

Chapter 9

Evaluation in Costa Rica

The Case of the *Programme for the Promotion of the Autonomy of Persons with Disabilities*

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Abstract

This chapter explores how active participation in the evaluation process strengthens public management, drawing on the experience of the Programme for the Promotion of Personal Autonomy of Persons with Disabilities, which provides financial support so that people with disabilities can hire personal assistants, thereby promoting their autonomy. The inclusion of key stakeholders, such as the programme's users and representatives of civil society organisations, was essential to ensuring that the evaluation responded to their needs. This participation, framed within Mideplan's Guide to Evaluation with Participation, enabled the actors involved to contribute to defining questions and objectives, to influence the strategic decisions of the process, and ensured that the resulting recommendations were representative and meaningful, directly reflecting the experiences and needs of the users. This approach not only enhances transparency and legitimacy in public management, but also fosters a sense of shared responsibility between institutions and citizens, enriching the democratic process. By including these voices, participatory evaluation becomes a key tool for more inclusive public management and a more robust democratic exercise in the decisions that affect the community.

Keywords

Evaluation, Participation, Inclusion, Personal autonomy, Persons with Disabilities.

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*The voice of the voiceless, as they say,
is taken into account
(Johnny Núñez Herrera⁵⁵)*

Introduction

Undertaking an *evaluation with participation* (EwP) means accepting that, in order to pass judgement on a public intervention that addresses a multidimensional problem, affects multiple actors and, within the public administration, falls across diverse, multi-level areas of competence, the different interests, needs and expectations must be incorporated into the process from the outset.

The experience shared here highlights the importance of the evaluation of a public intervention aimed at a vulnerable population, and raises awareness of the implications, for the development of the evaluation process, of adopting a participatory approach; this experience took as its methodological basis the *Guide to Evaluation with Participation*⁵⁶, published by Mideplan in 2019.

⁵⁵ A person with a disability who is a user of the Programme and a member of the Technical and Extended Teams.

⁵⁶ Its content was developed based on the results obtained in the eight focus groups held across all regions of the country, where 66% of participants were women and 34% men; furthermore, 60% represented public institutions, 30% civil society (networks and CSOs), 5% academia, 3% evaluators and 2% international cooperation agents.

The second section of this chapter describes the Costa Rican context of institutionalisation (where Costa Rica stood when this evaluation began); the third section describes the programme under evaluation (its origin, what it consists of, and its actors); the fourth section, the development of the evaluation process (who participated, how and in which stages); and finally, the main lessons are presented for those wishing to learn about them, adding some recommendations for replicating this experience.

The main challenge faced in these lines lies in the background of the writers. On the one hand, two public officials accustomed to producing institutional documents who have set out —perhaps naively— to move as far away as possible from this perspective when writing; and, on the other, a consultant writer linked to academia. Together they have decided to merge their viewpoints in order to contribute a national experience to the region, fully trusting that this deliberate, multi-voiced participation will prove representative of, and faithful to, the practice being described.

Starting point

The institutionalisation of evaluation has made significant progress in Costa Rica since 2000, following a constitutional reform that introduced the evaluation function at the highest normative level, with a broad

and comprehensive character spanning across the public administration, establishing that evaluation must be systematic and must encompass the results of State action. Two laws complement this aim: *Law No. 5,525 on National Planning* and *Law No. 8,131 on the Financial Administration of the Republic and Public Budgets*, which establish, respectively, that the results of national plans, policies and programmes must be evaluated – a task entrusted to the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (Mideplan) (Law No. 5,525, Art. 2); and, along the same lines, that the Ministry of Finance must present the results of budget execution (Law No. 8,131, Art. 4). Likewise, Article 55 of Law No. 8,131 stipulates that both entities *must evaluate the results of institutional management in order to guarantee both the achievement of objectives and targets and the rational use of public resources* (Asamblea Legislativa, 2001).

This aspect has been recognised by the OECD (2022) for offering a wide range of normative tools that provide a framework to the evaluation of public policy in the country, placing it on a par with Germany, France, Mexico and Switzerland.

Participation is included at the normative level as a human right in the *Political Constitution* (Article 9), and one of the objectives identified for the task of planning is the participation of the public and private sectors. These provisions point to the formulation of public policy hand in hand with the people —the path that would make it possible to overcome the biases that arise from designing and implementing actions, and

from using State resources, from the centralised and comfortable confines of an office—.

Since the second decade of the twenty-first century, the evaluation culture has been promoted with greater determination through a series of particular milestones, among which the following stand out: *Executive Decree No. 35,755*, which configures the evaluation function within Mideplan’s organisational structure (2010); the development of the first evaluations within the National Evaluation System (2014); the first *National Evaluation Agenda (ANE)* linked to the *National Development Plan* (2015); the first experience of evaluations with an inclusive perspective (2016); the development of technical and methodological instruments (2017); the first National Evaluation Policy 2018–2030 (2018); and the publication of the *Guide to Evaluation with Participation* and the first *evaluation with a participatory perspective* (2019–2021).

Various actors converge in the journey outlined above: the Executive Branch, academia, international bodies, civil society representatives, national and international evaluation agents, cooperation partners and others. To go into detail about the specific roles and responsibilities of each within the processes that have taken place would detract from the central theme of this section, so we shall leave it at that.

In recent years, Costa Rica has seen a greater demand for evaluations within the public sector, accompanied by the investment of national resources to fund them and by innovation in the methods used to carry out evaluations with the support of cooperation partners.

This gives rise to the need for a pool of people trained in evaluation (here, the role of the postgraduate studies available in the country stands out) and to the sustainability of processes in the face of changes of government, amid political alternation, that has entailed a progressive escalation and advance.

According to the *National Evaluation Capacities Index (INCE)*⁵⁷, the country ranks in the middle, 6.18 out of 10; the most significant challenges being the use of evaluation results (by various stakeholders), their connection to budgeting processes and to the assessment of public policy performance, knowledge management by diverse actors, and the installed capacity to manage, innovate and decentralise the evaluation function.

The country has identified the National Evaluation Policy and its *Action Plan* as its route forward, crystallising the commitments of a diversity of actors towards resolving these challenges. This mechanism becomes a comparative advantage when it comes to envisaging the gradual continuity towards the generation of more and better evaluations.

Following this perspective, the question arises: what is a good evaluation? The answer points to: one that is used; and that use —adding the qualifier “more”— necessarily involves inclusion and participation: the more actors we have at the table, the more likely it is

⁵⁷ A collaborative diagnostic instrument that measures evaluation capacities and practices, developed by WFP and DEval. Costa Rica has two records: 2020 and 2022. For more on INCE and the data, visit <https://inceval.org/es/country-page/costa-rica>.

that the evaluation will achieve its purpose of being used. It was on this premise that the experience described below originated.

The starting point of this experience is *people with disabilities (PwD)*⁵⁸ and their right to, and constant involvement in, participation, as will be discussed later. According to the *1st National Disability Survey* (2018), 18.2% of the adult population has some type of disability, and 52.63% are located in the 1st and 2nd quintiles of gross per capita household income; in addition, the *National Household Survey* (2018) reported that 31.03% of PwD are living in poverty.

The rationale for selecting the Programme for the Promotion of the Autonomy of Persons with Disabilities (hereinafter, the Programme) and evaluating it in a participatory way rested on three aspects:

- Institutional willingness and consent: as a recently created programme, in both its design and its implementation, with a prevailing intention to scale it up and invest more resources, the collection of evidence became necessary.
- The possibility of drawing on resources (financial, technical, logistical, temporal and technological)

⁵⁸ Law No. 9,379 defines a Person with a Disability as one who has long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. In the case of minors, insofar as this law is applicable to them, their best interests shall always be pursued (subsection b, Art. 2).

from an international cooperation source⁵⁹, which offer greater agility and flexibility compared with ordinary national mechanisms.

- The characteristics of the Programme, aimed at a specific population segment and situated in a particular territory.

The starting point was the concept of participation presented in Mideplan (2019, p. 13), which describes it as the *active involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation process*, with involvement defined as the action or effect of being committed to a situation (the evaluation process); stakeholder as a person who represents themselves or an organisation (public, international, civil society or other); and the evaluation process as all the actions organised into steps to carry out an evaluation.

Stakeholders directly or indirectly related to the evaluation process were identified, and their level of participation was defined following the classification established by Mideplan (2019), which is based on two levels of participation (low and high) according to the way in which the different stakeholders make decisions and the frequency (number) of actions in which they participate⁶⁰.

⁵⁹ It drew on the contribution of the project for Strengthening Evaluation Capacities in Costa Rica and Other Latin American Countries (now Focelac+).

⁶⁰ Participation is high when the stakeholders who took part at different moments of the evaluation process were involved in specific actions at the time of drafting the ToR, collecting information, analysing results, codeveloping recommendations and disseminating them.

Programme for the Promotion of the Autonomy of Persons with Disabilities

The Programme is coordinated and implemented by the National Council for Persons with Disabilities (Conapdis) within the framework of *Law No. 9,379 on the Promotion of Personal Autonomy of Persons with Disabilities* (2016). The problem of the insufficient full exercise of the *Right to Personal Autonomy* was placed on the political agenda through the mobilisation of PwD and the civil society organisations (CSOs) connected with the principle of independent living⁶¹. Conapdis, as the governing body for disability matters, joined this mobilisation (Mideplan, 2021). Both the Law and the Programme were driven by the conceptual, attitudinal and legal changes facing Costa Rican society with regard to the human rights of PwD⁶².

The objective of the Programme is to contribute to ensuring that PwD living in poverty and requiring support to carry out activities of daily living can exercise their right to personal autonomy, through human

⁶¹ Under Law No. 9,379 (subsection m, Art. 2), this principle seeks to ensure that the PwD: experiences the right to personal autonomy, makes decisions while assuming responsibilities, and is recognised as an active part of society. All of the above applies regardless of whether the PwD requires supports (a personal assistant, a guarantor or products).

⁶² A paradigm for addressing disability from a human rights perspective. It centres on the intrinsic dignity of human beings, valuing differences. The person with a disability is a subject of rights and obligations, and not an object of overprotection and/or pity (regulated in Law No. 8,661, Approval of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, of 19 August 2008).

personal assistance, so that they can control, address, make and act on their own decisions (Conapdis, 2019).

The Programme was created as a monthly state cash transfer (Law No. 9,379, Art. 16) so that PwD may access human personal assistance, support products and services – including the costs derived from the upkeep of assistance animals – provided that the requirements set out in Article 15 of the Law are met (Conapdis, 2020), thereby aligning with the national development objectives framed in the country's strategic instruments and with Sustainable Development Goal 1: to end poverty⁶³.

The Programme receives strategic support from public institutions in relation to the training of personal assistants, the certification of the poverty status of PwD, and its funding. In addition, the independent-living CSOs take part, facilitating human personal assistance services and advice to PwD, along with the figure of the human personal assistant, the users' family members, and the PwD users themselves.

Once the *human personal assistants* (HPAs)⁶⁴ had been certified, the Programme began its implementation

⁶³ For further details, visit www.conapdis.go.cr

⁶⁴ Prior to the implementation of the programme, Conapdis and the National Training Institute developed the professional profile and the certification module of the Training Programme, with the aim of ensuring that the independent-living model is understood and operationalised correctly and at no point considering the traditional care paradigm. The figure of human personal assistance is a person over the age of 18 trained to provide support services in carrying out daily activities in exchange for financial remuneration (Law No. 9,379, Art. 2).

in early 2019 by selecting its first users, drawing up and endorsing individual plans, and carrying out information and advisory actions about it. In this way, the implementation of the Programme is grounded in the mechanism of co-responsibility, whereby there is a mutual commitment on the part of families, the PwD requiring human assistance, and the Costa Rican State, regardless of the modalities through which the provision of the service is coordinated, namely:

- **direct:** the PwD coordinates the assistance and the rotation with the HPA (using the Conapdis database), at most every three months, and is responsible for making the transfer or payment to the HPA;
- **indirect:** the CSO (with the PwD's approval) coordinates the assistance and the rotation of the HPA on a daily or weekly basis; the PwD transfers the payment to the CSO, and the CSO to the HPA.

A journey through the evaluation process developed

In this section, we take a journey through the evaluation process, identifying how each stage was approached, for any organisation or person interested in learning about or replicating this first experience (see Figure 1).

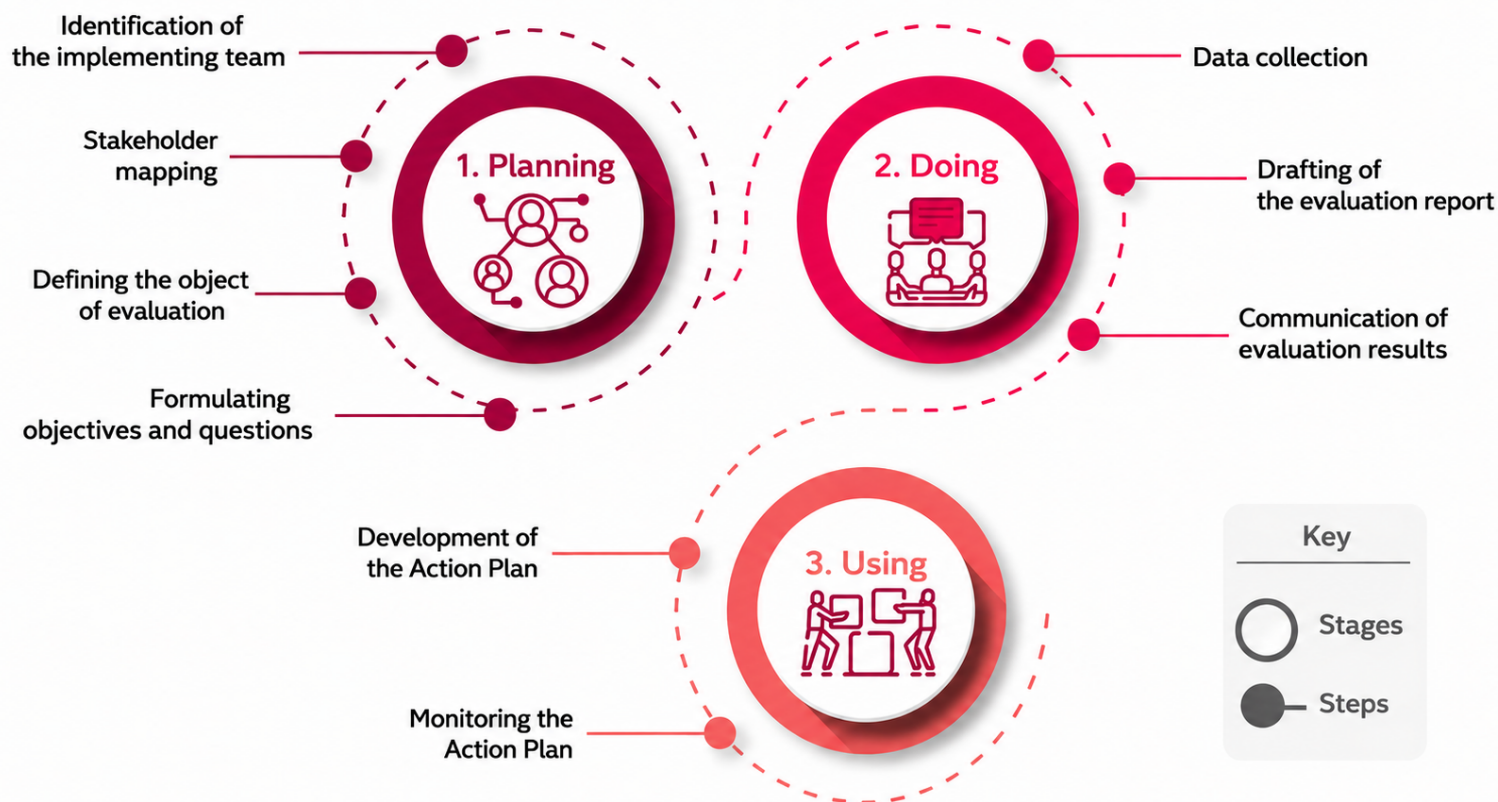


Figure 1. Evaluation process.
Source: Mideplan (2019, p. 22).

Planning stage (3rd quarter 2019 – 1st half 2020)

This evaluation stage originates when Conapdis requests Mideplan to incorporate the Programme into the National Evaluation Agenda (ANE). Conapdis is an entity that has participation embedded in its

organisational culture, contributing a sensitivity towards participatory evaluation—a key condition that drove the process, since it was understood that participation entails sharing decision-making with other stakeholders—. Likewise, from the standpoint of PwD, the importance of the right to have a bearing on the Programme was taken into account under the

premise ‘*nothing about us without us*’. It was fitting to apply participatory methodologies to the evaluation process with the aim of learning from and improving a state programme that was new and unique in Latin America in 2019.

Identification of the team responsible for the evaluation and stakeholder mapping

Once the decision to carry out the evaluation had been taken, the implementing team was set up, made up of two representatives from Conapdis (as the unit responsible for the Programme) and two representatives from Mideplan (as the body responsible for evaluation in Costa Rica), both acting as facilitators of the process.

Among this team’s first tasks, the mapping of the Programme’s key stakeholders stands out – who would be invited to join the evaluation process and its management. This mapping identified who had a connection with the Programme and held some kind of knowledge, right, responsibility, competence or particular interest that made their participation strategic, whether in an individual capacity or as representatives of agencies, entities and civil society organisations. Following the identification and prioritisation of stakeholders, they were invited to take part in the evaluation.

The first call to all these stakeholders took place in a set of working sessions that were named the Workshop for the Participatory Planning of the Evaluation, whose aim was for all the stakeholders to get to know one another and to be introduced to the participatory evaluation process. In these sessions, an introduction to the evaluation was carried out, dialogues of knowledge were facilitated, and the evaluation’s guidelines, objectives, questions and criteria which would articulate the process were generated.

In the Workshop, the evaluation’s Extended Team was formed, which now brought together all the stakeholders in the management of the evaluation and, from that point onwards, would be responsible for making strategic decisions about it. Given that managing the evaluation gradually demands many technical and administrative tasks that require greater dedication, a subgroup was set up, called the Technical Team, which included representatives of the PwD, who were selected democratically among themselves (see Box 1, which addresses their responsibilities during this stage). In addition, the Workshop had a team of facilitators; Figure 2 shows the different participating teams.

Given the importance of setting up these teams, in addition to including in the agenda presenting their main functions—and the milestones of the process in which they would have to participate, with the estimation of timeframes and anticipated dates—the facilitation team envisaged various activities aimed at fostering acquaintance and trust among its members, as well as developing teamwork skills.

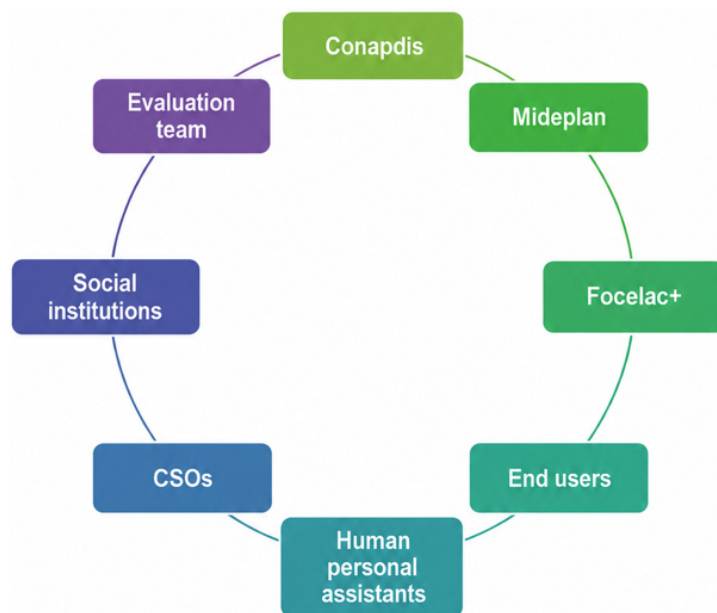
The Extended Team was responsible for strategically steering the process and defining the evaluation commission during its planning and, from then on, was responsible for ensuring its proper progress and fostering participation throughout its conduct, as well as for promoting the use of the improvement recommendations. Belonging to the Extended Team is what allowed stakeholders to have a bearing on the evaluation's decision-making (Mideplan, 2019), and it is the sustained participation in this team what facilitated ownership of the process, acceptance of the results and engagement with the use of the evaluation.

The Extended Team was heavily involved in the definition of the evaluation, attending the Planning Workshops and the subsequent meetings to validate the Terms of Reference that would govern the contracting of an External Evaluation Team for the Doing stage; at the request of the Extended Team, this team had to —and did— include a person with a disability who lived within the independent-living model. The Extended Team performed other functions during the Doing and Using stages, which will be described under those stages.

For its part, the Technical Team held executive responsibility over the Extended Team's decisions and took on the day-to-day tasks demanded by the management of the evaluation, holding an important role in facilitating the dialogue, communication and coordination of the process.

Box 1. *The role of the Extended Team and the Technical Team*

Source: Prepared by the authors.



Extended team:

- 10 Programme end users.
- 10 Human personal assistants of end users.
- 3 Independent living CSOs.
- 4 Public institutions: Conapdis (implementing agency), Mideplan and other social institutions involved in implementation (INA, Desaf).

Technical team:

- 3 Programme end users.
- 2 Conapdis staff members.
- 1 Mideplan staff member.

Technical assistance:

- 2 Focelac+ Project.

Evaluation team:

- 3 Social workers (one of them expert in human rights and disability)

Figure 2. *Configuration of teams.*
Source: Prepared by the authors.

Delimitation of the object of evaluation

In practice, the Planning Workshops have proved to be an ideal setting for delimiting the Programme as the object of evaluation, since they facilitate dialogue and the convergence of different perspectives and viewpoints on the key elements: why the Programme exists, what it does, what for, how, when, where, with whom and for whom. In addition, learning about different views on the intervention prepared the stakeholders to understand each other's differing perspectives and, on that basis, to lay the foundations for designing an evaluation tailored to those differences.

All of this gradually created an environment conducive to reaching agreements on the selection and prioritisation of the questions on which the evaluation should focus, on its criteria and objectives and, ultimately, for the cocreation and collective construction of the evaluation process, as the basis for and catalyst of its ownership. In the practice of evaluation with participation, this work of sharing each stakeholder's different approaches to the intervention in order to facilitate the delimitation of the object of evaluation was channelled through two participatory activities proposed by the facilitation team:

- *The dice of innocence*: each participant rolls this dice and answers the question they land on (the why, what, what for, how, with whom and for whom of the evaluation), noting their reflections on cards. The turns allow everyone to answer all 6 questions, and the sharing of ideas and the group work itself prove enriching.

- *My programme's results chain*: a sequence of 4 cards is established, each with a prompt about the intervention being evaluated (what it does; what it delivers; what the recipient achieves; what consequences these achievements have). They are handed out to the participants, who exchange points of view on the answers and place their written cards under each prompt.

These activities became one of the most notable moments of these workshops, especially the collective work on the Programme's results chain, since it allowed the chain to be *reconstructed* where it was not explicit, through the convergence of different perspectives, taking it as a starting point for reflection on the evaluation questions and facilitating understanding among the stakeholders about their different needs and interests – something essential for collective work.

Formulation of objectives and questions

In this step, it was important to communicate clearly why participation was relevant, and to manage expectations in order to avoid the risk of *symbolic* participation. This need quickly becomes apparent in the Workshops when the evaluation objectives, or the questions that the evaluation exercise seeks to answer, begin to be defined, since a certain “vertigo” arises among those who manage the Programme on realising that they are losing *control over* the process, and on seeing that their interests may not always coincide with those of the other stakeholders.

The formulation of questions constitutes the core of any evaluation and, in this experience, it was a central focus of the Planning Workshops⁶⁵, and what was most valued by the participants, since they made it possible to capitalise on the work done up to that point, facilitating the collective construction of the evaluation and its commission. Among the people with disabilities who were service users and took part in the Extended Team, it was noted that, for them, participating at this level in the evaluation *breaks paradigms regarding the participation of people with disabilities in decision-making about the programmes that affect them*.

Among the various alternatives for defining the evaluation objectives, it was decided to construct the objectives on the basis of the evaluation questions (see Table 1) shared by the largest number of stakeholders in the workshops and the criteria towards which they were directed⁶⁶.

⁶⁵ In the field of evaluation, these spaces that seek to develop creativity through brainstorming are what Cronbach (1982) calls the divergent phase in the process of formulating evaluation questions, since the key is to generate many questions that seek answers. According to this author, this phase should be followed by a convergent phase which, in a second, reflective, critical and prioritising moment, then allows the filtering for the final selection.

⁶⁶ A matrix can be constructed to identify the list of questions gathered in the workshops, checking those that are retained, those that change and those that are not included, adding the justification. This work can be circulated among the extended team.

1.	To what extent is the programme’s intervention theory relevant to the needs of the target population, the problem it seeks to address, the institutional objectives and national policies?
2.	What is the degree of internal coherence of the Programme’s Intervention Theory (and its causal logic) for achieving personal autonomy?
3.	In what way are service users’ understanding and experience of the right to personal autonomy aligned with the Programme’s mission and objective?
4.	In what way do assistants understand the Programme and deliver their service in accordance with the Programme’s mission and objectives?
5.	To what extent are the services provided by the Programme effective in meeting the needs of the population?
6.	To what extent do the resources allocated and utilised by the programme (human, material, financial) guarantee the implementation of planned activities and the timely delivery of the human personal assistance service to the beneficiary population?
7.	To what extent do current institutional resources (financial, human, material, etc.) and the current and future demand from people with disabilities ensure the long-term sustainability of the Personal Autonomy Programme?

Table 1. Evaluation questions.
Source: Mideplan (2020, p. 7).

*Drafting of the Terms of Reference and selection of the Evaluation Team*⁶⁷

The group output generated in the participatory planning sessions was processed by the Technical Team and made it necessary to plan a space to share the draft *Terms of Reference* (ToR) with the Extended Team, ensuring that their needs and contributions during the workshops were appropriately incorporated.

Given that an Evaluation Team was to be contracted for this evaluation, it was necessary for the ToR to contextualise the participatory framework within which the evaluation had been commissioned and the participation expectations that existed, incorporating the minimum occasions on which the Evaluation Team should involve the Extended Team⁶⁸, as well as the level of participation that the approaches, methods and techniques were expected to envisage, so that the teams could adjust their methodological proposals and approaches to these requirements, and consider alternatives tailored to the time, budget and health context⁶⁹.

⁶⁷ This step is not mentioned in the content of the Guide; nonetheless, it was carried out in this case.

⁶⁸ The ToR requested a description of how the evaluation team would involve the participation of the extended team in decision-making in the *Drafting of the evaluation report* step of the Doing stage, specifically in the activities of *analysing the results of questions 3, 4, 5 and 7(b)* and *constructing recommendations for questions 3, 4, 5 and 7(b)*, in consideration of the country's health situation in the face of Covid-19.

⁶⁹ For more detail on the approaches used by the Evaluation Team in the Do stage, see Mideplan (2021).

Likewise, the selection of the Evaluation Team also became a space conducive to participation, especially by the Technical Team, in assisting with the presentation of the ToR or in the analysis of technical bids.

This stage was carried out between November 2019 and June 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic began, which entailed new administrative considerations (adjustments to the ToR and coordination work outside office hours in order to obtain the opinions of people with disabilities), technological considerations (learning to use platforms) and temporal considerations (it took four months longer than planned).

Doing stage **(2nd half 2020 – 1st quarter 2021)**

This stage was marked by the context defined by the pandemic, which determined the framework of possibilities for the evaluation's timeline and for the application of methods and techniques. It was carried out mainly by the Evaluation Team, which was commissioned to construct and implement the evaluation plan.

At this stage, the need arose to further secure participation and to count on greater involvement by the Extended Team in decision-making and in the analysis of the various products, given that decisions in the Technical Team were falling, to a greater extent, on one of the representatives of people with disabilities. In view of this situation, it was necessary to increase

the representation of the Extended Team within the Technical Team, and so the former held a vote, which resulted in the incorporation of a woman who was a user of the Programme (adding gender balance), a resident of the Brunca Region (helping to understand the particularities experienced in the regions) and, at the same time, a representative of a CSO – a characteristic that notably helped both the rest of the Technical Team and the Evaluation Team in their organisational learning about this CSO-based service delivery modality and in achieving greater precision in the evaluation report.

Within the framework of the National Evaluation Agenda, throughout this stage the evaluation reports were assessed for the first time by the Programme's user population as part of the Technical Team's responsibilities.

To comply with the Evaluation Team's work plan, the participation of the Extended Team was effectively involved in the following steps:

Information gathering

In this step, the members of the Extended Team performed different roles and had different levels of participation; for example, they acted as key informants in the evaluation process, both in the piloting of instruments and in the interviews conducted.

The people with disabilities and the assistants in the Extended Team produced various informational videos

(recorded with mobile phones) about the field data-collection process, to be circulated among themselves, so that the rest of the user population could understand even better the evaluation process being set in motion and the information gathering techniques in which they would be invited to participate to give their opinion.

In addition, the Technical Team notified several stakeholders (institutions that were partners in implementation, CSOs, people with disabilities on the waiting list to enter the Programme, families of the people with disabilities who were users of the Programme) about the details of this stage. According to the Evaluation Team, this *made the fieldwork and the provision of information easier, considering the diversity of stakeholders to be consulted, the context of the SARSCoV2 pandemic and the increase in fraudulent calls or contacts* (Mideplan, 2021, p. 225).

Drafting of the evaluation report

During this stage, the Extended Team took part in group exchange spaces with the Evaluation Team, in which the former contributed their ideas, reflections, experiences and perceptions about the object evaluated, playing a role in the process of collectively constructing the findings (evaluative discourse), the recommendations and the assessment of the conditions for their implementation (usefulness) (Mideplan, 2021). The Evaluation Team conducted two discussion groups and two virtual workshops to address the participation of the Extended Team:

These group-based approach techniques enabled the (high) participation of the members of the Extended Team in the DOING stage of the evaluation. Through these collective spaces, its members took part in the interpretation of the findings and in the discussion of the value judgements alongside the Evaluation Team, which benefitted the construction of recommendations for improving the design and the services offered by the Programme.

In general, such collective construction spaces are geared towards encouraging the stakeholders involved to commit to implementing the proposed actions, thereby creating the basic conditions for this evaluation to be useful. (Mideplan, 2021, p. 69)

Among the strategies adopted to reduce the difficulties presented by the pandemic and to facilitate a sustained commitment from the stakeholders, consideration was given to offering them different levels of participation according to the time available or the commitment they could take on. In addition to the options of joining the Extended Team and the Technical Team, other alternatives were introduced, such as the figure of *active audiences*, which allowed them to offer feedback on the progress reports that were presented to them when they could not join these teams in person or synchronously. Efforts were also made to maintain this participation by raising the awareness of the entities involved, since the greater use that is hoped for is associated with their remaining in the process in a sustained way, as this is what progressively generates their ownership. Here lies one of the greatest challenges faced by this evaluation: ensuring that decision-makers remained present and represented in a sustained way throughout the entire process, given the commitment

demonstrated by all the stakeholders involved, and particularly by the rightsholders.

In parallel with these activities, the Extended Team drew up, from its own opinion and experience, a section of lessons learned during the process, which was included in the final evaluation report⁷⁰.

Communication of the results

The Extended Team took part in the sessions at which the results of the evaluation process were shared, taking on various tasks (supporting logistics, extending the invitation, as listeners or presenters, among others).

One of the sessions was open to the general public via social platforms and had sign-language interpretation for the deaf community. During this presentation, one of the people with disabilities who was part of the Technical Team spoke as a presenter on the lessons learned in this process from the perspective of the Extended Team and the participating organisations. This session was joined by independent-living CSOs from countries such as Chile and Bolivia. In the words of the Evaluation Team regarding the role of the Extended Team: *in this case, the members of the Extended Team were stakeholders who had a high level of participation in the PLANNING and DOING stages* (Mideplan, 2021, p. 59).

⁷⁰ A number of them are addressed in the *Lessons learned* section of this document. For further detail, see Mideplan (2021).

At this stage, the role of Mideplan and Conapdis consisted mainly of: organising training spaces for learning how to assess the products, coordinating mechanisms to ensure participation, promoting awareness of the evaluation in different spaces, serving as a communication channel between the Evaluation Team and the Extended Team, gathering and systematising experiences of the process, ensuring compliance with the ToR, and seeking solutions to unexpected situations (such as Covid19), among others. This stage was carried out between August 2020 and February 2021 (six months).

Using stage (2nd quarter 2021 – present)

The purpose of this stage is to promote the use of the evaluation, transforming recommendations and lessons into improvement actions within an Action Plan. It comprises two steps: Drafting of the Action Plan and Monitoring of the Action Plan. The starting point is the analysis of the recommendations, which may require an administrative or managerial response from the unit responsible for the Programme, expressing and justifying its agreement with them, since the commitments of the Action Plan must be derived from their acceptance.

Evaluation with participation promotes the involvement of the Extended Team at this stage: participate to use, and use to improve. The essence of an evaluation with

participation is to promote the participation of the main stakeholders involved from its design onwards, so that they are empowered to take on and promote the use of the evaluation, on the basis of the premise that greater participation leads to greater use of the evaluation.

Drafting of the Action Plan

To facilitate participation in the use of the evaluation, it was proposed that sessions be organised to allow the Extended Team to deliberate and assess the recommendations and to help draw up the Action Plan. In an evaluation with participation, it is proposed that the Action Plan should emerge from the collaborative work of the Extended Team, although practice shows that there are variations, depending on the requirements of the evaluation procedures in each context.

In this evaluation, Conapdis, as the entity implementing the Programme, was responsible for the Management response to the recommendations and for drawing up and presenting the Action Plan to Mideplan, following the requirements set by the National Evaluation Agenda. Subsequently, in October 2021, a Participatory Workshop on the recommendations was organised with the Extended Team in a virtual format, to share the Action Plan, enrich its implementation proposal and channel the Extended Team's participation opportunities.

Given that a considerable period of time elapsed between the approval and dissemination of the

evaluation report and the drafting of the Action Plan, this Workshop incorporated a brief introduction to the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation, which served to refresh the participants' memories and provide context to encourage their contributions. This task made use of the products that had been generated for disseminating the evaluation, such as the multimedia presentations, videos and infographics themselves. In view of the number of evaluation recommendations and the number of members of the Extended Team, several groups were set up that shared out the work on the recommendations, so as to facilitate their contributions regarding activities for implementing them, those responsible for doing so and deadlines.

As a result of the Workshop, a readjustment of the Action Plan was proposed, and it was agreed that, before being sent, it would be validated again with the Extended Team in a new working session, taking into account the contributions made to its activities and with the direct involvement of the Extended Team in some of these activities.

Implementation of the Action Plan

Although the implementation of the Action Plan does not appear as an explicit step in the process set out by the Guide —instead, the Guide jumps from its drafting to its monitoring— this section reflects precisely what happened in the interim, so that the experience can be assessed in its context.

A first point is that the members of the Extended Team remain attentive to the progress of the changes that were agreed upon in the Programme's improvement agenda set out in the Action Plan (with specific dates and responsible parties), even though the evolving context itself may facilitate or hinder their development. In this regard, to properly assess the effects of this evaluation on the implementation of its Action Plan, it is necessary to bear in mind that 2022 —the year in which some changes derived from the recommendations should have begun to be appreciated— was a complicated period globally and in Costa Rica in particular, where there was a change of government and a significant fiscal adjustment which, in this case, required reformulating the resources allocated to the Action Plan and its deadlines.

Alongside this, the progress made in 2022 was concentrated on administrative and preparatory matters, linked to internal departments of Conapdis, and it was not until the last quarter of the year that the application of the recommendations began to become visible to much of the Extended Team. It was precisely around these dates that the first participatory Workshops for the recommendations were held, which were necessary to enable the application of some of them, such as those relating to the improvement of the Programme's design and theory of change, the characterisation of the target population, or the mechanisms for collaboration and coordination at the regional scale.

To find out how the Action Plan was progressing, during the last quarter of 2021 various activities were carried out with the Extended Team. On the one hand, the *Logbook of the evaluation with participation* (Murciano, 2021) was applied – a change-monitoring tool that was applied every six months by the evaluation’s facilitation team. In this logbook, the members of the Extended Team were consulted about the evidence of the change that the evaluation with participation was driving, about the results that were being observed, about the associated improvements and the lessons learned. The results of this consultation —which covers the profiles of Programme operators, collaborating agencies and people with disabilities— are summarised in Table 2.

Profile of programme operators and collaborating agencies
- I have been able to identify areas for improvement in the programme’s regulations, in order to further refine its management... - It has served as a tool for rethinking options for improving training programmes. - It has helped raise greater awareness among all stakeholders and, as a result, fostered greater collaboration to carry out tasks more efficiently with a clear direction.
Profile of a person with a disability user of the programme
- It has improved in that more branches have become involved, there is greater interest from other sectors, and it has helped to make the programme clearer and more far-reaching, but the real and most urgent changes are still not in sight and progress is very slow - The true beneficiaries of the programme are being listened to and taken into account, and the programme is being strengthened, but we need the changes to be put into practice; we’re moving a bit slow.

Profile of an evaluation manager
- Among the outcomes is a better understanding of the programme, especially about its form of management... this has helped to define and understand each person’s role, and its limitations. It has also clarified the specific services the programme can actually offer to its users and their families, ensuring that a person with a disability who is beginning to benefit from the programme is aware of them.
Profile of a representative of a CSO for people with disabilities
- Although the unit responsible for the programme lacks sufficient staff and funding to provide the service to more people, it has improved by becoming more aware of the importance of collaborating with the organisations that provide the service (Independent Living Centres), and that training for service users must be a constant. - The programme has been regionalised, and support services are now provided in remote areas. - The views, experiences and lives of people with disabilities are taken into account. - The very people with disabilities who were not in favour of rotation, for example, now understand its importance.

Table 2. Perceptions of the scope of the Evaluation with Participation among the members of the Extended Team.
Source: Murciano (2021, p. 10).

However, the members of the Extended Team also identified many areas for improvement. In this respect, aside from the difficulty the pandemic created in accessing the target population groups, an important obstacle was the lack of resources to carry out some of the recommendations, which prompted the proposal of allocating evaluation resources to this end or that specific budget lines be earmarked within the programme. In addition, with regard to the evaluation process itself and how participation had been organised, it was suggested that the profiles of participants representing each population group within the Extended Team should be diversified, so as to reflect the diversity existing within each group. To encourage the implementation of the recommendations at this final use stage, it was proposed to schedule meetings of the Extended Team to avoid postponing the commitments undertaken and to reinforce collaboration among the stakeholders (see Box 2).

- Consider resources for the evaluation's use stage, to operationalise the recommendations, which often proves to be a constraint; consider funding for the development of the Work Plan.
- As the evaluation was carried out during the pandemic, access to vulnerable populations became more difficult; however, I consider that the work was done strategically to remedy some of the weaknesses arising from of this issue.
- Diversify the representation within the Extended Team to address a wider range of needs, as in the case of the population with disabilities, considering different types of disability, so that the interests represented are balanced across the organisations and across the community.
- The pandemic was a constraint; every effort was made to involve people with disabilities, but the results should be disseminated more widely, to the Legislative Branch, in order to increase the budget.
- We need more meetings where we can all participate again, during the use stage, to refresh a little what we have been doing since 2019, in order to speed up and activate the use of this evaluation a little more.
- Evaluations must be carried out periodically, in order to verify each stakeholder's compliance with the recommendations.
- Encourage more participation from current and future users of the programme, to enhance understanding and foster a more enriching experience.

Box 2. *Proposals for optimising the implementation of recommendations.*

Source: Murciano (2021, p. 11).

Monitoring of the Action Plan

This step is carried out in the ordinary way, following the methodology of the National Evaluation Agenda and the National Evaluation Policy: Conapdis is the institution responsible for implementing the planned activities in a participatory manner, thereby putting the recommendations into practice, and also for coordinating their implementation with the other stakeholders; while Mideplan takes on solely the role of monitoring and providing technical support in any activity within the remit of its normative functions.

In this context, monitoring has been carried out only within the sphere of public institutions and took place during the first quarter of 2024, identifying advances in the implementation of the recommendations (see Box 3) and how these have gradually influenced the intervention (see Table 3), since as progress is made on the Action Plan and on the availability of Conapdis's human resources, it becomes possible to influence more aspects of the Programme.

- **R1.** Better characterised user population. It is recognised that the profile of the target population needs to be better defined.
- **R2.** Causal logic with a greater degree of congruence (problem and objectives validated across the country; other elements pending).
- **R3.** Greater degree of dissemination of the Programme through CSOs, public institutions and online media.
- **R4.** The Programme has two additional staff members to improve the monitoring and support for people with disabilities and human personal assistants.
- **R5.** Improvement in the Programme's coordination with strategic partners (the number of HPAs was increased, as well as 3 CSOs that offer the service, extending the Programme's coverage to more regions of the country).
- **R6.** No progress has been made on estimating demand.

Box 3. Progress in the implementation of the Action Plan

Source: virtual interview with the Programme's management (March 2024).

The foregoing, even amid the fiscal situation affecting the country's investment in the social sector and its interventions, demonstrates that the usefulness of the evaluation with participation remains in valid; in the words of the Programme's management, *even today, albeit at a slower pace than expected, the evaluation is alive.*

Statement	2023*	2024*
Modify the design of the intervention based on evidence	Agree	
Foster better institutional coordination and collaboration among the stakeholders involved in the intervention	Agree	
Expand the intervention's information and data-recording systems	Disagree	Agree
Increase the participation and integration of stakeholders in the intervention	Agree	
Understand and learn about the context or functioning of the intervention	Disagree	Agree
Modify the management and use of the intervention's resources (financial, technological, temporal)	Agree	
Greater political backing and support for the institutional and sectoral positioning of the intervention	Disagree	Agree
Increase opportunities for accountability and greater transparency in the intervention	Agree	

Table 3. *Impact of the evaluation on the Programme.*

*Note: *A 5-level Likert scale was used (strongly disagree to strongly agree).*

Source: Prepared by the authors based on a survey and interview with, Conapdis (2023 and 2024).

Lessons learned

Lessons along the path of the evaluation with participation

The evaluation process described above left many lessons, some of which emerged as each step was taken; they are both strategic in nature, for optimising

the potential of participation, and operational aspects that facilitate the proper development of the activities.

One of these lessons emerged during the stakeholder mapping exercise, which proved decisive, as it allowed a pluralistic and holistic approach to the Programme. In addition to providing greater accuracy and depth of information required by the process, the active participation of the stakeholders involved in the design of the evaluation lends credibility and acceptance to the results, thereby facilitating the effective implementation of the recommendations.

The challenge is to ensure that the decision-makers to whom the results will be presented, and to whom the recommendations are directed, join from the outset and remain engaged throughout the process. In addition to identifying the agencies involved, stakeholder mapping must specify within them the levels of responsibility in decision-making so that, together with their teams, they are invited to the process and added to the awareness-raising about the advantages and opportunities offered by participatory evaluations and about their implications in terms of ceding power. The fact that the planning workshops have a facilitator (a person or team) contributes to dialogue, ensuring that no stakeholder has to coordinate the process, and helps to prevent the perpetuation of the asymmetrical relationships that exist in the programmes.

With regard to delimiting the object of evaluation, this experience illustrates the opportunity that arises when stakeholders share their views of how an intervention works through the participatory process. This helps them to contrast the interventions, and the needs that justify them, with their results, acquiring a global perspective and developing evaluative thinking, which gradually places them in an ideal position to formulate accurate evaluation questions about the Programme. It is important to bear in mind that this broader view, and the different evaluation questions that will derive from it for each stakeholder, may give rise to these evaluations having ambitious commissions, encompassing comprehensive lines of questioning. It is important that the team facilitating the process pays special attention to prioritising questions and focusing the evaluation objectives.

In this evaluation, the objectives were developed based on the evaluation questions prioritised in the Planning Workshop and the associated criteria. This approach has energised the group work, has made it easier for participants to understand the process and has helped them to reach consensus. It is advisable that, before publishing the terms of reference⁷¹, a session be held with the Extended Team to validate the commission, as it is important that there be traceability between the group work and the final questions and objective. This will facilitate the approval of the ToR and clarify each stakeholder's information needs.

The Planning Workshop, as a space that concentrates much of the requirements of the Planning stage, entails a considerable effort in terms of convening, organisation, development and systematisation, and demands a high commitment from the participants over the four days it lasted. Among the lessons learned, it stands out that, whereas participatory evaluation always carries an implicit negative connotation about its longer duration, significant efficiencies have been highlighted in this collective work. If the usual National Evaluation Agenda processes are taken into account, it represents a significant advance that, in just one week, a consensus on the delimitation of the object is reached, the scope of the evaluation has been settled, specifying its questions and criteria, and an initial formulation of objectives is in place, matters that usually take longer in other evaluations.

⁷¹ The situation would be similar if the task were to draft the Evaluation Plan based on the group work, in the event that the extended team were to carry out the evaluation, supported by the team of facilitators that energised the Planning Workshop.

The Workshop must encourage participation. In logistical terms, accessible venues will be needed, in this evaluation the Workshop was held at the Conapdis headquarters. In methodological terms, techniques will be required to energise the participation of large and heterogeneous groups, taking into account the development of capacities among stakeholders, which calls for specialised facilitators. And, among other resources, provision must be made to cover the costs associated with the participation of the Extended Team (travel, attendance and subsistence, or the care of dependent people), including the opportunity cost of attending. This is all the more relevant because of the individuals that join these evaluations, who are neither civil servants nor have organisations to cover these expenses, being in many cases people in situations of poverty and exclusion. Although these expenses do not usually represent a large sum, they do encounter legal and budgetary restrictions within public institutions in terms of covering them—a difficulty overcome in this case by the international cooperation provided by Focelac+, which covered the travel and subsistence of the people with disabilities and their personal assistants—.

Appointing an Evaluation Team to work alongside the group of stakeholders that make up the Extended Team allows this type of participatory evaluation to be reconciled with the administrative procedures governing public action, safeguarding its quality, transparency and credibility. Among the lessons regarding the ToR, it is important that they clarify how participation has been incorporated, what it should entail for the Evaluation Team, and guidance

on methods and techniques to foster participation. The methodological expectations of the ToR must be flexible, with guidance that allows the Evaluation Team to offer its judgement, adjusting approaches, techniques and tools as far as possible to the philosophy that drives participatory evaluation and to its budget. It is important to explicitly state the motivation for the evaluation and for participation, summarising the roles of the Extended Team and the Technical Team, and specifying whether the Evaluation Teams must convene them at any meeting. In addition to estimating the Evaluation Team's timeframes, it is also necessary to include the time required by the Extended Team and the Technical Team to gather the necessary information, or to provide their feedback and contributions on the progress presented by the Evaluation Team.

The experience highlights the opportunity that these stakeholder platforms offer as a conducive setting for an evaluation: to test the theory behind the intervention, to contextualise conclusions or to draw up recommendations with a practical orientation. They represent a drastic change in the development of an evaluation: from a situation where an Evaluation Team arrives in the field in a context where local stakeholders are unaware of or unprepared for their presence, to a scenario where these same stakeholders are not only aware of the evaluation but are actively awaiting the arrival of the team that is going to facilitate its development and that will collaborate in the collection, systematisation, analysis and interpretation of the information. This generates enormous advantages

in participatory evaluation, by facilitating access to key informants and the availability of information. This evaluation also shows improvements in the participation of stakeholders and beneficiaries, attesting to improvements in the representativeness of the samples, in the response rate and in a participation grounded in informed consent.

During the selection of the Evaluation Team, the involvement of the Technical Team in assessing proposals is an opportunity to deepen participation, which is desirable if the administrative procedure allows it. And, once chosen, it is an opportunity to hold a meeting with the Extended Team and the Technical Team, in which the foundations for coordinated work can be laid.

During the Doing stage, the operational lead falls to the Evaluation Team, with the Technical Team and the Extended Team offering their collaboration. This stage highlights one of the singularities of this experience, since normally, in a participatory evaluation, the Evaluation Team is made up from the outset of both the group of stakeholders involved in the intervention being evaluated and the group of evaluation experts who facilitate it. In this experience, the overall planning of the evaluation (Planning stage) is carried out by the stakeholders who make up the Extended Team, facilitated by an expert in evaluation and participation; however, for its implementation (Doing stage), an Evaluation Team is contracted which, while maintaining that facilitating role, takes on methodological and technical leadership in its development.

- One of the challenges is to achieve the active involvement of the Extended Team in the strategic management of the evaluation, attaining the greatest possible degree of collaboration with the Evaluation Team. To this end, it has been essential to have milestones such as the joint session for validating the theory of the intervention, for contextualising findings and conclusions, and for the practical drafting of recommendations.
- Another challenge is to secure the Evaluation Team's collaboration so that it adjusts its approach and techniques to stimulate the participation of the Extended Team, strengthening its role as facilitators. As we have seen, reconciling timeframes, methods, techniques and budgets under the requirements of the administrative procedure is not a simple task.

For all these reasons, this stage demands commitment and dedication, especially from the Technical Team, which will have to maintain coordination and communication with the Evaluation Team and with the Extended Team. This type of evaluation requires flexible timeframes, methodologies and aptitudes, in order to reconcile the profiles, dynamics and procedures of the public administration with those of a group of stakeholders who do not usually take part in this type of exercise, affecting the schedules and deadlines of the Evaluation Team and those of the public officials. It is important to schedule activities for capacity development, so as to guarantee that the Technical Team and the Extended Team can take on their functions.

It is a key lesson that the Technical Team responsible for the day-to-day running of the participatory evaluation was made up of representatives of the Programme's user population and members of the NGO representing them. Their presence ensures that the Evaluation Team understands the problem and conveys it appropriately to the information-gathering instruments. The beneficiaries thus collaborate in overseeing the information-gathering instruments, offering inputs to adapt them to the needs of their intended recipients, to their language and educational level, and ensure that, besides being accessible documents, they incorporate the essential elements to address the evaluation questions. It is also important for optimising the fieldwork schedule, adjusting it to the context of all the stakeholders (days, times and venues), thereby resulting in greater coverage and efficiency of the fieldwork.

The Technical Team is also a highly valuable mechanism for communicating with the beneficiary population, since it has lent legitimacy and closeness, facilitating the distribution of messages among their peers so that they understand the process and the meaning of their participation, thereby generating an awareness that is difficult to achieve in an evaluation without this participatory component.

Other lessons learned are associated with the importance of incorporating into the ToR milestones at which the Evaluation Team must convene the Extended Team, as this guarantees its active presence at key moments that underpin the consistency of the evaluative judgement:

- Validating the theory of the intervention, lending it relevance.
- Crosschecking the findings to ensure that they are contextualised.
- Advancing the recommendations put forward by the Evaluation Team, enabling their suitability and, above all, their practical orientation to be validated.

The fact that the Extended Team played an active role in these milestones has allowed them to internalise the process, take ownership of it and engage with the recommendations.

Another lesson relates to the opportunity for collaboration in presenting the report, overseeing the adaptation of the language, the choice of channels and format, or the accessibility of its presentation, incorporating a sign language interpreter. It is also a learning experience to invite to these gatherings other organisations that work to promote the personal autonomy of people with disabilities, thereby expanding collaboration networks.

It is advisable to consider spaces where the members of the teams responsible for the evaluation can convey their experiences and lessons for understanding and improving the evaluated programme.

In the Using stage, the experience has highlighted that, although during the Planning stage the implementing entity (Conapdis) is supported by the lead evaluation entity (Mideplan), and the management of the process is facilitated by the technical team made up of both bodies together with other stakeholders, the arrival

at the Using stage gives the leading role to the entity implementing the Programme, as it falls within its remit. And although the philosophy of participatory evaluation entails that collaborative work be maintained at this stage, the fact is that it must be promoted, encouraged and planned carefully. If this awareness-raising and training are not developed from the outset of the evaluation, it is likely that the improvement proposal and its participatory conception and management will be affected, delaying its application, mitigating its possibilities of application or limiting its transformative and collective learning potential.

Lessons learned regarding the use and usefulness of the evaluation

One of the principles that underpin evaluation with participation is that, by giving room to the main actors involved in an intervention, it increases the probability that the exercise responds to questions that are relevant to everyone and, therefore, sparks their interest, generates their involvement, and is useful to a greater number of stakeholders, thereby fostering greater use of the evaluation and facilitating the implementation of recommendations that improve people's lives.

The people with disabilities who were users of the Programme highlighted the usefulness of participating in this process, noting it had given them the opportunity to express their opinions and experiences about how

they conceive of the programme, about their needs and their satisfaction, or about their expectations of what the programme should offer. This opportunity has enabled them to make their voice heard, by feeling listened to, but also because it has improved their self-confidence and shown them that they can take part in evaluation initiatives, making relevant contributions and raising questions that are of interest to them in order to assess whether the programme addresses their needs, enhancing their empowerment and allowing them to assert their rights. As a result, they have felt that it was worth to participate, as they felt their involvement was meaningful in defining what to evaluate or what determines the quality of the programme. They have also noted that their participation has been influential, appreciating the decisions that have been taken to incorporate the recommendations, in many of which they feel their opinions are reflected, and which have gradually shaped the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation. Nonetheless, at the end of 2022, they noted that no major changes derived from the evaluation were yet perceptible.

Other benefits were more personal in nature: feeling heard, valued and empowered knowing that the State and society are addressing their needs. In this area, they highlighted their learning about how programmes work and about the network of institutions involved so that their claims may be heard and changes can be implemented, generating trust in the system and improving governance. This is a valuable element for the cocreation of the evaluation and for facilitating understanding among the views and perspectives that

converge in the evaluation.

Those implementing the Programme remarked the usefulness of this opportunity to improve the programme's life cycle, from its diagnosis and monitoring through to its communication and interinstitutional coordination, developing their awareness and understanding of the perspectives of other areas in the operation of the service. They noted this has generated added value for the interinstitutionality that evaluations with participation promote for improvement. This has extended to all the stakeholders involved, whose perspectives have enriched the Programme's knowledge base and have generated personal lessons about the problems faced, contributing to the understanding of the various positions and facilitating dialogue. They also highlighted the usefulness of these evaluations for raising awareness of the programme and fostering its ownership.

The evaluation managers identified the usefulness of this EwP with the opportunity to improve evaluation processes, developing more inclusive exercises in which all the stakeholders learn to participate and to evaluate, not just the Government representatives. In addition, they highlighted the opportunities that arise in the extended team to work with sectors and institutions as well as with the programme's beneficiary population. This enables a plural dialogue and generates shared responsibility among the key stakeholders, encouraging to become involved in the evaluation and the improvement of the programmes

that affect them. They also highlighted improvements in the bureaucratic and technical culture due to the capacity development that is taking place, since interinstitutional collaboration is gradually internalised, as is the incorporation of the beneficiary population into the interventions that affect them, thereby improving governance.

And among CSO representatives, the usefulness of the EwP was identified with the opportunity for understanding how the Programme works and what role each stakeholder plays, as well as for having the space to convey their view of the problems and their proposals. Nonetheless, they hold more critical opinions regarding the implementation of the recommendations, since, one year after the formulation of the action plans (improvement agendas), they had not yet perceived their implementation.

This evaluation with participation also generated two lessons that were not anticipated from the outset, and making them visible in this document is as relevant as the lessons cited above:

Although stakeholders are encouraged and invited to participate from the very start of the process, not all of them will have the opportunity, interest or commitment to take part in the extended team, as this depends, among many other factors, on the development of the evaluation culture, the importance attached to participation within the context of public management, work responsibilities and individual attitudes. (Mideplan, 2021, p. 228)

Beyond the empowerment of people with disabilities, this evaluation was a mechanism that contributed

positively to their self-esteem; therefore, when well planned, it can generate more than just technical knowledge and the ownership and use of the results:

We thought that [public officials] wouldn't understand us because they didn't have a disability... they taught me that the two groups can indeed come together: people with disabilities and people who don't have a disability, that they can unite and achieve something great... even though I haven't had much education, I realised that I know more than I thought I did, that I had it in me, and it made me understand that I have more to give, despite the fact that I had no knowledge of things like these... I broke down barriers and myths for myself; I was afraid to speak, to express myself, to face a camera, and all of this brought me out of that darkness, and today we are working for this programme (a PwD who is a user of the Programme and a member of the EA).

By way of conclusion

When the journey of this evaluation began in October 2019, in addition to an EwP Guide that acted as a compass, there were many expectations and hopes. Along the way, we experienced the benefits of these evaluations and navigated the challenges that participation posed at each moment. In November 2021, in the light of the experience, the members of the Extended Team were asked what an EwP was, why they would recommend it, when they would not propose it, and when it is ideal to promote it. Based

on their responses, important lessons were identified that need to be shared, relating to when it is desirable to undertake an EwP, and when it is not.

To promote an EwP, it is desirable to have a conducive environment, where the parties involved are interested and motivated, and where the necessary resources to promote it are available; and it helps if the evaluation can focus on a clearly defined and limited object of evaluation.

- The parties must be interested and motivated to develop participation effectively, recognising what it will entail sharing decision-making power, so that consensus and the joint perspective prevail over individual ones; and that this will contribute to legitimise the results of the process, fostering their greater use and the effective improvement of the evaluated object.
- This is an option worth considering when the institutions that hold competence over the intervention and the evaluation are willing to cede a leading role in decision-making.
- The necessary resources to guarantee full participation must be available. When new stakeholders join the evaluation, it is necessary to adjust its timeframes, budgets and the requirements that their coordination will entail for those managing the process.
- Focusing on a clearly defined and specific object of evaluation helps to carry out an evaluation with participation. Although EwP can be a good alternative in many cases and in the face of a plurality

of diverse and heterogeneous public interventions, the fact is that the task becomes easier when the object of evaluation to which it is applied is well defined and delimited in time and space. This is so because of the work entailed in identifying, selecting and coordinating the stakeholders involved, and because of the various resources required for their

sustained participation in the process, among other aspects.

All these lessons learned from this experience were lived through both personally and professionally, and added to an evaluative path of no return: *Nothing about us without you*—that is, we need your participation in order to manage evaluations that are useful—.

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