It is therefore necessary for M&E to embark on a path of adaptation, incorporating a participatory orientation, and avoiding being limited to the analysis of budgetary efficiency and effectiveness, or to a mere consultative exercise (*passive participation*) that offers actors no possibility of influencing the use of results and the associated decisions that affect the policy agenda.

Chilean civil society organisations have contributed significantly to redirecting this path towards mixed evaluations that also consider qualitative methodologies, thereby giving prominence and a leading role to the actors, beneficiaries, or participants of the processes being evaluated—as illustrated by the evaluative example of the Servicio País Programme’s intervention in Putaendo, presented in this chapter—.

We firmly believe that we must go still further in this direction, promoting interactive participation not only in the civil society sphere, but also extending it into the public domain. To pave that path, we must advance towards greater training of professionals and technicians in this area, educating undergraduate students in the social and economic fields from the outset to design and implement evaluations that also legitimate qualitative methods within the spectrum of rigorous and valid measurement.

On the other hand, the writing of this chapter prompts us to reflect on evaluation models and their coherence with the internal structure and purpose of the elements they evaluate. As noted above, the Servicio País Programme has, since its inception, promoted a participatory and promotive approach to social intervention, understanding the overcoming of poverty as a process of human development and fulfilment of collective scope. Thus, the programme’s purpose has a community character—that is, achievements and changes are expected to occur at the group, organisational, and community level—.

In that context, and given that the Foundation managing this programme is private in nature but receives state funding, in 2010 the Budget Directorate (DIPRES) of the Ministry of Finance decided to subject the Foundation to an exhaustive evaluation and audit. As a result of this process, a programme evaluation system was designed which, from 2012 onwards, incorporated various quantitative instruments for measuring achievements, such as satisfaction surveys and baseline tools. However, these instruments collected only quantitative data from individual informants.

This approach provided objective measurements of high evaluative value, but lacked qualitative information that would add context and interpretation. Moreover, it did not capture an essential characteristic of the programme: the attainment of collective achievements. How could the programme’s collective achievements be recognised through individual, exclusively quantitative evaluations?

From this perspective, it was decided to incorporate into the evaluation model innovative tools that would make it possible to capture those results and collective achievements that were not evidenced through individual surveys. Thus, participatory evaluation became an indispensable component of the programme's evaluation process. The inclusion of this evaluative dimension is valuable not only for the complementary nature of the two methods, but also because participatory evaluation offers a unique opportunity to develop and build evaluation capacities in communities and among participating actors.

Participatory evaluation in this experience —and indeed in all other evaluations of this programme's interventions— has contributed significantly to complementing the quantitative evaluation results: on the one hand, by giving context to the objective results, and on the other, by providing intermediate results that are essential for the planning and design of adjustments to the intervention plan. Moreover, it is observed that the participatory evaluation experience proves especially powerful when implemented in the mid-term evaluation format —that is, when developed during the course of the implementation of interventions—.

It is also worth reflecting on the different levels of participation that can occur within an evaluation process. As described in this experience in Putaendo, participatory evaluation is intrinsically participatory because it seeks to give a leading role to diverse stakeholders throughout the process, but this does not mean that all stages attain the same levels of participation. Each experience must, in accordance with its context and temporal and budgetary possibilities, design an evaluative process that includes participatory stages —ideally binding ones— but that also considers stages of consultive, functional, collaborative participation, and so forth. It is appropriate and legitimate for a participatory evaluation process to encompass this diversity.

The overarching challenge facing the participatory evaluation in Putaendo —still in progress— and other similar ones within this programme, is to build on the work of the evaluation team in order to collaboratively design plans for the dissemination of results and their use. Although it is part of the stated intentions and the planning of the Servicio País Programme's technical team in the municipality of Putaendo, it is necessary to empower the evaluation team with tools to lead and manage the process of collectively defining the use of results, with a view to the formulation and implementation of concrete plans, strategies, or projects for the community based on those results.

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