Evaluation, democracy and transformation

Experiences of participatory evaluation in Latin America

Editors
Pablo Rodríguez Bilella | Esteban Tapella



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Table of Contents

Foreword 5
Sarah Klier

Presentation 7
Pablo Rodríguez Bilella | Esteban Tapella

Participatory Evaluation As an Expression of Democracy in Action 12
Pablo Rodríguez Bilella | Esteban Tapella

Examining the Process of Participation in Evaluation 30
The Case of the Transition to Independent Living Programme for Persons with Disabilities in Chile
Rodrigo Quiroz Saavedra

Evaluation, Inclusion and Democracy in Latin America: Experiences and Lessons Learned 53
The Case of Santa Teresa (Chile)
Fernanda Arriaza

Participatory Evaluation in the Municipality of Putaendo 70
A Mid-Term Evaluation of the Social Intervention of the Servicio País Programme (Chile)
Carmen Luz Sánchez | Catalina Valdés | Camila Gallagher

Participatory Evaluation of a Community Centre Policy 94
The Experience of the Compaz Network (Recife, Brazil)
Priscilla Bacalhau | Guilherme Bayma | Gabriela Lacerda | Nicole Mourad Pereira

The Evaluation of the Holistic Development of Children and Adolescents 121
Challenges in Building a Participatory Evaluation Based on the Work of CSOs in Brazil
Esmeralda Correa Macana | Rayssa Deps Bolelli

Participatory Evaluation of a Public Policy Supporting Transport 150
A Perspective of Inclusion and Transformation – Jalisco (Mexico)
Mónica Ballescá | Sugey Salazar | Selene Michi

Participatory Evaluation 176
3 Public Interventions in the State of Zacatecas (2020)
Janett Salvador

Evaluation in Costa Rica 207
The Case of the Programme for the Promotion of the Autonomy of Persons with Disabilities
Karol Cruz Ugalde | Eddy García Serrano | Juan Murciano

Design of the Participatory Evaluation of a Public Care Service for Older Adults in Ecuador 236
Carmen Lucía Jaramillo | Joselyn Corrales

Lessons from the Practice of Inclusive Rigour in Evaluating a Peace Initiative in Colombia 261
Ángela Báez-Silva Arias | Helene Bradburn Marina Apgar | Leslie Wingender Stephen Gray | Alejandra Solarte Cruz
Gloria Paulina Góngora Herrera

Strengthening Evaluation Capacities 288
EvalParticipativa's Strategy, Achievements and Challenges
Esteban Tapella | Pablo Rodríguez Bilella

Foceval and Focelac 308
Ten Years of Cooperation for Capacity Development in Participatory Evaluation in the Region
Andrea Meneses Rojas

Biographical Notes 324
Reviews 331

Foreword

It is with great pleasure and deep appreciation that I introduce this important volume on participatory evaluation in Latin America. For over ten years, the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) has worked alongside diverse actors across Latin America to strengthen evaluation capacities, and this book represents a significant milestone in that ongoing journey.

At the outset of our Evaluation Capacity Development (ECD) work in the region, diverse stakeholders called for anchoring participatory evaluation as a core methodological approach in ECD, building on the strong foundation that already existed in the region. Remarkably, this call came not only from civil society organizations but equally from academia and representatives of public institutions. This broad-based interest has, over time, grown into a community of practice whose expertise extends far beyond Latin America and whose collective knowledge is being utilized in diverse ways across the globe.

Participatory evaluation holds a special place in the field of evaluation because it fulfills evaluation's core functions —transparency, accountability, and learning— in particularly powerful ways. Most notably, it transforms learning into a shared experience. Program managers learn side by side with the intended beneficiaries of interventions. Much of this learning occurs during the evaluation process itself, rather than only after reading the final report. This real-time, collective learning is what makes participatory evaluation so vital for Evaluation Capacity Development. Throughout our years of ECD work, we have witnessed how participatory evaluation enables sustainable learning and often leads to meaningful structural adaptations within organizations and systems. In this sense, participatory evaluation also contributes to strengthening democratic practices by broadening whose perspectives count in assessing public action.

This book is a natural continuation of Sowing & Harvesting - Participatory Evaluation Handbook, which provided conceptual and methodological foundations. Now, responding to the demand for concrete examples, this volume presents rich case studies from six countries, offering lessons learned, recommendations, and insights that illuminate the global debate on stakeholder involvement in evaluation processes.

This publication serves as another medium to make years of dedicated work accessible to a broad audience. I hope it will inspire many readers, that they will learn from the experiences shared here and apply these insights to their own contexts. Most importantly—in the true spirit of participatory evaluation and the collaborative work that has flourished in Latin America—I hope this book will spark further dialogue on this crucial evaluation approach, provoke new learning, and strengthen the bonds within a growing global community of practice.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all contributors and to the EvalParticipativa initiative for making this valuable resource possible.

Sarah Klier
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Presentation

Pablo Rodríguez Bilella | Esteban Tapella

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EvalParticipativa is the Community of Practice and Learning in Participatory Evaluation for Latin America and the Caribbean, born out of interest in evaluation and its growth in the regional and global context. It is a joint initiative between the *Social and Environmental Labour Studies Programme (PETAS)* at the National University of San Juan (Argentina) and the Focelac+ project for the promotion of a culture of evaluation and learning in Latin America with global reach, run by the German Institute for Evaluation in Development Cooperation (DEval).

The last few decades have seen an increase in theoretical and methodological production, as well as the emergence of national evaluation policies in countries on all continents, a growing institutionalisation of evaluation, and a process of consolidation of various initiatives aimed at professionalising this practice. In addition, the *Sustainable Development Goals* reflect a new agenda of priorities for evaluation at the global level, which includes the leading role of civil society in these efforts and highlights the participatory dimension as a central aspect of evaluation practice. Thus, concepts such as *participation*, *accompaniment*, *stakeholder perspective* and others have become recurrent in the current work of the evaluation field.

The emergence of EvalParticipativa involved the creation of a novel space in the region (and one of the few globally) aimed at reflecting on the practice of participatory evaluation, linking the cognitive component with the practical dimension, aimed at generating knowledge, learning and concrete proposals in this field of evaluation. EvalParticipativa seeks to promote the inclusive involvement of civil society in evaluation processes based on three main strategic objectives:

- to strengthen and consolidate a community of practice and learning around participatory evaluation in Latin America and the Caribbean;
- to facilitate the multiplication and institutionalisation of this evaluation approach through the development of written and audiovisual materials on experiences and lessons learned from practice in the region;
- to promote training processes on participatory evaluation through seminars, courses for facilitators, and in-person and virtual forums with representatives from civil society organisations, the public and private sectors, and academia, as well as the creation of academic certification programmes for training in participatory evaluation.

This book is the natural continuation of *Sowing and Harvesting – Participatory Evaluation Handbook (*Tapella *et al.*, 2022), developed within the framework of the First Gathering on Participatory Evaluation Experiences, held in Quito (Ecuador) at the end of 2019, and built on the knowledge and learning of around twenty colleagues involved in such processes in different Latin American countries. *Sowing and Harvesting* presents conceptual and methodological considerations regarding participatory evaluation,

emphasising how to develop these processes and the role of facilitation, as well as the selection and use of appropriate tools for this approach. In other words, its focus was on providing ideas, guidelines and recommendations on how to carry out a high-quality participatory evaluation in concrete terms.

Since its publication and within the framework of EvalParticipativa's activities, this handbook has represented a unique conceptual and methodological construct, emerging from and for Latin America. In a short time, it became a key resource, a reference bibliography in training contexts, and an instrumental guide for facilitators of social participation evaluation processes. A diverse range of actors, practitioners, and academics interested in the subject thus gained access to a manual that addresses the most relevant issues surrounding the what, why, and how of participatory evaluation.

Following the widespread dissemination and use of this handbook, also published in English, there was growing demand to learn about how various participatory evaluation experiences had been effectively and concretely implemented in the region. New questions arose, such as: with which actors, under what conditions, with what results, and what lessons were learned from these processes? Thus, in order to answer these questions, a study was undertaken to report on experiences with varying degrees of development of social participation evaluation in different contexts in Latin America. This book is the result of a rich collective and international research process.

Its creation involved identifying and convening individuals who have taken part in participatory evaluation experiences in order to present these cases alongside reflections on the factors that facilitate and hinder this type of evaluation. The book's various chapters present lessons learned, as well as recommendations and suggestions that can inform the global debate on the inclusion and involvement of stakeholders in evaluation processes.

Chapter 1, developed by the coordinators of this book, discusses the importance and growth that the field of evaluation in general has experienced globally, as well as the importance that evaluative approaches involving greater participation by civil society in particular have acquired. Participatory evaluation and its principles in the Latin American context are briefly presented, and the key aspects that characterise it are introduced. The chapters of this book are based on this analysis, addressing both some criticisms and weaknesses of the approach and the responses that arise as a corollary of the experiences analysed, emphasising the potential of evaluation with social participation to strengthen democratic processes.

The following chapters present different cases, with the first three corresponding to Chile. In **Chapter 2**, Rodrigo Quiroz Saavedra examines the evaluation of a programme aimed at promoting self-management among people with intellectual disabilities through the application of a measurement instrument composed of three dimensions of Participation: control over the evaluation process, diversity of

stakeholders, and extent of involvement. In **Chapter 3**, Fernanda Arriaza introduces the experience of the organisation Techo Internacional with a mechanism called *Mesas de Trabajo (Working Groups),* which are formal and democratic meeting forums led by local leaders and young volunteers, and the participatory evaluation of one of these forums in a working-class neighbourhood in Santiago, Chile. In **Chapter 4**, Carmen Luz Sánchez, Catalina Valdés, and Camila Gallagher present the *ex-dure* or process evaluation of an inclusive social development experience of the Servicio País programme in a largely rural commune in the Valparaíso region.

In **Chapter 5**, Priscilla Bacalhau, Guilherme Bayma, Gabriela Lacerda and Nicole Mourad Pereira introduce the executive evaluation carried out by the Municipality of Recife (Brazil) with technical advice from *the Center for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Lusophone Africa and Brazil (CLEAR LAB)* of the Compaz Network (Community Centres for Peace), a programme aimed at tackling violence and promoting social inclusion through community centres. Also in the Brazilian context, Esmeralda Correa Macana and Rayssa Deps Bolelli present and discuss in **Chapter 6** the lessons learned in the construction of a Comprehensive Development Evaluation framework carried out with the active participation of community-based social organisations in different regions of the country.

Chapter 7, written by Mónica Ballescá, Sugey Sa-lazar, and Selene Michi from Evalúa Jalisco, in the Secretariat of Planning and Citizen Participation of the Estate of Jalisco in Mexico, reports on one of the first participatory evaluations in the country, addressing the case of the Mi Pasaje Programme, which provides free tickets for public transport to older adults, students and people with disabilities. Also in Mexico, Janett Salvador discusses in Chapter 8 the disruptive commitment of the Zacatecas State Government to incorporate participatory evaluations of three public interventions in 2020: a strategy for gender equality, a project for the social prevention of violence, and another focused on the citizen participation component of a drinking water, drainage, and sanitation programme.

Chapter 9, written by Karol Cruz Ugalde, Eddy García Serrano, and Juan Murciano, presents an evaluation of the Programme for the Promotion of the Autonomy of Persons with Disabilities in Costa Rica. The first two authors are civil servants and the third is a consultant and academic, they have integrated their perspectives to review an evaluation process based on the *Participatory Evaluation Guide* published in 2019 by the Costa Rican Ministry of Planning (MIDEPLAN). **Chapter 10**, by Carmen Lucía Jaramillo and Joselyn Corrales, is also a joint reflection between the facilitating evaluator and the civil servant requesting the evaluation, in this case focusing on the design of the participatory evaluation of a public service for the elderly in Ecuador. **Chapter 11,** by Ángela Báez-Silva Arias, Helene Bradburn, Marina Apgar, Leslie Wingender Stephen Gray, Alejandra Solarte Cruz and Gloria Paulina Góngora Herrera present a participatory evaluation of a peacebuilding initiative in Colombia, comparing the implementation of a systemic action research project with a capacity-building process, highlighting the lessons learned in light of the use of the

inclusive rigour framework, which they present in the same chapter.

Chapter 12, by Esteban Tapella and Pablo Rodríguez Bilella, focuses on the capacity-building strategy in participatory evaluation that the EvalParticipativa initiative has generated in the region in its first six years of development, presenting the training modalities deployed, as well as the different instruments developed. Finally, in **Chapter 13**, Andrea Meneses reports on the key milestones, lessons learned and challenges that have arisen in this area during the 10 years of cooperation in the region between the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) and the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy of Costa Rica (Mideplan) with the shared objective of strengthening evaluation capacities in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a clear emphasis on evaluation methodologies involving social participation.

As a whole, the book seeks to provide a critical, comprehensive and practical review of the application of participatory approaches to the evaluation of interventions implemented by both the public sector and NGOs and civil society organisations in different countries in the region. Its authors, intellectuals and academics, public officials and programme and project managers, members of evaluation teams and independent consultants, have devoted their reflective talents to reviewing their practice and highlighting its most valuable aspects, offering recommendations to those who want to learn and improve their evaluation skills.

The authors of the different chapters of the book were free to choose the mode of expression they considered appropriate, choosing the language that would enable them to describe reality as it is, using the various resources available in the language so as not to discriminate against people, while prioritising clarity in communication. Thus, throughout the book, you will find that, when possible, gender-exclusive pronouns have been avoided and generic, collective or impersonal terms have been favoured.

Throughout this book links have been included to facilitate access to reference material available online. Please note that some content may be geographically blocked or unavailable in some regions, in such cases a VPN may be needed to access it.

Chapter 1

Participatory Evaluation as an Expression of Democracy in Action

Pablo Rodríguez Bilella | Esteban Tapella

Abstract

Drawing on the general framework emerging from the theory and practice of participatory evaluation in Latin America, the chapter highlights the significant growth that the field of evaluation has experienced globally, noting how its political dimension underpins its ability to contribute to the consolidation of democratic processes. The importance that the leading role of civil society has acquired is highlighted as an expression of a new sensibility in both the management and evaluation of public policies and social programmes. Participatory evaluation in the Latin American context and the principles that characterise it are briefly presented before outlining the key aspects emerging from the chapters of this book regarding the potential of evaluation involving social participation to strengthen democratic processes. Finally, the scope and potential, as well as the limitations and weaknesses typically associated with the participatory evaluation approach, are analysed, reflecting on them in light of the experiences examined in this publication.

Keywords:

Latin America, Participatory Evaluation, Democracy, Experiences

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This opening chapter aims to provide a general framework drawn from the theory and practice of participatory evaluation in Latin America.

To this end, the first section highlights the remarkable growth the field of evaluation has experienced globally, and its practice in approaches that emphasise its technocratic nature (method and technique), including its political dimension, which enables its capacity to contribute to the consolidation of democratic processes.

The second section highlights the growing importance of evaluation approaches that give civil society a more prominent role, reflecting a new sensibility in the field of evaluation linked to a democratising perspective within which different evaluation methodologies coexist.

The third section of the chapter provides a brief introduction to participatory evaluation in the Latin American context, as well as the principles that characterise it, which have been systematised within the framework of the EvalParticipativa initiative.

The fourth and final section summarises the key points emerging from the chapters of this book regarding the potential of evaluation involving social participation to strengthen democratic processes. In addition, it addresses some of the criticisms and weaknesses of the participatory evaluation approach, as well as the insights that can be drawn from the experiences analysed.

Participatory evaluation is characterised by being a flexible approach that can be adapted to different contexts, offering varying degrees of participation by different social actors. The possibility of replicating the approach in different situations is facilitated through the documentation and dissemination of good practices and lessons learned. Within this framework, a key idea underlying the book in general and this chapter in particular is that participatory evaluation is an approach to democracy in action. Among the various dimensions that give concrete form to this idea, a basic and fundamental one relates to the democratic principle that people must have a voice (and a vote) in matters that concern and affect them, such as when they are the target population of projects, programmes or policies whether public or otherwise that affect them. This book is a collective endeavour based on this understanding and conviction.

The growth of the evaluation field: technocratic approach versus political dimension

Public policy analysis is defined by Dunn (1994, p. 416) as a social science discipline that employs multiple research methods in contexts of argumentation and debate to create, critically evaluate and communicate relevant knowledge. An integral part of the public policy analysis process is the field of evaluative research (Dery, 1984, p. 104), which aims to generate information about the value or merit of past and/or future courses of action, emphasising not only the outcomes achieved but also accounting for the processes involved (Weiss, 1998, p. 4). Evaluative research thus emerges as an appropriate arena for the development of social research, based on the understanding that public interventions are framed —generally in an unstated manner— by hypotheses regarding macrosocial trends, the role of the social actors involved, the context of implementation, and so on.

For over four decades, the evaluation of social interventions has been approached conceptually and epistemologically both as a fruitful field of scientific inquiry and as a practical, applied domain of knowledge (Scriven, 2011; Stockmann & Meyer, 2016). Thus, consolidating advances in the field of evaluation and analysing them critically presents a challenge both for academic debate and inquiry, as well as for the implementation of public policies (Yañes Rizo, 2021).

Against this backdrop, interest in and concern about evaluation in general, and public policy evaluation in particular, have grown globally in the early decades of the 21st century. This is reflected both in a dynamic body of theoretical production and the resulting methodological reflection within the field of evaluation, as well as in the increase in evaluative practices and national evaluation policies across countries on all continents. This trend is also evident in the growing institutionalisation of evaluation and the emergence of various initiatives aimed at professionalising this practice (Peroni & Rodríguez Bilella, 2021; Rodríguez Bilella, 2017).

As a global reflection of these trends, 2015 was declared the International Year of Evaluation by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) (Evalpartners, 2016). This made explicit a consensus on the relevance of the issue, given the convergence of interests and actions among various sectors of nation states, the main international development agencies, nongovernmental organisations, academia and Voluntary Organisations for Professional Evaluation (VOPE), comprising networks, associations and communities of evaluation practice) (Segone & Rugh, 2013). The common factor uniting these institutional actors in this field is their interest in promoting the development of evaluation as a tool for improving social interventions, whether these be policies, programmes, or projects, public or otherwise (Rodríguez Bilella & Lucero Manzano, 2017).

In the Latin American context, the evaluation of public management has undergone significant development, manifested in a variety of

organisational forms, practices and approaches, largely characterised by the commitment of public administrations and international development agencies to a technocratic managerial approach (Cullen *et al.*, 2011; Pérez Yarahuán & Maldonado Trujillo, 2015). This approach, an expression of the neoliberal trend and its **New Public Management** movement, have had a profound impact on evaluation practices, placing a strong emphasis on accountability, effectiveness, efficiency and impact measurement. Consequently, evaluation systems in the region tend to adopt largely conservative stances, as well as a narrow and positivist understanding of methodological rigour, which focus exclusively on quantitative methods and the construction of large indicator systems.

This emphasis on the evaluative functions of technical, economic or organisational improvement reinforces the image and conception of evaluation as a rational, pragmatic and technical activity, guided by procedures and criteria that would lead to 'scientifically' verifiable results. This view seeks to confer neutrality, pragmatism and detachment from the policymaking process, presenting evaluation as a value-free exercise and obscuring its political function.

In contrast, viewing evaluation as a social practice allows us to understand it from a sociohistorical perspective, in which its definitions, methods, uses and legitimate participants are seen as the result of social constructions specific to each context and, therefore, subject to different social forces and potential for change over time (DahlerLarsen, 2012). The social and intersubjective nature of evaluation becomes apparent when one considers the plurality of criteria, procedures and potential uses of evaluation by different actors with unequal interests and power. In this regard, evaluation has a significant strategic potential for social transformation, although developing evaluations with a comprehensive approach remains a challenge (Amaya, 2008, 2010).

While the logic of conventional evaluations does not appear to lead significantly to more effective public interventions, it should nonetheless be guided by the public values that have been restored in the context of democratisation and the institutionalisation of rights over the last 30 years in the region (Jannuzzi, 2020). Only by building on this commitment can evaluation contribute to the construction of a more prosperous and just society that serves to promote the rights of vulnerable and marginalised individuals. In this regard, recognising the political dimension of evaluation makes it possible to reflect on its capacity to contribute to the consolidation of democratic processes (Cardozo Brum & Rosas Huerta, 2021; Fetterman & Wandersman, 2018; Hay & KumarRange, 2014; Rodríguez-Campos, 2018; Zukoski & Bosserman, 2018) as it can facilitate the exercise of the rights to participation, advocacy and control over public affairs by various social actors, particularly those traditionally excluded.

Traditional evaluation approaches, which focus primarily on quantitative methods and are largely detached from the day-to-day reality of the intervention, have often led to disinterest and even resistance among local stakeholders. Meanwhile, an understanding of the specific circumstances of community stakeholders has

gained ground in the theory and practice of evaluation in the region, with a particular attention to indigenous peoples (Kushner & Rotondo, 2012), rural farmers (Romero Sarduy et al., 2017), older adults (Huenchuan & Paredes, 2007), atrisk communities (Letichevsky & Penna Firme, 2012) and organisations and social groups involved in the management and evaluation of social policies (Cardozo Brum, 2008).

It is within this context that participatory, democratic and dialogue-oriented approaches have seen significant development at both global and regional levels. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), established as part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and aimed at promoting social development, economic growth, environmental sustainability, as well as peace and access to justice, reflect this trend by incorporating monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure that they are systematically reviewed, with a central role for civil society (Bamberger et al., 2017; van den Berg et al., 2017). This has given rise to a new set of priorities for evaluation, in which the participatory dimension has become a central feature, helping to ensure that evaluations effectively respond to the needs and interests of intended users.

A new approach in the field of evaluation

The ultimate aim of evaluation should be social improvement, that is, transforming the quality of life of the population targeted by the interventions being evaluated (Rodríguez Bilella & Tapella, 2017). This is achieved by contributing to the development of initiatives (projects, programmes and policies) aimed at promoting social justice, as well as by stimulating public debate regarding the benefits and costs of social interventions and how these are distributed by and for society. Within this framework, the importance of evaluative approaches that give civil society a greater role becomes apparent; this reflects a new sensibility in the field of evaluation that recognises its importance when assessing or attributing effects and outcomes to a specific intervention. In this regard, there is a growing proliferation of both proposals and examples of situated evaluation, which highlight the lessons learned and outcomes of interventions from multiple community perspectives, with methodological rigour and an understanding of the complexity they represent (Amaya, 2016).

The relationship between evaluation and participation can be traced back to the 1960s, when social science researchers began to question positivist approaches (Plottu & Plottu, 2009). It gained significant momentum in the mid-1990s within the context of an international framework aimed at promoting human development (Daigneault, 2011; King *et al.*, 2007; Ryan

et al., 1998). Since then, various forms of stakeholder participation in evaluation have emerged, including empowerment evaluation (Fetterman & Wandersman, 2018), transformative evaluation (Mertens, 2009), democratic deliberative evaluation (House & Howe, 2000) and collaborative evaluation (Cousins & Chouinard, 2012). These diverse approaches highlight how the participatory dimension has become a central aspect of evaluation practice, shaping a tangible, current and inescapable reality.

A significant strand in the field of evaluation is the *democratising perspective* (Dahler-Larsen, 2012; Everitt & Hardiker, 1996; Greene, 2006; House & Howe, 2000; Podems, 2017), which takes shape in various methodologies and where the evaluative practice itself constitutes a form of intervention in the public sphere, attributing value to public actions. From the democratic tradition of evaluation, Greene (2015) identifies three key analytical dimensions to consider in evaluative practices:

- who takes part in them, turning them into spaces of inclusion or exclusion in the political process,
- what their substance and content are, that is, the central and core issues they address, and
- what social relationships are generated within the evaluation context, shaping specific forms of interaction between evaluators and stakeholders.

These dimensions are relevant for distinguishing between two competing approaches to participation in the field of evaluation, both of which focus on promoting greater participation and involvement of local stakeholders in evaluation processes (Espinosa Fajardo *et al.*, 2022). The first of these, *practical evaluation*, has been developed mainly in the developed Anglophone world and emphasises the involvement of stakeholders through a pragmatic, problem-solving approach aimed at improving the use and outcomes of evaluation (Cousins *et al.*, 2013). The second perspective, *transformative evaluation*, which has had a significant presence in Latin America, India and Africa, emphasises the components of emancipation, empowerment and social change (Rodríguez Bilella *et al.*, 2021). This transformative evaluation is aligned with the democratic tradition in evaluation and aims to transcend the instrumentalist view of stakeholder participation as mere informants, recognising that its democratising or transformative potential is realised by placing stakeholders at the centre of the evaluation. With the support of a facilitation team, these groups are involved in setting the evaluation objectives, co-designing the methodology, carrying out fieldwork, analysing the data, presenting the results and ensuring that the implementation of recommendations leads to effective improvements in the programmes and their outcomes.

In the Latin American context, the transformative approach to stakeholder participation in evaluation has been driven and promoted by a rich tradition in the field of social action, which placed a clear and significant emphasis on the participatory dimension within a liberating perspective on reality. Specifically, stakeholder participation in evaluation has drawn on

three traditions of inquiry-action widely developed in the region: popular education (Freire, 1972), participatory research/action (Fals Borda, 2009) and the systematisation of experiences (Tapella & Rodríguez Bilella, 2014). Alongside this, recent years have seen a growing interest in addressing issues of interculturalism, gender and human rights within evaluation processes in the region (Faúndez Meléndez & Weinstein, 2013). Beyond their specific nuances, these different traditions focus on social change and empowerment, recognising the importance of dialogue and participation in addressing structural inequalities and injustices that often go unnoticed in more traditional evaluation processes, while assigning a clear facilitating role to those who promote inquiry/action processes.

Traditionally, policymakers and funders have adopted a view of evaluation centred on accountability, institutional transparency and control (Cullen *et al.*, 2011; Scriven, 2013), thereby reinforcing the stereotypical image of the evaluator as an expert who, by following the scientific method, is able both to account for what does and does not work in a given intervention and to provide detailed recommendations to the relevant decision-makers in order to remedy the problems identified. In this way,

> The evaluator assumes a position of professional authority. The entire evaluation system pushes them —and those who hire them— to conform to this stereotype, in which it is presented as self-evident and appropriate that, at some point, the evaluator should assume the authority to modify, validate and provide the appropriate recommendations and solutions to improve the situation. (Ferretti, 2024)

In contrast, there are numerous examples (as each chapter of this book demonstrates) that assign a significant role to 'formative' evaluation as a tool for continuous learning and capacity building. While at the global level much of the debate in the field of social evaluation tends to focus on theoretical approaches and evaluation methods, the Latin American agenda has played a marginal role in these debates, even though there is some recognition of the innovative practices in the region, including the linking of social evaluation with the political dimension of social inclusion (Neirotti *et al.*, 2019; Pérez Yarahuán & Maldonado Trujillo, 2015).

Participatory evaluation in Latin America

In Latin America, the most common term for this type of evaluation practice has been *'participatory evaluation'*, understood as one in which non-evaluating participants —that is, stakeholders of the evaluation and those affected by it, particularly local managers and the target population of a programme— are meaningfully involved in the evaluation process. This type of evaluation reveals its political dimension by often taking place within

the context of social interventions that have not been participatory in their design and implementation. This reality addresses and goes beyond the question of the possibility of a participatory evaluation in such scenarios, highlighting the importance of ensuring that the very formulation and development of projects, programmes and policies incorporate social participation. Alongside this, it becomes important to deepen and transform the evaluation process into an endogenous practice, rather than one that is external to (and often imposed upon) the institution responsible for the intervention.

Participatory evaluation also helps to introduce a new dimension to accountability, an aspect that has been emphasised in a one-dimensional manner in technocratic evaluation approaches to the detriment of the learning dimension. The collective generation of data facilitates transparency and public debate with and within the context of civil society, with public participation constituting an exercise in citizenship —that is, both a right and a democratic responsibility aimed at facilitating the construction of a new political culture—. Thus, the involvement of stakeholders in the evaluation promotes negotiation between the various actors – including funding bodies and political authorities – for each specific evaluation exercise. This commitment also involves the task of resolving conflicts of interest; balancing power dynamics in decision-making; and creating social spaces for encounter, dialogue and the joint creation of knowledge.

In line with global trends, research and analysis in Latin America on the theory and practice of evaluation have seen a marked increase over the last decade (Cardozo Brum & Rosas Huerta, 2021; Ghiano, 2021; Neirotti, 2019), although the focus on participatory evaluation has been largely implicit and has not drawn directly on the analysis of situated practices. The lack of academic and associative spaces focused on the field of participatory evaluation theory and practice made it difficult to respond with concrete experience to the key question of how to achieve greater participation and agency of diverse social actors in the evaluation of policies, programmes or projects that affect and involve them. Consequently, international initiatives and publications seeking to further explore theoretical and methodological approaches to evaluation involving multiple actors (Cousins *et al.*, 2013; Eggens & Chavez-Tafur, 2019; Shulha *et al.*, 2015) lacked contributions from Latin America. While the development of the Evaluation Standards for Latin America and the Caribbean (Ghiano et al., 2021; Rodríguez Bilella et al., 2016) entailed an initial process of regional coordination as well as a global presence for discussions on the specific realities of evaluation and social participation, a significant gap remained between these normative contributions and the analysis and reflection on concrete experiences of participatory evaluation.

Against this backdrop the First Gathering of Participatory Evaluation Experiences in Latin America and the Caribbean took place in 2019. One of its aims was to build a framework through reflection and practice that would enable this approach to be conceptualised from and for the region. Within this forum emerged

the following principles that characterise this type of evaluation in Latin America (Tapella et al., 2022):

1. The key stakeholders in the intervention or situation under evaluation are actively and consciously involved in the evaluation process as rights-holders.
2. Local knowledge is recognised as valid and essential to the evaluation.
3. Institutional representatives work in partnership with local stakeholders on the design, implementation and interpretation of the evaluation findings.
4. The use of teaching techniques and materials facilitates dialogue by creating spaces and procedures for the collection, analysis and use of information.
5. Participants or stakeholders take ownership of both the processes and the results of the evaluation.
6. The evaluation process strengthens local capacities for planning and participatory decision-making.
7. External evaluators act as facilitators of the evaluation process.

These principles were formulated by the collective reflection of stakeholders who had taken part in participatory evaluations in the region, thus becoming fundamental elements for conceptualising through practice the reality of this evaluation in the region. These principles have been present in the training and knowledge sharing sessions on participatory evaluation undertaken by EvalParticipativa, clearly serving as an introductory foundation and facilitating an initial understanding of this evaluative approach.

Participatory evaluation experiences and their key points

Taken as a whole, this book provides a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of the lessons learned and challenges faced in the region through the practice of participatory evaluation and offers different perspectives on the following key points:

- **Community empowerment.** By focusing not only on measuring the outcomes of interventions, participatory evaluation enables local stakeholders and citizens in general to become active participants in the assessment of the projects, programmes and policies that affect them. By encouraging the active participation of stakeholders, incorporating their voices and perspectives, and creating spaces for dialogue where they can express their needs and concerns, it strengthens their capacity to influence decision-making. This makes it a source of valuable lessons for similar initiatives that are not necessarily evaluations, such as community assessments, participatory planning and transparent accountability processes. The case studies presented in this book demonstrate

how the development of participatory evaluation processes improves the quality of the evaluation and fosters a greater sense of ownership and responsibility towards the projects in which they are involved. This in turn leads to greater trust in institutions and the strengthening of social cohesion.

- **Improving public policy.** Given that civil society organisations focus on social justice and therefore commonly promote active participation in evaluations, they provided fertile ground for the development of participatory evaluations. Various chapters of the book illustrate how governments (in this case at a subnational level) can move beyond more traditional approaches and instrumental participation. The contribution of participatory evaluation to improving the quality of public policies is evident in its ability to incorporate diverse perspectives and local knowledge into the evaluation process by paying particular attention to understanding the context and the realities of the affected communities, thus making it easier to adjust interventions by tailoring them to the specific needs of the population. The experiences examined in this book show that active participation of people and organisations enables participatory evaluation to address its subject matter more closely than in cases where no attention is paid to the diversity of perspectives, thereby fostering a better understanding of the local context. In this way, the quality of public policies is improved because citizens can influence their formulation and implementation, contributing their knowledge and experience as valuable inputs for decision-making.
- **Promoting transparency and accountability.** The various chapters of the book illustrate how participatory evaluation promotes transparency and accountability in both public administration and non-governmental organisation projects. The active involvement of citizens and project participants in the evaluation process creates opportunities for dialogue about the outcomes of interventions, which requires a commitment from decision-makers and those responsible for the intervention to consider the perspectives of local stakeholders. This also explains the resistance to participatory evaluation processes in contexts where authorities lack transparency and accountability to their citizens which makes this approach a key tool in the consolidation of democratic processes.
- **Strengthening social cohesion.** At the heart of participatory evaluation lies the possibility of making the realities of inequality and injustice visible and thus addressable —realities that tend to go unnoticed by more technocratic and top-down evaluation approaches—. Participatory evaluation is particularly relevant in contexts where communities have historically been marginalised and excluded from decision-making processes. Such processes promote dialogue and collaboration while helping to overcome social divisions and build bridges

between different and often unconnected groups, such as indigenous communities, young people, people with disabilities, rural communities, etc. In this way, working towards a common goal, such as that proposed by participatory evaluation initiatives, contributes directly to strengthening social cohesion in various spheres.

- **Capacity building.** Capacity building among those involved in a participatory evaluation process —particularly the members of the evaluation team— is one of the most highly valued aspects of this evaluative approach as evidenced by the experiences presented in this book. These new capacities are developed when opportunities for participation are provided and local residents and other stakeholders are encouraged to engage actively in the evaluation process. Among the most highly valued aspects, particularly by local residents, programme and project users, as well as community leaders who had never before been involved in an evaluation, were the following skills: *(a)* improving the ability to reflect, analyse and propose solutions; *(b)* learning about new participatory tools useful for building consensus and participatory processes in their communities; *(c)* strengthening local organisations so that they have greater control over their own development; and *(d)* recognising their right and capacity to influence the design of policies and programmes relevant to their circumstances.
- **Focus on the sustainability of interventions.** Community involvement in evaluation processes helps ensure that the interventions in which they participate are relevant to their needs, moving beyond a focus on immediate results and facilitating consideration of their long-term sustainability. Participatory evaluations provide a space to assess the incorporation of practices and approaches that are culturally appropriate to each context, as well as the continuous adaptation of interventions to the changing needs of the community. This enables local participation in the (re)design and implementation of interventions, thereby greatly enhancing their long-term sustainability. Stakeholder participation promotes methodological designs that are flexible and adaptable to varied contexts and evaluation objectives, fostering a greater understanding of the processes and of the results, both expected and unexpected. In addition, the sense of ownership of the initiative fostered by participatory evaluation is another key factor in ensuring that its benefits are sustained over time.

Advancing stakeholder participation requires a transformation not only of evaluation culture and policies but also of its frameworks and objectives. Such participation involves working collaboratively and on an equal footing among stakeholders, which is achieved through facilitation by evaluation teams and the use of educational tools, materials and techniques that ensure a sense of ownership and commitment among those involved. These elements have been explored in depth in *Sowing and Harvesting – Participatory Evaluation Handbook* (Tapella *et al.*, 2022).

This book's focus of reflecting on specific examples of participatory evaluation makes it particularly relevant for those responsible for commissioning, carrying out and designing evaluations, so that they may give greater consideration to the possibility and feasibility of evaluation involving public participation (and keep both on their radar and in their agenda). In the academic field, the case studies in this book will be of interest to lecturers and participants in diploma courses, specialisations and master's programmes focusing on evaluation and social planning, an area that has seen significant growth in the region (Ghiano, 2021). For their part, trained evaluators will find further resources to enrich their professional practice by engaging in reflection on critical learning processes that enrich the field of evaluation. In this way, the democratic dimension of evaluation will be strengthened through the evaluators' reflexivity, as they analyse the factors shaping their position and remain mindful of their potential to facilitate processes of dialogue and generate arguments and evidence alongside a diverse range of social actors, thereby enriching public debate.

On the other hand, the limitations and difficulties present in participatory evaluation processes must be taken seriously to avoid romanticising the approach, which could lead to a loss of legitimacy and credibility among various individual and/or institutional stakeholders. The critical elements can be summarised as follows:

- the real possibility of effective and equal participation by stakeholders;
- issues relating to the methodological rigour of evaluation approaches involving public participation, specifically regarding sampling, data collection and analysis, as well as the formulation of recommendations;
- the greater demand for financial and time resources that it entails.

It is clear that, on many occasions, the practice of evaluation has failed to reflect the intended participatory 'vocation', overlooking the fact that any exercise involving such a process can become a symbolic charade if it fails to recognise that any truly participatory process entails a redistribution of power (Chambers, 2003). The role of the facilitator of participatory evaluation processes is key to addressing the risk that the most vocal or powerful stakeholders might dominate the process, silencing the voices of the most vulnerable. Training for both facilitators and community participants together with the use of participatory and inclusive tools and techniques is essential to promote equitable and representative processes that ensure the quality of the evaluation (Tapella & Sanz, 2019).

The issue of rigour in participatory evaluations must be addressed within the context of quality that is essential to any evaluation effort. In this regard, and like any evaluation, it follows a logical sequence, involving stakeholders at the different stages; this dynamic enriches the results achieved, fostering a process of reflective dialogue. Every stage of an evaluation process is critical to its successful implementation, a

reality that is no less true of participatory evaluation. The use of relevant evaluation tools and instruments to rigorously carry out these processes is illustrated in the case studies presented in this book.

Criticism of participatory evaluation as a slow and costly process highlights two distinct realities. The fact that it requires more time than traditional evaluations is readily apparent, but this should not prevent us from paying attention to —and, above all, valuing— it given the various benefits (detailed in the key points outlined above) that arise from the participation of stakeholders in the evaluation process. With this context in mind, a pending task for evaluation research is to demonstrate whether additional financial resources are indeed necessary for a participatory evaluation, taking into account the potential benefits and their capacity to offset costs.

The key challenge is to move towards the institutionalisation of participatory evaluation within different organisations, legitimising its role and securing the resources needed for its implementation. In this process, the establishment of legal and regulatory frameworks plays an important role, alongside the promotion of a culture of evaluation and the support of civil society. In the face of institutional resistance to the participatory evaluation approach, which often occurs within the public sector, the demonstration effect plays a fundamental role. As illustrated by various cases in this book, this implies that prestigious organisations from both the public and non-governmental sectors can share their experiences and demonstrate both the feasibility and potential of the approach to generate added value. At the same time, training and raising awareness among policy-makers regarding the benefits of participatory evaluation can also help foster greater openness to adopting the approach. Collaboration with civil society organisations and universities can provide significant support, strengthening the structure and sustainability of these processes as well as methodological rigour in order to ensure the scientific quality of the evaluations.

Participation and engagement in evaluation in Latin America are in their infancy, progressing step by step and becoming increasingly aware of the challenges involved in moving towards an inclusive social evaluation that brings about transformative change in institutions, organisations and the general public (Stockmann *et al.*, 2022). In line with the democratic tradition in evaluation, participatory evaluation transforms stakeholders into subjects of evaluation and agents of change, placing them at the centre of the evaluation process. With the support of facilitators, communities are recognised as legitimate participants in setting objectives, co-designing methodologies, carrying out data collection and analysis, as well as in presenting and disseminating outcomes and monitoring the implementation of recommendations. Underpinning the entire evaluation process, this approach allows us to recognise how the experiences and needs of stakeholders vary significantly according to their cultural and gender contexts, while also facilitating

greater control over the resources and decisions that affect their lives. Participatory evaluation helps to redistribute power and build a more equitable, just and democratic society.

This is why the existence of initiatives and organisations that seek to ensure their evaluation efforts go beyond the mere measurement of outcomes to create opportunities for genuine and active stakeholder participation deserve to be studied, recognised and explored in greater depth in order to enhance their capacity to influence the culture and overall policy of evaluation. By consciously taking part in evaluation processes, citizens acquire various skills and knowledge that go beyond the one-off assessment of an intervention, enabling them to question and demand accountability from their governments, thereby developing a political culture in which participation and transparency are fundamental social values. Participatory evaluation promotes clear collective learning as well as critical reflection on the public policies that affect them, contributing to the construction of a democracy capable of creating spaces for social inclusion, giving a voice to those who do not have one, narrowing the gaps of inequality and contributing to social equity: a democracy in action.

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Examining the Process of Participation in Evaluation

The Case of the Transition to Independent Living Programme for Persons with Disabilities in Chile

Rodrigo Quiroz Saavedra

Abstract

Participatory evaluation has gained considerable prominence in recent years owing to the benefits it can offer to the parties involved and its potential contribution to democratisation and social transformation. Nevertheless, a lack of clarity persists within the evaluator community regarding which elements distinguish it, thereby hampering its operationalisation. This article seeks to address this problem by critically examining a case through the application of the participatory evaluation measurement instrument, which comprises three dimensions of participation: control over the evaluation process, diversity of stakeholders, and extent of involvement. The results demonstrate that the instrument is useful for systematically examining an evaluation and obtaining a deeper understanding of the participation process in it, the need to reincorporate the dimension of power relations between stakeholders, the role the evaluator may play in conflicts embedded in asymmetrical relationships, and the relevance of participation for oppressed groups. The importance of continuing to research participatory evaluation is affirmed, as is the use of findings to train colleagues, implementers, decision-makers, and citizens in the theory and practice of participatory evaluation.

Keywords

Participatory Evaluation, Dimensions of Participation, Power Relations, Conflict, Democracy.

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Introduction

It is currently well established that evaluation bears an intimate relation with democracy (Chelimsky, 2006). That said, the purpose of evaluation is not to eliminate the errors of authority or to strengthen its credibility, but rather to facilitate a democratic and pluralist process that enlightens all participants (Cronbach *et al*., 1980, p. 1).

In pursuit of these aims, numerous evaluation approaches grounded in democratic values have been developed over recent decades: *democratic evaluation* (Podems, 2017), *deliberative evaluation* (House & Howe, 2000), *empowerment evaluation* (Fetterman *et al*., 1996), *inclusive evaluation* (Mertens, 2008), *community evaluation* (Kilmer & Cook, 2020), and *collaborative evaluation* (Cousins *et al*., 2016), among others. Despite their theoretical, methodological, or axiological differences, one aspect common to these approaches is the importance they attribute to participation during evaluation processes, and to the effects of such participation (Espinosa-Fajardo *et al*., 2022; Smits & Champagne, 2008).

Traditionally, participation has been described in general terms as the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making during the various stages of the evaluation process, including planning, implementation, and utilisation of the evaluation (Whitmore & Cousins, 1998). In recent years, the field of participatory evaluation has seen significant advances in terms of *conceptual frameworks* (Weaver & Cousins, 2004), *operational models* (Fawcett *et al*., 2014/2003), and *principles* (Tapella *et al*., 2022) that specify with greater clarity what a participatory evaluation process consists in. However, some authors have noted that the conceptual development and empirical knowledge regarding these participation processes in evaluation continue to present limitations (Connors & Magilvy, 2011; Odera, 2021). Likewise, the difficulty of applying participatory evaluation in a manner consistent with the democratic values that infuse our practice has been highlighted (Ridde, 2006). As a consequence, our capacity to plan, implement, and evaluate participatory evaluations is diminished, as are the use and effects of such evaluations on participants. This chapter seeks to provide elements of a response to this problem by critically examining the case of a participatory evaluation of a programme designed to facilitate the transition to independent living for young people with disabilities, funded through public resources from the National Disability Service (Senadis) in Chile.

For the analysis of the experience, a conceptual framework is applied that distinguishes three dimensions of participation: extent of involvement in evaluative tasks, diversity of non-evaluator stakeholders, and control of the evaluation process (Daigneault & Jacob, 2009; Weaver & Cousins, 2004). It is anticipated that the results of this analysis will provide insights for designing and implementing participatory processes that reinforce the involvement of actors in decision-making, thereby fostering the promotion of rights, inclusion, and equity in social programmes and projects in Latin America (Tapella *et al*., 2022).

National context

Chile has a National Monitoring and Evaluation System for Public Policies, Programmes, and Projects with over 25 years of history (Irarrázaval & Pérez, 2017). The monitoring and evaluation instruments have been under the responsibility of the Budget Directorate (Dirección de Presupuesto, DIPRES), under the Ministry of Finance, and have therefore been linked primarily to the national budgetary cycle; that is, they seek to generate information for budgetary decision-making (Guzmán, Irarrázaval, & De los Ríos, 2014). In the view of experts, programme evaluation in Chile is highly institutionalised, characterised by being strongly centralised, disciplined, and routine (World Bank, 2005).

Despite its level of institutionalisation and relevance for the country, this evaluation system faces major challenges. In general terms, there is a demand for greater transparency (Consejo para la Transparencia, 2016), deficient programme design and a lack of evaluations of them (González, 2020), low coverage of evaluated programmes (Guzmán, Irarrázaval, & de los Ríos, 2014), and limited use of the information produced for budgetary decision-making and the public policy cycle (Olavarría, 2012).

With regard to the focus of this chapter, challenges are observed that relate specifically to the role of stakeholders in the programmes evaluated and, consequently, in the evaluations themselves. These include the predominance of economic criteria at the expense of public values such as social justice, equity, dignity, and human freedoms and rights (Centro de Sistemas Públicos, 2019), as well as an excessive centralisation of evaluation processes that leads to limited ownership of these processes by programme implementers and a low degree of influence of public service users and civil society organisations in programme evaluation (Irarrázaval *et al*., 2020). Although programme evaluation in Chile rests upon a solid institutional framework, the participation of citizens and, in broader terms, its democratic function, remains in deficit (Paredes, 2011).

Description of the implementing organisation

The programme that was the object of evaluation is implemented by the Eres Foundation, which was established in July 2014 on the basis of recognising and valuing people as unique individuals, in light of their differences, with distinct needs and potentialities, as well as the dedication of their families and guardians throughout the process of growth and development. Its mission is

> to guarantee the inclusion of persons with disabilities and their families in spaces for citizen participation such as education, employment, health, recreation, culture, tourism, sport, and the environment, among others, promoting a cultural, social, and normative

change that ensures the exercise of the rights of persons with disabilities, together with their families, communities, and surroundings.

The work of the Foundation is carried out in close partnership with the Special School for Development in La Reina and other schools in the Metropolitan Region that serve students with disabilities, as well as with organisations of and for persons with disabilities from different regions. The areas of intervention of the Eres Foundation are as follows: participation, communication, tourism, family, health, sport, recreation, culture, education, and employment.

Description of the case study

The programme under examination is entitled Transition to Independent Living, You Are What You Decide (TILP), the purpose of which is to promote the participation of *Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PwID)* in various spheres of civic life, mainly the world of employment, through an intervention that seeks to develop and strengthen social skills in both persons with disabilities and their carers, as well as in support professionals.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- To introduce participants to the philosophy of Independent Living so that they may assimilate and incorporate it into their life projects.
- To develop and establish self-care as a fundamental element for optimising the quality of life of participants.
- To develop and establish personal self-management tools that help participants navigate the process of Transition to Adult Life.
- To enable participants to know and exercise their rights so as to access, on equal terms, a role within society and fulfil the responsibilities that this entails.

The TILP is implemented on the basis of collaboration with a network of public bodies (e.g., Senadis), civil society organisations (foundations), and international bodies (e.g., the International Labour Organisation, ILO) related to disability, as well as special schools that receive the intervention for their students.

The TILP intervention strategy consists of an active, participatory, and experiential training model comprising four modules that cover topics related to independent living for persons with disabilities (see Table 1). A follow-up strategy is added to these four modules, offering support to participants by providing them with tools to facilitate the completion of tasks undertaken during the modules.

Each module is delivered through a workshop facilitated by two monitors who are specialists in disability. Participants are young people with disabilities, their family members or carers, and support professionals from the schools. They are aged between 15 and 30 years, belong to the first and second lowest-income quintiles, and are enrolled in a special school. The recruitment of participants is carried out

in collaboration with school management, and on the basis of the motivation to participate expressed by the parents and by the young people themselves.

The number of participants in the workshops varies depending on the context, reaching an average of approximately 10 young people with disabilities per implementation cycle.

Module	Contents	Methodology	Strategy
1. Philosophy of Independent Living	- Foundations and principles of the philosophy of independent living - Beliefs and expectations regarding disability - New approaches to disability - A new perspective on personal assistance	- Presentation of concepts - Practical activity - Questions for reflection - Personal logbook	- Encourage people with disabilities and their families to participate in the programme in advance. - Create a more horizontal environment so that PwID can express their needs and wishes for themselves. - Empower PwID to recognise their own abilities. - Encourage participation so that PwID, family members and professionals can communicate with one another. - Use a learning-by-doing methodology both within and outside the programme setting so that PwID take the lead.
2. Quality of Life and Self-Care	- Self-care - Quality of life (dimensions) - Well-being	- Presentation of concepts - Practical activity - Questions for reflection - Personal logbook	
3. Self-management and Development of Soft Skills	- Self-determination - Self-management competencies	- Presentation of concepts - Practical activity - Questions for reflection - Transfer project	
4. Right to Autonomy and Self-determination	- What is a right - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities - My rights at work - My health rights - Persons with disabilities as agents of change	- Presentation of concepts - Practical activity - Questions for reflection - Transfer project	
Personalised follow-up		- Individual and group meetings via Zoom or WhatsApp video calls - Text messages	

Table 1. *Components of the Transition to Independent Living programme*

From 2019 to the present, four cycles of programme implementation have been completed in various regions of Chile. Some of these cycles have been conducted in person, while others have been delivered remotely. The remote versions of the programme emerged as an adaptation to address the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. To date, the programme has served 85 young people with disabilities, 80 families, and 58 support professionals throughout the country.

Year	Municipalities	Region
2019	Iquique	Tarapacá
2019	Rengo, Quinta de Tilcoco, Rancagua, Requinoa.	O'Higgins
2019	Linares, Talca, Constitución, Longaví	Maule Region
2019	Concepción	Biobío Region
2019, 2020, 2021	La Reina, Ñuñoa, Buin, Puente Alto, San Miguel, Quilicura, Independencia, La Granja, San José de Maipo.	Metropolitan Region
2023	Peñalolén	Metropolitan Region

Table 2. *Implementation cycles of the TIL programme*

General description of the evaluation

The evaluation project for the TILP arose in 2021, following an initial contact with the Director of the Eres Foundation during a webinar I conducted on the subject of participatory evaluation[1].

Subsequently, we met on several occasions in order to discuss the possibility of establishing a collaborative relationship to evaluate the **TIL** programme. For the Eres Foundation, this evaluation project was viewed as a strategy for producing evidence that would help to improve the programme being implemented and to validate the work carried out in the field of disability, while for me this project represented an opportunity to apply a participatory evaluation approach to a programme working with a group that faces multiple barriers in society, and thereby to contribute to improving the programme so that it might better support young people and their families.

[1] This webinar was held in the context of the launch of the postgraduate diploma in Participatory Evaluation of Social Programmes, directed by the author of this chapter from the Faculty of Psychology at the Universidad del Desarrollo. For further information, see the following link: *https://psicologia.udd.cl/files/2023/08/evaluacion_psicologia_participa_programas_sociales_udd_070823.pdf*

The broader context for this evaluation is that the formulation and implementation of the TILP by the Eres Foundation takes place against the backdrop of the difficulties that special schools face in adopting an approach of autonomy and independence with their students, and as a response to the demand from the National Disability Service (Senadis) to implement the Independent Living programme for persons with disabilities. It is also important to note that, prior to the conduct of this evaluation, the Eres Foundation team was already evaluating relevant aspects of its practice internally (e.g., number of participants, changes in participants) through a reflective exercise and instruments constructed by themselves (e.g., surveys administered before the intervention began and after it had concluded). On the basis of the results of these evaluations, the Eres Foundation produced and submitted reports to its Board of Directors and to funders. In this sense, participatory evaluation represents an innovation for this Foundation in its approach to evaluating the TILP, both through the incorporation of stakeholder participation in the evaluation process and through the construction of an evaluation instrument as the principal output of that process.

In keeping with the foregoing, the purpose of the evaluation was to create an instrument to measure the outcomes of the programme in terms of increased self-determination among the young people with intellectual disabilities who participate in it. At the same time, the evaluation sought to address objectives related to understanding the experience of the participants in the programme activities and the effects they perceived in relation to their participation.

The evaluation consisted in a sequential mixed-methods (qualitative-quantitative) design with a participatory approach, comprising three stages: formalisation of the intervention model, a qualitative implementation study, and a quantitative study involving the construction of an outcome measurement instrument.

The evaluation lasted one year, from September 2022 to September 2023. It involved a team of professionals from the Foundation, young people with intellectual disabilities, their family members, and support professionals, all of whom were beneficiaries of the programme.

As a key component of the participatory design, an *Evaluation Committee* was constituted, comprising representatives of the main stakeholder groups of the programme, such as *public policy formulators* (e.g., Senadis), *implementers* (e.g., the Foundation team), *direct beneficiaries* (e.g., young people with intellectual disabilities), *indirect beneficiaries* (e.g., family members of young people with intellectual disabilities, hereon YwID), and *civil society* (e.g., members of a disability advisory committee), with the remit of ensuring the sound progress of the evaluation, validating and informing evaluation activities, and taking part in key decisions throughout the evaluation process.

The evaluation team comprised five professionals: the lead researcher, who is the author of this chapter; a specialist in quantitative methodology; two research assistants; and a professional support member from the Eres Foundation.

It should be noted that this evaluation was funded by the Ministry of Social Development and Family of the Chilean State.

Conceptual framework

The roots of participatory evaluation extend into Latin American traditions (Tapella *et al*., 2022) such as *Participatory Action-Research* (Fals-Borda, 1985), *Popular Education* (Freire, 1970), and the *Systematisation of Experiences* (Zuñiga, 1992), as well as the citizen participation programmes created in the United States during the 1960s and the international development programmes of the same era (Plottu & Plottu, 2009).

According to Jackson and Kassam (1998), participatory evaluation is

> a process of self-assessment, collective knowledge production, and cooperative action in which the stakeholders in a development intervention participate substantively in the identification of the evaluation issues, the design of the evaluation, the collection and analysis of data, and the action taken as a result of the evaluation findings.

This type of evaluation seeks to give preferential treatment to the voices and decisions of the least powerful and most affected.

Different conceptual models have been proposed for analysing and understanding a participatory evaluation process. In a pioneering study, Cousins *et al*. (1996) proposed three dimensions extending along a continuum for analysing what they defined as collaborative evaluation. The first dimension corresponded to stakeholder selection, extending the range of representation from direct users to any other individual or group with a stake in the programme (e.g., designers, implementers, funders). The second dimension referred to who holds control over technical decisions, that is, whether this rests with the evaluator, the stakeholders, or both. The third dimension was the level of participation of stakeholders in the activities of the various evaluation phases, which may range from moderate to high. The results showed that the evaluator continued to maintain a dominant role and that professionals and direct users had limited participation, as was the case in traditional evaluations. Drawing on the preceding research, Weaver and Cousins (2004) reformulated one of the dimensions of their model —stakeholder selection— thereby proposing a five-dimension model:

- control over technical decisions,
- diversity among stakeholders selected to participate,
- power relations between stakeholders,
- management of the evaluation implementation, and
- depth of participation.

Having applied these dimensions to two case studies — one in a hospital in Canada and another in an educational leaders training programme in India — the authors conclude that these dimensions change over time (e.g., the nature of conflicts), that the manner in which these dimensions are expressed during the evaluation process has both intended and unintended consequences, and that these dimensions enable a critical examination of participatory processes so as to prevent them from reproducing the status quo.

In a subsequent study, Ridde (2006) sought to verify the validity of the model proposed by Weaver and Cousins (2004). To achieve this objective, the author applied the model to three case studies corresponding to the three types of participatory evaluation derived from it, pertaining to health and social service programmes implemented by NGOs in Haiti, Afghanistan, and Québec (Canada) respectively. The conclusions of this exercise indicate that the model is well grounded empirically and constitutes a useful heuristic for examining the dimensions of the participatory evaluation process, that there is a need to describe the elements of the values attributed to each dimension, and that it is pertinent to apply this model again to other cases.

In the same vein, Daigneault and Jacob (2009) set out to develop an instrument for measuring participation in evaluation. To this end, they reconceptualise the model proposed by Cousins and Whitmore (1998), defining and operationalising three dimensions considered essential in participatory evaluation: extent of involvement, diversity of participants, and control of the evaluation process. On the basis of these three dimensions, the authors elaborate and offer a coding system that may be applied to evaluations to establish the degree to which they are participatory, recognising that this instrument still requires validation through further research. More recently, Daigneault *et al*. (2012) conducted a study to empirically validate the participatory evaluation measurement instrument using 40 cases drawn from the specialist literature on the subject. The results suggest that, notwithstanding certain limitations such as the difficulty of scoring the dimension of control of the evaluation process, the instrument is reliable and valid for measuring the three dimensions of participation.

In summary, the studies analysed demonstrate that it is possible and useful to examine the participatory evaluation process in greater depth for several reasons. In the first place, the conceptual models display good validity, focusing on substantive and distinctive aspects of participatory evaluation in contrast to non-participatory approaches. In the second place, such examination enables evaluators to plan, implement, and appraise participatory evaluations according to a clear and well-structured framework of reference. In the third place, the examination of participatory evaluations contributes to raising their quality and to clarifying their relationship with other outcomes of participatory evaluations (e.g., the empowerment of participants). That said, despite all the merits of the available models, the results obtained in these studies suggest that the participatory evaluation measurement instrument presents certain advantages related to

the use of a smaller number of dimensions (N=3) that facilitates the identification of relevant aspects of the process, the availability of a coding system that simplifies the scoring of the dimensions, and the validation it has undergone, which has corroborated its reliability and validity for these purposes.

For this reason, we shall employ the participatory evaluation measurement instrument developed by Daigneault and Jacob (2009) to examine a participatory evaluation conducted by the author of this article.

Participatory evaluation measurement instrument

The instrument comprises three dimensions considered necessary and sufficient for classifying an evaluation as participatory. The first dimension is the *extent of involvement*, which refers to the number of tasks in which stakeholders are involved, above and beyond the quality and intensity of the involvement or the control they may exercise over decision-making. This dimension is coded as follows:

	Level of Membership	
Number of tasks in which non-evaluating stakeholders are involved	*Intuitive label*	*Score*
0	No involvement	.00
1	Limited/weak involvement	.25
2	Moderate involvement	.50
3	Strong/substantial involvement	.75
4	Complete involvement	1.00

The second dimension is the *diversity of participants*, which concerns the selection of non-evaluator stakeholders who participate in the evaluation (e.g., policymakers, implementers, practitioners, beneficiaries, civil society). This dimension is coded as follows:

	Level of Membership	
Number of tasks in which non-evaluator stakeholders are involved	*Intuitive label*	*Score*
0	No diversity	.00
1	Limited/weak diversity	.25
2	Moderate diversity	.50
3	Substantive/strong diversity	.75
4	Complete diversity	1.00

The third dimension is the *control of the evaluation process*, measured in terms of how shared this is between non-evaluator stakeholders and the evaluator. This dimension is coded as follows:

Level of Membership	
Intuitive label	*Score*
Exclusive control by the evaluator and/or non-participating sponsor	.00
Limited/weak control by participants	.25
Shared control between participants and evaluator and/or non-participating sponsor	.50
Substantive/strong control by participants	.75
Exclusive control by participants	1.00

In order to be classified as participatory through the application of this instrument, an evaluation must obtain a score equal to or greater than .25 in each of the three dimensions and therefore at the *basic level*. The calculation of the score at this basic level is straightforward: the minimum score of the secondary-level dimension determines the overall score of the participatory evaluation. For example, if an evaluation includes all categories of non-evaluator stakeholders (score of 1.00 on the diversity dimension), it will obtain an aggregate score of 1.00 only if stakeholders are involved in all evaluation tasks (extent of involvement = 1.00), and if these stakeholders have total control over decisions in the evaluation process (control = 1.00). However, if the score for the control dimension is .50, the evaluation will obtain a score of .50 at the basic level, and if the score for the control dimension is .00, the evaluation will obtain a score of .00 at the basic level. Were this last case to apply, the evaluation could not be classified as participatory, even if it were to obtain a perfect score (1.00) on the other two dimensions.

By applying this instrument to the evaluation of the TILP that I conducted, we seek to contribute evidence towards its validation, and in particular to look retrospectively at the participation process in order to contrast the evaluator's subjective perception with the objective measurement provided by the participation index, and thereby to establish the degree to which this evaluation has been participatory, identifying the challenges involved in deepening participation in future evaluations. We consider that these lessons are fundamental for improving the competencies of the evaluator community, and for optimising the results of participatory evaluations for the various stakeholders involved. Likewise, the findings of this exercise may contribute to advancing research in participatory evaluation.

Description and analysis of the participatory process

In this section, we shall examine the three stages of the participatory evaluation process implemented (*modelling*, *qualitative study*, and *quantitative study*) through the lens of the three dimensions of participation proposed by Daigneault and Jacob (2009). At the end of this section, we shall present a summary of the results and score the participatory evaluation process according to the rubric constructed by the same authors in order to determine whether this evaluation may be classified as participatory in accordance with this instrument.

Diversity of participants

Diversity was expressed from the outset through the inclusion of the team responsible for the programme (educator, psychologist, occupational therapist) as participants in all three stages of the evaluation process. Once public funding had been secured to carry out the evaluation, the evaluator and the Foundation's team set about the task of constituting the Evaluation Committee (EC), which had formed part of the methodological design of the project. To this end, the evaluator provided general guidance to the Foundation's team regarding aspects such as the types of stakeholders that should form part of this body (e.g., users, policymakers, frontline professionals), whereupon the Foundation proceeded to identify and convene them. The diversity of participants increased considerably with the constitution and launch of the EC, given that it comprised representatives of all stakeholder categories in the field of disability: policymakers (e.g., ILO); central-level implementers of the state administration (e.g., Senadis); service-providing organisations (e.g., foundations, schools) and frontline professionals (e.g., specialist teachers); users (e.g., young people with disabilities) and indirect beneficiaries (e.g., family members of users); civil society (e.g., university researchers; community of solidarity organisations); and citizens (e.g., members of a disability advisory committee). This EC convened on five occasions throughout the evaluation process, which lasted one year, achieving an average attendance of 15 persons per session. Additionally, contact was made with foreign researchers specialising in self-determination in persons with disabilities in order to request feedback on specific aspects of the work in progress.

By way of summary, the analysis of the diversity dimension allows us to state that representatives of all four categories of non-evaluator stakeholders (decision-makers; implementers and practitioners; direct and indirect beneficiaries; and civil society and citizens) were involved throughout the evaluation process. For this reason, this dimension receives a score of 1.00.

Extent of involvement

This dimension of participation was expressed from the outset in the fact that the team responsible for the programme actively participated in defining the evaluation questions (e.g., What are the main changes expected in YwID as a result of their participation in the TIL programme?), defining the type of evaluation (e.g., design, processes, and immediate results), specifying the methodological design (e.g., mixed methods), and identifying sources of data (e.g., YwID, family members, support professionals). From then on, the programme team and the EC actively participated in the following tasks across the phases of programme modelling, qualitative study, and quantitative study: selection and construction of data collection instruments; determination of when data collection would take place; interpretation of results (e.g., conditions for successful programme implementation); and formulation of recommendations (e.g., providing support to the mothers of YwID). For example, in the qualitative study, the interview guides and focus group protocols were constructed jointly with the programme team, with an emphasis on the use of language that was comprehensible and consistent with the social model of disability.

Thus, the evaluator and the Foundation's team constructed adapted guides for persons with disabilities using pictograms. Later on, the evaluator was responsible for the greater part of data collection, while one of the focus groups was co-facilitated by a professional from the Foundation's team. Likewise, the analysis of qualitative data was carried out by the evaluation team, while its interpretation involved the evaluation team —in one meeting— and the EC at its third meeting. During these meetings, participants sought clarification regarding certain results (e.g., what are the medium-term changes?), made observations about conditions for successful programme implementation (e.g., support from schools, parental motivation, continuity of changes in YwID at home), and reflected on the implications of these results for the future of the programme (e.g., actions for improving the TIL programme).

In the quantitative study, the evaluation team was responsible for constructing an instrument to measure self-determination in the young people with disabilities participating in the programme. A first version of the self-reported questionnaire on self-determination in YwID was presented to the members of the EC at its fourth meeting, at which point they made observations regarding the questions on autonomy, participation, and self-determination, and recommended reviewing the language and either selecting or adequately preparing the person who would administer the instrument in order to facilitate participants' comprehension. In the final stage, reporting was the responsibility of the evaluation team, with review and comments provided by the programme team. Various dissemination activities were carried out. The principal one was a seminar to which members of the EC were invited, along with a broad group of individuals involved in the field of disability at the

national level. With approximately 60 attendees, a Senadis professional led a workshop introducing the concept of Independent Living, and the evaluator presented the main findings of the evaluation.

By way of summary, the analysis of the *extent of involvement* dimension allows us to state that non-evaluator stakeholders were involved to varying degrees in the four key tasks of the evaluation process: evaluation questions and methodological design; data collection and analysis; judgement and recommendations; and reporting and dissemination of results. For this reason, this dimension receives a score of 1.00.

Control of the evaluation process

Control of the evaluation process was shared between the evaluator, the Foundation's team, and the EC throughout the evaluation process in various ways. Prior to conducting the evaluation, the programme team and the evaluator decided to work collaboratively on this evaluation, on the basis of mutual recognition and respect. Accordingly, the focus of the evaluation was established jointly by the team responsible for the programme and the evaluator. The evaluator and the Foundation's team thus worked for approximately one month through online meetings and cloud-hosted documents to prepare the application for the fund that financed the evaluation. The evaluator's principal function was to listen to the Foundation's needs and to translate these technically into evaluation questions, a methodological design, a phased activity plan, and a budget.

The purpose of the evaluation was to improve the work carried out by the Foundation and to validate the results obtained by the programme with its various audiences, while the focus of the evaluation was programme design, implementation, and outcomes. The methodological design adopted was a qualitative/quantitative mixed-methods approach, as this allowed to first define the intervention model and to explore the key aspects of programme implementation from the perspective of stakeholders, before proceeding to a quantitative study aimed at constructing an outcome measurement instrument. In the modelling phase, the evaluation team prepared the Theory of Change for the project based on various sources of information. The resulting model was then submitted for review and validation by the programme team and the EC.

Following the second meeting with the EC, the evaluation team prepared and circulated to the EC a revised version of the Theory of Change that incorporated the corrections requested by its members. This new version of the Theory of Change was validated by the EC at its third meeting. During the qualitative study, and prior to beginning fieldwork, a presentation was made to the EC on the instruments, sample, and type of analysis of the qualitative study, at which point its members provided recommendations to ensure that data collection was appropriate for persons with disabilities (e.g., conducting interviews with YwID with the support of a parent). At the close

of this meeting, the EC validated the methodological design of the qualitative study.

As the qualitative study drew to a close, the EC held a meeting at which contradictory viewpoints were expressed regarding the role assigned by the programme to the family members of YwID who participate in the intervention. While the team in charge of the programme and a professional from an international organisation maintained that family members serve as supports for the process of independence undertaken by YwID, former programme users and persons with disabilities argued that it is typically the mothers of YwID who must support their sons and daughters but without having the support they themselves need in order to fulfil that role. This was one of the controversies that ran throughout the entire evaluation process, manifesting not only in discussions within EC meetings but also in the study results, their interpretation, and the recommendations made to the programme.

During the quantitative study, the evaluation team worked with the Foundation's team and with some members of the EC to make adjustments of varying degrees to the battery of instruments that had been constructed to measure the outcomes of the TILP (questionnaire for YwID, questionnaire for family members, and questionnaire on implementation performance), until a new version was obtained. This instrument was reviewed, given feedback on, and validated by the EC prior to being piloted in a special school in a municipality in the south-eastern area of Santiago. Subsequently, the evaluation team and the programme team met on multiple occasions to adjust the instrument and produce a definitive version, which was adapted to a universal accessibility format by a professional volunteer of the Foundation, before being subsequently validated by the EC.

By way of summary, the analysis of the dimension of *control of the evaluation process* allows us to state that non-evaluator stakeholders shared control with the evaluator over the essential tasks of the evaluation process, but that the former did not have total control over the evaluation process. For this reason, this dimension receives a score of .50.

In conclusion, the evaluation examined receives a score of 1.00 for the dimension of *diversity of participants*, 1.00 for the dimension of *extent of involvement*, and 0.50 for the dimension of *control of the evaluation process*, giving an overall score of 0.50, and may therefore be classified as a participatory evaluation in accordance with the instrument of Daigneault and Jacob (2009). Table 3 presents these results:

Dimension/indicator	No. of tasks	Non-evaluator stakeholders involved	Regarding the tasks of the evaluation process
Extent of involvement	4 = 1.00	-	-
Diversity of stakeholders	-	4 = 1.00	-
Control of the evaluation process	-	-	2 = 0.50
Total score	**.50**		

Table 3. *Scores for the three dimensions of the participatory evaluation examined*

Discussion

The objective of this text was to apply Daigneault and Jacob's model (2009) to the case of a participatory evaluation in the field of disability, in order to extract lessons that may be useful for the community of evaluators wishing to adopt a participatory approach in their professional practice, and to contribute to the study of participatory evaluation.

It is important to begin by noting that we succeeded in applying the model successfully to the case under examination. Indeed, all three dimensions were employed to analyse the evaluation process through the lens of the participation of non-evaluator stakeholders. In this regard, we should note that we perceived significant differences in the application of the three dimensions. The dimension of *extent of involvement* allowed the most straightforward application, as the indicators (e.g., tasks) are clear and can be readily identified in the evaluation process. Something similar applies to the dimension of *diversity of non-evaluator stakeholders*, which is applied through a categorisation of stakeholders (e.g., decision-makers, practitioners, users) that fits adequately with the Chilean context.

However, the application of the dimension of *control of the evaluation process* was less straightforward, as the indicator for this dimension and the indicator for the dimension of *extent of involvement* partially overlap in that both focus on essential tasks. To overcome this difficulty, we shifted the focus from the tasks to the authority over decision-making (Daigneault & Jacob, 2009), and, following the approach proposed by Daigneault *et al.* (2012), we mapped certain key terms used to describe the manner in which the evaluation process under study was conducted (e.g., shared, jointly, collaboratively) in order to use these as indicators of how decisions were made regarding essential tasks. In this way, we succeeded in applying the dimension of *control of the evaluation process*,

obtaining an analysis that was both coherent and more extensive than that resulting from the application of the other two dimensions.

Another problematic aspect in the application of the dimension of *control of the evaluation process* relates, in our view, to a conceptual confusion between outcomes and processes. According to the reconceptualisation proposed by Daigneault and Jacob (2009), control of the evaluation process will rest with those who hold formal (e.g., legal, institutional) or informal (e.g., resource mobilisation to exert influence) authority to make decisions on essential tasks. This definition of control over the evaluation process facilitates the task of constructing indicators for observing who holds control in the decision-making pertaining to various tasks throughout the evaluation process, but does not explain how those stakeholders come to gain or lose such control over decision-making. In other words, we observe the outcomes of the distribution of control over the evaluation process but do not understand the process of distributing that control in and of itself.

Our experience conducting multiple participatory evaluation processes suggests that the distribution of control during the evaluation process can be better explained by drawing on the concept of power relations between stakeholders, as done by Weaver and Cousins (2004). These authors propose a five-dimension model that conceptually distinguishes between the dimension of control over technical decisions and the dimension of power relations between stakeholders, the latter being related to indicators such as conflict among stakeholders (Quiroz *et al*., 2022), the capacity of these parties to generate change, and the degree of alignment of their interests.

In the case under study, one of the moments of greatest conflict arose when interpreting the results of the qualitative study regarding the relevance of the support provided by families to the young people with disabilities participating in the programme. The Foundation's management and a professional from an international body defended the position that on occasion families do not support the process of change desired by their sons or daughters with disabilities owing to a lack of commitment, while family members and persons with disabilities argued that it is typically the mothers who have to assume this role without themselves having the necessary support to do so. What is important here: the participation of stakeholders in the interpretation of results, or which interpretation of results ultimately prevails? Unlike the dimension of control over the evaluation process, which is confined to identifying who participates in the task of interpreting results, the dimension of power relations understands that what is fundamental in a participatory evaluation is which interpretation of results prevails, by virtue of the positive or negative consequences this may have for the interests, needs, and perspectives of stakeholders. For instance, maintaining that families are not committed to the process of change in their sons or daughters with disabilities, while disregarding the lack of support experienced by mother-carers, may lead to an overloading of the latter and may affect their physical and emotional wellbeing.

The preceding point also draws our attention to the role of the evaluator in participatory evaluation in the face of conflicts emerging between stakeholders in asymmetrical relationships. My experience in such situations has been, first, to recognise and make visible the existence of a conflict of interpretations; then, to facilitate the adequate expression of the perspective of both parties with regard to the conflict; and, if necessary, to defend the position of the less powerful stakeholder by means of the resources at my disposal as an evaluator. In this way, it is possible to sufficiently balance the asymmetries and generate the conditions necessary for the interpretation of the less powerful stakeholder to be able to claim, in the public sphere, a portion of reality that is observable by all parties.

This position derives from the assumption that participatory evaluation is grounded in social relations between the evaluator and stakeholders, and that the manner in which these relations unfold will have repercussions simultaneously on the process of knowledge construction (the epistemological dimension) and on that of decision-making (the political dimension) (Chouinard & Cousins, 2013). That said, the evaluator may also on occasion commit the error of exercising epistemic violence against stakeholders, by interpreting or privileging an interpretation of data that portrays the other (e.g., the beneficiary) as inferior on the basis of a power asymmetry (Teo, 2010); that is, the programme evaluator could contribute to perpetuating inequalities in the process of knowledge production and decision-making within the evaluation, by placing the interests of the study above the quality of the intervention or the wellbeing of users (Daher *et al*., 2023).

Another interesting aspect of this exercise is that it has allowed for a contrast between the subjective perception of the participatory process and more objective data arising from the application of the instrument proposed by Daigneault *et al*. (2012). In this regard, it may be noted that the evaluator held a view of the evaluation as having been less participatory than what was revealed by the analysis of the evaluation process from the perspective of the three dimensions. Indeed, it was surprising to note the broad diversity of stakeholders who participated in this evaluation, the fact that all of these stakeholders were involved in every essential task of the evaluation process, and additionally that they achieved significant control over several of these tasks, which had not been planned for. For example, an occupational therapist from the programme team progressively acquired a more significant role, taking part in multiple activities throughout the process (e.g., information management, instrument adaptation, data collection) and becoming an authoritative voice within the evaluation.

Something similar was recorded within the Evaluation Committee, where one mother/carer and two young people with intellectual disabilities assumed a prominent role at each of the meetings, taking the floor to express their opinions, suggestions, and disagreements.

These participation practices on the part of certain stakeholders within the evaluation are consistent with a definition of participatory evaluation as one that seeks to give preferential treatment to the voices and decisions of the least powerful and most affected (Jackson & Kassam, 1998). At the same time, these

practices may be considered as forms of transformative participatory evaluation insofar as they succeed in empowering stakeholders through the recognition and respect of their knowledge in the process of knowledge construction (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998). In the words of Latin American Participatory Action Research (PAR), it is possible for research to contribute to the democratisation of our societies and to the self-determination of popular groups if we cease to attribute superiority to formal knowledge and instead value popular knowledge in the analysis of the processes and structures that perpetuate oppression and inequalities (Fals-Borda & Rahman, 1991).

To conclude, we should like to highlight the value of the original participatory evaluation model (Weaver & Cousins, 2004), and in particular the instrument proposed by Daigneault and Jacob (2009) on the basis of that model. The application of this instrument to a participatory evaluation case conducted by the author of this article has shown it to be parsimonious, offering three well-operationalised dimensions of participation with a clear and coherent scoring system. In this way, any evaluator could use this instrument to examine their own practice, identify its strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, and plan the participation of stakeholders in future evaluation processes in a more detailed and effective manner.

Lessons learned

Having conducted this analytical exercise on the participatory evaluation process that I had the opportunity to lead, I am in a position to share the following lessons learned.

In the first place, the instrument used to carry out this exercise has been of great value, as it has enabled me to examine the evaluation process exhaustively through the lens of three dimensions of participation, and thus to better understand the essential characteristics that distinguish a participatory evaluation from one that is not. I hope that this exercise may serve as an illustration for other evaluators so that they too may develop a more nuanced understanding of what a participatory evaluation entails, thereby increasing their capacity to plan, implement, and critically appraise the participatory evaluations for which they are responsible.

In the second place, it is possible to conclude, at least in the light of this case, that an adequate understanding of a participatory evaluation requires taking the dimension of power relations into account, and with it, the oppressive patterns that may be reproduced among the stakeholders of an evaluation process. While the dimensions of control over the evaluation process, diversity of stakeholders, and extent of involvement can capture what is essential and observable in a participatory evaluation process, the oppression experienced by the 'users' of the programmes we

evaluate remains present even when we do not 'see' it. In the case of the TILP, the multiple forms of violence, discrimination, injustice, and inequality experienced on a daily basis by persons with disabilities and their carers can easily be reproduced in participation processes if the evaluator is not aware of the presence of a view of disability understood as impairment and of the ideology of normality that underlies it. Thus, recognising and understanding these power asymmetries and oppressive patterns gives us the possibility of planning participation processes that can be liberating for the oppressed, and for ourselves as oppressors.

In the third place, this exercise has made me aware that a fundamental aspect of the evaluator's role in a participatory evaluation is that of facilitating the resolution of conflicts as a driver of learning and transformation in relations between stakeholders. In this way, evaluation may contribute not only to opening spaces for participation that are meaningful for stakeholders, but also to wellbeing and the reduction of the inequalities that particularly affect oppressed groups striving for greater democratisation of our societies. That said, facilitating the resolution of conflicts is a major challenge that demands preparation on our part.

In the fourth place, I should like to note that participatory evaluation can have positive effects from the perspective of stakeholders. For instance, when the Director of the Foundation was consulted regarding the perceived benefits of her participation in this evaluation, she noted that it had served to validate what they do internally within the organisation and externally with other organisations in the field of disability; to increase institutional recognition not only as 'implementers' of a public programme but also as an organisation that designs and evaluates its implementation; to have a clearer, more objective, and more concrete vision of the needs of the programme and of what is required with and for persons with disabilities; and to establish focal points for continuous improvement.

In sum, it seems important to close this article by reaffirming the fundamental significance of the evaluation community continuing to learn and conduct research on the participatory evaluations taking place in the region, and of the knowledge produced being used to train colleagues, implementers, decision-makers, and citizens in the theory and practice of participatory evaluation.

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Chapter 3

Evaluation, Inclusion and Democracy in Latin America: Experiences and Lessons Learned

The Case of Santa Teresa (Chile)

Fernanda Arriaza

Abstract

The participatory evaluation presented here proved to be a profoundly human process: from the commitment to placing people at the centre and allowing their narrative to determine the impact of the community work, to the entirely voluntary nature of the involvement of all those who took part. Those who participated were convinced that it was a necessary step to take. This chapter reports the findings of the evaluation of the "Working Groups" (Mesas de Trabajo), an intervention mechanism used by the organisation TECHO as a means of contributing to the search for solutions to the main social problems affecting informal settlements or low-income neighbourhoods in Latin America. Given the importance of the Working Groups, an evaluation was designed to examine their strengths and weaknesses. The main finding of this participatory evaluation was the mechanism's high capacity to manage and implement projects, achieving its proposed objectives. Furthermore, its effectiveness was a significant source of legitimacy within the community regarding the work it carried out, reinforcing the standing of its members and, in particular, that of its leader.

Keywords

Working Group, community organisation, participation, leadership, volunteering.

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The institutional context

Since the mid-1990s, Chile has had a robust monitoring and evaluation system that collects and generates information on the performance of public programmes and institutions, with a view to supporting decision-making on the allocation and use of public resources (Ministerio de Hacienda, 2023). The consolidation of this system has been the result of its institutionalisation through three milestone events:

- In 1997, the first *ex post* evaluations of Government Programmes were conducted;
- In 2003, the regulations established by Ministerial Decree No. 1,177 of the Ministry of Finance were approved, granting the Budget Directorate (Dirección de Presupuestos, DIPRES) the authority to carry out evaluations of social programmes, productive development programmes, and institutional development programmes included in the budgets of public services; and finally
- In 2021, by means of Decree No. 2,068, the *Regulations for the operation of the evaluation system for public programmes and institutions* were approved, as established in Article 52 of Legislative Decree No. 1,263 (Organic Law Decree on Finance Administration of the State).

The decree in question is resolute in its pursuit of results and from its very first article it mandates that annual evaluations be carried out of social programmes, productive development programmes, and institutional development programmes included in public service budgets. In line with the above, it establishes six evaluation lines:

- *Government Programme Evaluation*, which must consider the following dimensions: justification of the programme, design, key aspects of its organisation and management, and results and performance analysed against the criteria of effectiveness, efficiency, quality and economy.
- *Programme Impact Evaluation*: through the application of different analytical models, intermediate and final results will be evaluated on the basis of experimental and quasi-experimental, prospective and retrospective methodologies.
- *Institutional Expenditure Evaluation*: the effectiveness and efficiency of the institution's expenditure in the provision of goods and services will be evaluated, in line with its strategic objectives.
- *Focused Scope Evaluation*: specific aspects of programmes relating to design and/or implementation will be analysed, as well as all other aspects necessary to determine the correct use of public resources.
- *Sectoral Evaluation*: seeks to identify the programme offer relevant to the area of public policy, as well as to analyse and evaluate the design and performance of the programmes and initiatives that form part of said offer.
- *Expenditure Review*: will examine the effective implementation of programmes and the management of institutions and/or expenditure execution mechanisms used by those institutions.

The programmes to be evaluated are determined by a *Ministerial Decree* (Ministry of Finance), following a selection process based on proposals put forward by various actors on an inter-ministerial committee comprising representatives from the Ministries of Economy, Development and Tourism, of Social Development and Family, and of Finance, via the aforementioned DIPRES, which is also the body responsible for chairing the committee. This body facilitates alignment with the National Evaluation and Productivity Commission (Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Productividad, CNEP), which is responsible for promoting the evaluation of public policies and collaborating in the strengthening the evaluation system of the state. In addition, the National Congress may add or recommend new evaluations during the passage of the Budget Law.

During 2023, 16 evaluations were completed across 4 *ex post* evaluation lines (Ministerio de Hacienda, 2023): 8 Government Programme Evaluations; 5 Focused Scope Evaluations; 1 Sectoral Evaluation; and 2 Impact Evaluations.

In line with the strengthening of evaluation and monitoring in Chile, it is public knowledge that the Centre for Learning in Evaluation and Results for Latin America and the Caribbean (CLEAR-LAC) began operating in the country in 2024, based at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. The Centre has the backing of the Global Evaluation Initiative (GEI), the support of the World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group (IEG), and the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) of the United Nations Development Programme.

The scenarios described above —both in the public and private spheres— highlight the pivotal importance of evaluation in the country. However, this does not automatically permeate civil society organisations. On analysing the context, one might infer that evaluation capacities tend to be concentrated in small groups of experts whose services carry high costs, which prove inaccessible to many organisations that direct their resources towards intervention work in communities.

The experience under evaluation

TECHO is an organisation made up of young volunteers and residents of informal settlements in Latin America. Through joint action, they work to overcome the situation of poverty in which millions of people live. Operating in 18 countries across the region, since 1997 TECHO has built over 140,000 emergency homes and mobilised 1.5 million volunteers.

TECHO's work in Latin America focuses on fostering connections on the ground between communities and young volunteers in informal settlements (*tugurios, villas, favelas* or *campamentos*), which are organised through the Working Group mechanism. This constitutes a regular working space where volunteers and community members meet to discuss, reflect, and reach decisions on the community's interests, in order to manage collective initiatives that contribute to the settlement's wellbeing and strengthen community

capacities (TECHO, 2016). In this regard, TECHO–Chile, in its conceptual and methodological framework for the Working Group, defines it as follows:

> formal and democratic meeting spaces led by settlement leaders and young volunteers. These meetings promote community organisation to develop initiatives that address local issues, fostering supportive and inclusive ways of relating to others and a commitment to playing an active role in social change. The Working Group constitutes a micro-social space for training in rights and democratic skills (participation, listening to others, carrying out joint projects, transparency, etc.) which seeks to expand and be replicated in other spaces of civic engagement, exerting influence on the global level through local organisation. (TECHO, 2016, p. 16)

By 2018, this initiative had been developed in 438 communities across the 18 countries where TECHO operated, with a total of 173 communities in Chile, 46 of which were in the Metropolitan Region and 22 in informal settlements.

Working Groups are also spaces for popular education and training, for decision-making and community coordination. The former, because those involved build knowledge through the sharing and complementarity of the ideas and worldviews that each person or group brings — that is, everyone both learns and teaches something, in a permanent and dialectical process. The latter, because that learning gives rise to ideas that must be planned, implemented, and evaluated, which requires collective decision-making involving different sectors and groups within the community.

In TECHO's more than 20 years of experience working alongside communities, the Working Groups have given rise to various housing, community infrastructure, education, employment, and community development projects. These were generally evaluated by means of qualitative or quantitative instruments measuring the satisfaction and degree of efficiency of the projects implemented in the communities. However, those evaluations focused on the projects rather than on the Working Groups themselves, leaving unexamined the functioning of this intervention space which, as noted above, involves participation and the co-construction of solutions. Considering its extensive regional reach and its value as a catalyst for transformation, it was highly relevant to carry out an evaluation in a horizontal and co-responsible manner, consistent with the purpose, logic, and practice of the Working Group.

Given that the Working Group is the core unit of TECHO's work, the evaluation findings were intended to serve the purpose of improving key aspects of the intervention by adopting a broad analytical process for reflecting on how the intervention work is carried out. In this regard, the present chapter takes the Working Group as its object of study, through the case of Santa Teresa, an informal settlement in the municipality (*comuna*) of San Bernardo, in the Metropolitan Region of Chile.

Case Study: Campamento Santa Teresa

Campamento Santa Teresa is located in the municipality of San Bernardo, in the southern area of Santiago. Based on data from the 2017 Census, San Bernardo is recognised as one of Chile's most populous municipalities, with 301,313 inhabitants. In terms of its socioeconomic characteristics, the municipality has an income poverty rate of 9.2%, while the multidimensional poverty rate stands at 22%, according to the Report on Municipal Poverty Estimates (*Informe de Estimaciones Comunales de Pobreza*), based on data from the 2015 Casen survey by the Ministry of Social Development (2018).

The site on which this community stands was formerly a bus terminal, which, after falling into disuse and becoming an informal dumping ground, began to be cleaned up by a group of families who settled there between 2010 and 2012. The community comprises 52 families organised through a steering committee made up of three people (treasurer, secretary, and president). The steering committee meets periodically and reports its activities to the community Assembly (25 families with regular participation). In terms of its organisational structure, the Working Group functioned as a space for strengthening the steering committee's work and for integration with the Assembly; it was made up on a stable basis of the president, secretary, treasurer, residents who regularly attended activities, and TECHO volunteers, meeting periodically at the community's meeting room and working on a range of projects.

The main characteristics of the community's living conditions relate to the absence of paved access roads and partial access to basic services. Key figures illustrating the situation of the settlement are reflected in the diagnostic survey, a tool that TECHO administers every two years in the community. In 2016, the overcrowding rate stood at 33%, the unemployment rate reached 60%, and 80% of adults had not completed their formal education.

With regard to the normative and legal conditions, the land was held under an informal rental arrangement based on a verbal agreement with the landowner, which ran for two years from 2017 to 2019, with the possibility of purchase by the families currently living there.

Between 2017 and 2018, the projects carried out in collaboration with TECHO numbered 22, covering activities in education, vocational training, environmental improvements, and the regularisation of the legal situation. Some examples of activities included: remedial education, preparation for external examinations, a self-managed football workshop, training of residents as classroom assistants tu run an educational space called *Techo para Aprender* (roof for learning), an outing to *Cirque du Soleil*, improvements to the community meeting room, participatory neighbourhood design with *Construye Solar* (Build Solar), a tour of the San Francisco neighbourhood, the signing of a letter of commitment between the steering committee and the housing development department for the evaluation of a housing project, and support in negotiating the land purchase price with the landowner.

The evaluation process

In order to gain a thorough understanding of the Working Group's work, it was necessary to evaluate how its processes, projects, and objectives had unfolded. It was decided to carry out a participatory evaluation, as this allows for an in-depth understanding of the reality of the communities, strengthens the role and identity of each of the stakeholders involved, and generates new approaches to information gathering. At the same time, it is considered an intervention process in its own right, given its capacity to foster integration among those involved, thus constituting an approach consistent with the methodological strategies developed within the Working Group.

Participatory evaluations provide information that makes it possible to guide decisions, improve processes, and generate lessons for management. The participatory approach entails a series of benefits associated with the democratisation of certain spaces and the development of a holistic vision. As proposed in the handbook *Seguimiento y evaluación participativos basados en los resultados* (Coupal, 2000), participatory evaluation is an intervention within the community that:

- Strengthens the capacity of all stakeholders involved to reflect, analyse, propose solutions, and take action.
- Learns, readjusts, and acts by taking proactive corrective measures in order to achieve results, add or remove activities, or change strategy.
- Is accountable at all levels: to the collective, the organisation, and those responsible for the implementation and funding of the project.
- Makes it possible to recognise and celebrate successes, while drawing out lessons and opportunities for improvement.

In this way, participatory evaluation is an ideal process on account of the correspondence that exists between this approach, the evaluation process, the objectives of the Working Group and the mission of TECHO.

Specifically, the evaluation process was divided into four phases:

1. **Training and design:** during this stage, training was received from Foceval (2015–2018) and, alongside this, the evaluation matrix was designed.
2. **Information gathering:** carried out through the use of four instruments.
3. **Systematisation and analysis.**
4. **Validation of information within the community:** through an open invitation to residents of the settlement, the main findings of the process were presented in consolidated form.

Evaluation design

The first phase involved forming an evaluation team and focusing on what was expected to be evaluated. For this purpose, the organisation was represented by a group of members of the Santa Teresa steering committee

—numbering between three and five participants— whom TECHO relied upon to coordinate and carry out the activities of the Working Group. They were joined by volunteers and employed staff, thus constituting the evaluation team[2], which agreed to designate the Working Group as the object of evaluation.

The involvement of the Santa Teresa participants came about on a voluntary basis, as a consequence of their close working relationship with the TECHO team, who proposed that they take part in a process through which, in a participatory manner and by involving more community members, they could learn about the results of the work that had been carried out to date. This prospect became even more significant given the steering committee's interest in increasing the participation of residents in activities aimed at improving the settlement, and in highlighting the work that the group had been doing in the community.

This initiative was made possible through the support of the Foceval project (2015–2018) of the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval). This project aimed to strengthen the role of evaluation in decision-making and policy steering through capacity building in the region. For TECHO, the collaboration with Foceval enabled the development of a participatory evaluation process of a high technical standard, characterised by the incorporation of training sessions and knowledge exchange, and critical reflection among civil society organisations.

Throughout this process, the Foceval facilitators organised various workshops and field visits aimed at providing training in evaluation content and at designing an evaluation plan suited to the needs of the institutions that took part in these spaces. As a product of these workshops, and using participatory approaches and methodologies, the evaluation team — in cooperation with the Foceval facilitators — produced an *Evaluation Matrix for the Santa Teresa settlement*, as a descriptive and exploratory tool designed to understand the central aspects of the Working Group. The matrix brought together the evaluation questions, the criteria governing those questions, the objectives to be evaluated, the potential use of the results, and the indicators that would enable the measurement of the questions and their dimensions. It is important to note that the matrix was designed by the evaluation team and subsequently validated by participants at the Working Group.

The matrix comprised six criteria:

- *Effectiveness*: establishes the degree to which the Working Group fulfilled the projects proposed by the community —that is, whether it is an effective working instrument—.

[2] The team involved in developing the participatory evaluation project was as follows: María Jesús Silva (Director, Social Research Centre – TECHO Internacional); Fernanda Arriaza (Director of Community Management – TECHO Internacional); Catalina González (Regional Director, Metropolitan Region – TECHO Chile); Matthias Casasco (Housing Solutions Project Manager – TECHO Chile); Valeria Paz Lazo (Evaluation and Diagnostics Coordinator, Social Research Centre – TECHO Chile); Amalia Llebul (President of the Working Group – Santa Teresa, San Bernardo, Chile); Juan Carlos Sanz (Foceval Evaluator); Esteban Tapella (Foceval Evaluator); Javier Araneda (Foceval Young Evaluator).

- *Relevance*: establishes whether the Working Group responds to the needs or problems of the community.
- *Learning*: characterises the conditions that influence the functioning of the Working Group.
- *Participation*: describes the roles and degrees of participation involved.
- *Sustainability*: identifies forms of collaboration embedded within the community.
- *Impact*: seeks to establish the effects generated by the intervention.

Thus, for each evaluation criterion a question was formulated, which were central to the development of the information collection instruments:

- Which projects were carried out through the Working Group?
- How are the needs addressed by the intervention prioritised?
- What characteristics and conditions influence the functioning of the Working Group?
- What has the participation process in the Working Group been like?
- What co-management capacities did the Working Group generate within the community?
- What contribution did the Working Group make to the community?

Information gathering tools

Four tools were developed for data collection which, using a participatory approach, were designed to be applied in the context of the settlement and to facilitate the participation of as many people as possible involved in the Working Group, thereby broadening the range of responses and opinions that could emerge from the data collection process. The four tools developed were as follows:

1. Board Game: Defining the Working Group

The purpose of this tool is to elaborate a definition of the Working Group that arises from the participants themselves, offering as a prompt a set of words that may or may not be associated with the concept. Discussion based on a range of words facilitates reflection and the prioritisation of what is most relevant. The activity progresses from the individual level to the collective construction of a single definition of the Working Group, which must be agreed upon and shared by the members of the mechanism under evaluation (the Working Group). The activity opens up space for debate and reflection, creating tension — and seeking consensus — around the main perceptions of what each person understands and incorporates regarding the Working Group.

2. Timeline

The purpose of this tool is to arrange a sequence of events or milestones on a given topic in order to visualise clearly the chronological relationship between them. Events and dates must be identified in the chronological order (start and finish dates) in which they occurred, drawing on individual and collective memory to reconstruct a story seen from different angles, facilitating the prioritisation of the most significant events. The activity is enriched by having a broad set of games and pedagogical materials that encourage the participants' creativity, so that they can integrate the most significant events through photographs, drawings, and/or messages, making it possible to observe changes, trajectories, and the influx and outflow of families in the settlement.

3. Board Game: Horse Race

Through the playful representation of a horse race, depicted on a board game, a group of community members and volunteers are invited to share their views on a series of statements that prompt participants to reflect on the functioning, achievements, and challenges of the Working Group. First, participants are divided into different groups according to their interests and roles in the community, then they move around a board with different squares on which they land, according to the number indicated by the dice. The squares are in six different colours representing the six criteria on which the evaluation questions in the matrix are based. When a player lands on a given square, the game facilitator reads a card of that colour and the participants debate the question or statement written on the selected card. In this way, the game and the dialogues that arise around the cards yield a range of information relating to the 6 evaluation questions.

4. In-Depth Interviews

In order to complement and support the information gathered through the activities described above, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with two key community actors: a resident and the president of the steering committee. This approach sought to reach data saturation by creating a space of trust in which they could freely express their views.

Field application of the tools

The fieldwork was carried out between September and October 2018 through periodic work by the members of the evaluation team, respecting the activity schedule established in advance by the community. To implement each of the activities, pilot tests were conducted, validations were carried out with key stakeholders, implementation guidelines were drawn up, facilitators were trained, and residents were invited door-to-door.

Tool	Number of participants	Roles
Defining the Working Group	6	Steering committee and volunteers
Timeline	30	Residents and volunteers
Horse race	20	Residents, steering committee and volunteers
In-depth interview	2	Resident and president of the steering committee

Table 1. *(Source: Author's own elaboration)*

Systematisation and validation

The information gathered through the use of these tools was transcribed and systematised in order to facilitate its analysis.

Finally, two information validation sessions were held, using the game *Experts Meeting*. This involved participants using a board with the options 'AGREE', 'DISAGREE' and 'UNCERTAIN' to indicate whether or not they accepted a series of statements capturing the main findings and conclusions of the data collection and analysis processes.

The first session was held with two volunteers from TECHO (a man and a woman) who accompanied the Working Group, which made it possible both to capture their impressions of the results of the process and to test the methodology of the game.

The community validation was carried out through a Working Group gathering, which brought together 16 people who, in four groups, went through the same exercise and subsequently reached collective conclusions.

Main findings

Effectiveness

Based on the information gathered, it can be concluded that the vast majority of the projects carried out by the Working Group were completed with a high degree of achievement of the proposed objectives. The high regard in which residents hold the projects that have been implemented —and their recognition of the significant contribution these have made to the settlement— has contributed to the legitimisation of the Working Group's work, and in particular of the president of the steering committee, to whom these achievements are attributed.

On the other hand, while a high level of effectiveness is acknowledged in the development of projects, these have been predominantly infrastructure-related (for example, the construction of a community meeting room, erection of a perimeter fence, waste collection

management, and maintenance of septic tanks), with little attention given to other types of project (development of skills and capacities in management, teamwork, and leadership), which are perceived as undervalued and as weak points by the steering committee and the Working Group, and are not regarded as priorities by residents.

Relevance

From the perspective of the settlement's members, the Working Group's work has revolved around their main problems and needs (security and improvements to living conditions), and similarly the initiatives and projects it has managed have contributed significantly to improving living conditions. Even though there has been no direct participation in the full process of each project, the projects have proved relevant, which lends legitimacy to the Working Group's capacity to identify the community's principal problems and prioritise them in projects and activities.

While the relevance of the Working Group is evident (given that it responds to community needs), difficulties arise when these achievements are attributed solely to the steering committee leader, since this generates a perception of dependence on her management and renders invisible the work of others who might be involved. Moreover, because projects related to building capacities within the community have not been prioritised, the relevance of the Working Group on this point is called into question: while the projects have contributed substantially to improving the quality of life of the settlement (needs expressed by residents), the other aspect has not been developed —which constitutes a significant shortcoming in the community—.

Learning

It can be concluded that, on the one hand, if residents do not know what the Working Group is, this means they do not understand it as an open space in which they can participate, nor do they know its objective or what takes place within it. Consequently, the lack of information about this space directly influences the low level of resident participation.

On the other hand, the fact that the president of the steering committee is rated highly in terms of the implementation and relevance of the projects she leads within the settlement, yet is rated poorly in terms of her interpersonal relations, affects the functioning of the Working Group: a leadership style that is inhibiting is also one that constrains participation, resulting, for example, in not all residents feeling part of the projects decided upon within the community, since this type of leadership (among other things) means there is no space for deliberation through which to reach consensus.

With regard to this evaluation criterion, it can be inferred that the good relationship between the volunteers and

the community steering committee has had a positive influence on both parties' motivation to work together and be active in the pursuit of shared objectives. The good relationship also extends to residents and volunteers, with the former being grateful for and pleased by the active participation of the young people. This contributes to residents' motivation to cooperate in the pursuit of shared objectives.

Finally, regarding the decision-making process that has been established within the Working Group — whereby volunteers and the president make decisions and the rest of the steering committee board validates them — it can be said that although this is an efficient mechanism that in some instances positively influences the functioning of the Working Group by enabling rapid progress in decision-making, it is not a mechanism that generates sustainability, in the sense that it does not allow the other members of the steering committee to develop this kind of skills.

Participation

It was observed that, while the interventions and/or projects carried out are relevant to the community, it is important to highlight that decisions continue to be made by the steering committee together with the volunteers in the Working Group. A representative decision-making process is therefore identified, but one that does not involve the direct participation of residents.

It was in fact observed that there is no clarity regarding who should participate in the Working Group, which is perceived by the community as a space for the exclusive participation of the steering committee. While this perception generates dissatisfaction on the part of the president, no direct efforts to involve more residents have been observed. It should also be noted that, while the Working Group is declared by TECHO to be an open space, it is not clear in what way the volunteers and the organisation seek to make it effectively so.

Finally, by concentrating decision-making within the Working Group since the Assembly began calling on more residents to participate, a tension emerged between two organisational models: one that operates under the logic of direct participation in the Assembly, and another that operates under a logic of representation, whereby the Working Group is the decision-making body in order to be more efficient and to avoid conflict in the Assembly. Residents thus delegate to the steering committee the responsibility of representing their interests —which has been possible thanks to the Working Group's current ability to identify the settlement's genuine priorities—.

Sustainability

This criterion relates to the co-management capacities that the Working Group has generated within the community, and thus to whether it can be defined as a space moving towards sustainability. In the

first instance, the existence of certain activities self-managed by the community should contribute to progress towards a greater level of autonomy, although we see that these are generally activities arising from basic needs or emergencies (fires, water cuts, heavy rain, etc.). On the other hand, having networks beyond TECHO for the achievement of its objectives is a positive element and a necessary condition for developing collaborative working skills and advancing towards a *sustainable community.* However, there are also projects which, although arising from needs identified by the community, do not involve community participation at every stage, and therefore do not generate learning or leave established capacities within the community.

Furthermore, while collective spaces are created to communicate the decisions taken by the group (Assemblies) and to involve other settlement residents in the implementation of initiatives, these spaces have a purely informational character, which prevents any substantial progress towards sustainability. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that without TECHO's presence the Working Group would cease to exist, and the decision-making space — in which the leader applies her learning in project management — would be lost. Consequently, while the effectiveness and relevance of the Working Group are evident, these criteria are not sustained by community self-management in the pursuit of objectives, which points to inadequate development of the Working Group in terms of the sustainability criterion — and reveals the harm that would be caused to the community should the president step down from her role, given that self-management capacities are not distributed among other members.

Impact

In terms of impact, it is important to distinguish two dimensions of this criterion: the development of housing and habitat initiatives, and the strengthening of community capacities. With regard to the former, efforts have been well focused and directed towards improving the settlement's infrastructure conditions; as residents themselves attest, the community has improved during this recent period, which is also associated with the president's management. This is recognised by some residents, who feel safer and more settled and demonstrate a sense of belonging — reflecting a positive impact of the housing and habitat initiatives on the community—. However, with regard to the second aspect (strengthening of community capacities), some dimensions of the impact have been enhanced while others have been insufficiently developed. For example, networking and a sense of belonging have advanced, whereas organisation and participation have not been developed in a consistent manner.

The institution's role in the settlement is having positive effects and generating conditions that enable the community to advance in the achievement of its objectives, given that achievements can serve as motivational catalysts for the beneficiaries of projects,

who also witness the benefits that organisation around shared goals brings. Despite this, the community's residents do not feel themselves to be the protagonists of that impact, seeing others as the main actors in those effects.

Validation of information

The evaluation team convened and ran two workshop-format sessions, aimed at community leaders and residents, in order to report back the principal conclusions of the process. The objective was for the groups that had participated at different stages and moments in the process to recognise the information, feel that it reflected their experience, and thereby validate it.

The attendees endorsed both the information relating to the Working Group and the coordination space for the actions carried out by TECHO with the steering committee. Specifically in regard to the problems concerning the physical condition of the settlement, as opposed to those relating to communication and interpersonal relations. They also highlighted that the Assemblies should take on a greater role, as they are the community's main space for participation.

Another key finding validated in this session was the role of the president as the anchor of the Working Group: without her direct involvement, projects in the settlement could not progress. At the same time, participants acknowledged that, while the Working Group was a space of trust and cordiality that facilitated the development of actions for the benefit of the settlement, this interpersonal dynamic was concentrated within the steering committee and did not extend to the wider community, preventing other people from being incorporated.

Finally, participants highlighted that, while the Working Group had contributed to improving the community's living conditions, there were communication and interpersonal problems that had not been addressed.

Final reflections

Through a participatory evaluation approach that reflects different voices on the work of the Working Group, the aim is to strengthen the community's self-management capacities —recognising that evaluation, far from being an isolated process, makes a contribution to the institution, its beneficiaries, and the intervention itself, which is based on collaborative, rigorous, and deliberate work—.

In line with this, an important challenge is identified: transforming the role of settlement residents from recipients or beneficiaries to active subjects with rights. It is necessary, however, to contextualise the lack of participation on a different scale and to investigate its

structural causes in order to understand the extent of the community problem being identified: the national reality in terms of participation. According to SERVEL, in the 2017 Presidential, Parliamentary, and Regional Councillors' elections, 53.3% of the population did not vote. In the San Bernardo municipality this figure is higher, reaching 57.3%. In addition, according to CASEN (2015), at the national level 73.5% of the population does not participate in any organisation or group (religious, neighbours' associations, sports clubs, and other associations). These figures show that the lack of participation in the settlement has deeper structural roots and is explained by national-level phenomena. This points to the need to focus determined efforts on promoting participation, given that one of TECHO's aims is to foster community development.

The process described in this chapter, in addition to being carried out in Chile, was also conducted between 2018 and 2019 in four other settlements in Mexico, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Ecuador. With varying levels of participation from residents, the evaluation teams were made up of Working Group leaders (approximately 5–8 people) and volunteers and staff from the respective TECHO offices. The factor that stimulated community interest was common to all: increasing resident participation by highlighting the community's work and potential through organisation.

With the direct support of Foceval in the evaluation process at the Santa Teresa settlement in Chile, it was decided that the team from TECHO's international office —which provided guidance to the country offices on community intervention— would extend its advisory role to the territorial teams in Mexico, Uruguay, Paraguay, and Ecuador, generating a form of parallelism between the activities being promoted in those countries and those being developed in Chile.

The participants who remained consistent members of the evaluation teams across the five countries were the volunteers and staff from the TECHO offices. With regard to community representatives, their participation varied across the different stages: they were most actively involved in information collection and community validation, partially involved in capacity building and design, and not involved at all in systematisation and analysis. As for the first two stages, their principal role was in discussions about the object of evaluation and in problem-framing to construct the guiding questions for the process. Moreover, while their role was more consultative, they were key in validating the different information collection instruments designed for gathering data from different community actors.

The evaluation experience described in this chapter was carried out on the basis of exploratory and immersive work developed alongside people who are on the front line of community organisation. According to Shahra Razavi (2007, cited in Faur, 2014), community organisations are one of the key care-providing entities, alongside the state, the family and the market. Community care thus emerges spontaneously, yet in a coordinated manner, as an entity that works to fill gaps in access to multiple services.

One of the common factors characterising those who represented their territories on the evaluation teams (both in Chile and in the other four countries mentioned) was that the majority were women. In the cases of Chile and Uruguay, the representatives were all women, and in the other three countries women were always the predominant group. These leaders carried out daily actions to improve their territories, consolidating a relationship with the community that was tied not only to a sense of belonging but was also reinforced by the urgency of improving, among many other demands, living conditions —through the mobilisation of residents in the development of entirely voluntary actions—.

As has been described throughout this account, it was a profoundly human process: from the commitment to placing people at the centre and allowing their narrative to determine the impact of the Working Group, to the agreement by which both the technical teams and residents from all the countries were involved on a wholly voluntary basis.

These characteristics meant that those who participated were convinced of the value of implementing and applying participatory evaluation, but at the same time this was subject to their work and personal commitments and to external factors that may have interfered with the organisational dynamic: such as the COVID-19 pandemic that affected the world in 2020, and the turnover and changes of TECHO collaborators who participated in the respective processes. These conditions prevented the institutionalisation of the methodology for evaluating the results and impact of the organisation's work.

Furthermore, in keeping with TECHO's ethos of driving its projects through the efforts of young volunteers with limited on-the-ground experience, it was necessary for the professionals responsible for coordinating community intervention in each country to be involved in the evaluation process for a significant amount of time —which was on occasion hampered by highly dynamic and demanding work schedules—. This in turn caused the planning of evaluation activities to be postponed or displaced, extending the time required to obtain results beyond what was expected and creating the impression that the process was overly lengthy.

Finally, and no less importantly, another factor that prevented the institutionalisation of participatory evaluation is the level of priority that civil society organisations tend to assign to evaluation — something observable from the simplest action, such as not including it as part of project management, through to more political decisions, such as not allocating human and financial resources to build an organisational culture around committed participation, cross-cutting accountability, and continuous improvement.

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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.

Citation

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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.

[3] Throughout 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 Chile[4]

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 MSDF 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 Servicio País intervention in the municipality of Putaendo, 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 Putaendo 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 Putaendo, 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), Putaendo'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 closure[6].

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 Committees[8], of the Paso la Frontera Cultural Association and of the Paso Histórico women's workshop) and representatives of the municipal counterpart (DIDECO[9] 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.

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* game[10], and a *place-swapping* game[11]. 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

[8] Local organisations for Rural Drinking Water (APR).
[9] Director of the Municipal Community Development Department.
[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 questions[12], 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 form 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 in 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 consultive 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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Chapter 5

Participatory Evaluation of a Community Centre Policy

The Experience of the Compaz Network (Recife, Brazil)

Priscilla Bacalhau | Guilherme Bayma | Gabriela Lacerda | Nicole Mourad Pereira

Abstract

The Compaz Network in Recife, Brazil, is a public policy focused on the creation of community centres to combat urban violence and promote social inclusion. The participatory evaluation of this network was carried out by the Municipality of Recife with the support of CLEAR-LAB. The Compaz Network, inspired by Colombian models, seeks to reduce violence by offering educational, cultural, and sporting activities in vulnerable communities. The evaluation included the participation of municipal, academic, and civil society actors, enabling a comprehensive and detailed overview of the programme. Tools such as the Problem Tree and Theory of Change were developed, alongside surveys and focus groups with beneficiaries. The findings showed a positive perception of social impact, highlighting the reduction of violence in the areas served and the strengthening of community cohesion. The participatory process facilitated evidence-based decision-making and generated recommendations for the expansion of the programme, prioritising adaptation to local needs and the inclusion of young people in training activities.

Keywords

Participatory Evaluation, Violence Prevention, Social Inclusion, Community Centres, Rede Compaz.

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Introduction

The evaluation of public policies is a fundamental process for understanding the effectiveness and impact of governmental initiatives on the lives of citizens. Rapid evaluation is a quick form of evaluation with a flexible format and multiple agile data collection methods to underpin decision-making and aid understanding of the policy[14]. In the Brazilian context, the city of Recife, located in the North-east region of the country, has been expanding evaluation initiatives to strengthen evidence-based decision-making, seeking to identify the effects of management and the implementation of policies aimed at improving the quality of life of its population.

One such policy is the Compaz Network (Community Centres for Peace), a programme whose objective is to combat violence and promote social inclusion through community centres that offer a variety of services and activities. The policy was developed with the aim of mitigating and preventing problems associated with urban violence, as the city has a track record that makes it one of the state capitals with the highest violence rates in the country. This chapter presents a participatory rapid evaluation of the Compaz Network policy, carried out by the Municipality of Recife at municipal level with technical advisory support provided by the Center for Learning on Evaluation and Results for Lusophone Africa and Brazil (CLEARLAB).

[14] For more information on what rapid evaluation is, see *https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/rapid-evaluation*.

CLEAR-LAB is one of six centres in the CLEAR Network, all of which are located in internationally recognised academic institutions in the Global South. Based at the São Paulo School of Economics (EESP) of the Getúlio Vargas Foundation (FGV), CLEAR-LAB acts as an implementing partner of the Global Evaluation Initiative (GEI), disseminating a culture of monitoring and evaluation and evidence-informed decision-making.

Through a diverse evaluation committee, the participatory rapid evaluation of the Compaz Network sought to capture a broad and detailed view of the implementation and results achieved by the policy in the city of Recife. The methods used included the development of monitoring and evaluation tools and field research with the beneficiary population and employees of the community centres.

What follows is a presentation of the Brazilian context of public policy evaluation. The subsequent section details the Compaz Network policy. This is followed by a discussion of the details of the evaluation, from the formation of the committee through to the development of monitoring and evaluation tools, the results achieved, and the formulation of recommendations and an action plan for the continuous improvement of the policy. Finally, some lessons learned from the participatory evaluation process are discussed.

The Brazilian Context of Public Policy Evaluation

When discussing the institutionalisation of evaluation in Brazil, it is necessary to contextualise the Council for Public Policy Monitoring and Evaluation (CMAP) of the Federal Government. The Council was established in 2019 (Decree No. 9,834/2019) and comprises members from the Ministry of Planning and Budget (MPO), the Civil House (Office of the Chief of Staff), the Ministry of Finance (MF), the Ministry of Management and Innovation in Public Services (MGI), and the Office of the Comptroller General (CGU) (Ministério da Economia, Planejamento e Gestão do Brasil, 2024a).

With these actors, the CMAP performs two main functions. Firstly, the CMAP selects, in accordance with criteria of *materiality*, *criticality*, and *relevance*, the federal public policies that will be subject to evaluation during the current cycle. Secondly, following the evaluation process, the CMAP is also responsible for monitoring the implementation of the recommendations suggested by the evaluation process for each policy.

Since its creation in 2019, 60 evaluations of public policies have been carried out in areas such as social assistance, health, education, industry, commerce and entrepreneurship, infrastructure and transport, defence, justice and public security, agriculture, labour, communication, science, technology and innovation, energy, housing, and sanitation. Each evaluation cycle results in an Annual Report on Public Policy Evaluation, which is presented to the National Congress and made available to the Brazilian population (Ministério da Economia, Planejamento e Gestão do Brasil, 2024b).

By virtue of its nature within the Brazilian government, the remit of the CMAP is restricted to the federal sphere. Structurally, the CMAP is tasked with evaluating federal public policies, taking into account the use of the Union's budget. In the Brazilian context, given the country's size in terms of territory and population, efforts towards evaluation at the subnational level (state and municipal) are necessary in order to achieve policy evaluation coverage beyond federal reach.

Furthermore, given the organisation of the Brazilian state as a federated system, the states make use of their own planning instruments, implementing more public policies at the local level than the Union. Thus, there is a need for capacity for evaluation of public policies at state and municipal level —whether ex-ante or ex-post— beyond the evaluation of planning instruments alone, such as multi-year plans. Therefore, bearing in mind that both states and municipalities have elements of institutionalised evaluation (which can be measured by legislation, structures, technical capacity, practice, and use of evaluations), and that the CMAP is tasked with evaluating federal policies, targeted efforts are needed to develop evaluation capacities at subnational levels.

In this vein, CLEAR-LAB comprises various initiatives to strengthen the culture of monitoring and evaluation of public policies at subnational level. Among these, two

initiatives in particular involved the city of Recife as one of their partners: the *CLEAR Nordeste Programme* and the *Rapid Evaluation Call* (Convocatoria de Evaluación Ejecutiva).

The CLEAR Nordeste Programme is an initiative in partnership with the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA) and the Centre for Data and Knowledge Integration of the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation (Cidacs-Fiocruz). The initiative contributes to the strengthening of the culture of monitoring and evaluation of public policies and programmes in state governments and municipalities in the Brazilian North-east, a region encompassing nine Brazilian states, including Pernambuco, whose capital is the city of Recife. In general, the North-east region presents lower economic and social development indicators than other regions of the country, such as the South-east and the South (Barros, 2011). For this reason, initiatives focused on the North-east can contribute to the development of more effective policies and to the reduction of regional inequality in the country. The CLEAR Nordeste Programme operates through a network comprising public administrations, universities, and social and private sector organisations dedicated to the subject, and supports training activities and the construction of monitoring and evaluation systems (FGV CLEAR Nordeste, 2024).

Meanwhile, the Rapid Evaluation Call launched by CLEAR-LAB in 2021 had as its main objective the contribution to the development of evaluation competencies through technical advisory support in evaluation to public administration bodies in Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe. The technical advisory support consisted in the delivery of an online course on rapid evaluation and support for the evaluation of policies selected through the process. Technical support was provided through the delivery of training workshops and participatory meetings aimed at accompanying, facilitating, and providing methodological support for the activities of rapid evaluation implementation. Among the main requirements was institutional and technical diversity in the composition of the evaluation committee, which had to be made up of representatives of entities connected to the public policy to be evaluated. One of the policies selected by the Call to receive advisory support in evaluation was the Compaz Network of Recife, Brazil.

The Institutionalisation of Evaluation at Municipal Level and Context for the Implementation of the Compaz Network

Recife, capital of the state of Pernambuco in north-eastern Brazil, is the ninth most populous capital in Brazil, with 1.5 million inhabitants (IBGE, 2022), and one of the most violent in the country. In 2007 it recorded a homicide rate of 75.4 per 100,000 inhabitants, the second highest rate among the 27 Brazilian state

capitals (Atlas, 2019). In the face of this social challenge, in 2016 the Recife City Council (Prefeitura do Recife) inaugurated the first Community Centre for Peace, the Compaz, which was founded on the principles of violence prevention, territorial outreach, and a culture of peace. By 2024, eight years after the inauguration of the first Compaz centre, there are now six units in the city, constituting the Compaz Network.

In parallel, the Recife City Council also invested in good planning and management practices, developing institutional maturity across its secretariats. In this regard, project monitoring and results verification activities were already well established by 2021, when the transition took place between mayors Geraldo Júlio, who had been in office since 2013, and João Campos, both of the Brazilian Socialist Party (PSB). Consequently, political stability, combined with a consolidated organisational culture of results-based management, benefitted the implementation of new actions to promote the evaluation of public policies and the use of evidence in municipal executive management. This environment enabled, among other outcomes, the development and implementation of the participatory evaluation of the Compaz Network in 2022.

Alongside the process of institutionalisation at the federal level — with the establishment of the CMAP — and other examples at the subnational level, the city of Recife created a department to strengthen the culture of municipal policy evaluation. In 2021, the Centre for Public Policy Evaluation and Data Science (NAPCD) was created, which directly supports the Executive Secretariat for Planning and Management (SEPLAN) of the Recife City Council in its institutional activities to implement the municipal administration model. In this way, the NAPCD actively participated in the preparation of diagnostic reports and analyses that underpinned the formulations of the *2022–2025 Multi-Year Plan* and the *2021–2024 Municipal Strategic Plan "Recife on the Road to the Future"*, which established, among other targets and priorities, the expansion of the Compaz Network services.

This institutional priority arose, on the one hand, from the diagnostic reports prepared with the views of citizens and municipal public administration staff, which identified the Compaz as an excellent public policy. On the other hand, quantitative analyses of municipal indicators showed that, despite a recent decline, the *Rate of Intentional Lethal Violent Crimes (ILVC)* per 100,000 inhabitants, when compared with other state capitals, remained high in the city of Recife. Thus, against this backdrop and incorporating the results of public consultation, the goal of expanding the Compaz Network emerged as the public choice for the continuation of a recognised policy for combating violence and promoting a culture of peace and social justice (Prefeitura do Recife, 2022).

However, beyond simply increasing the number of services within the network, the technical capacity of the NAPCD made it possible to seek a deeper understanding. It was necessary to investigate the mechanisms through which the Compaz achieved its results. At the time the participatory evaluation of the

Compaz Network began in 2022, the NAPCD consisted of four members and comprised a multidisciplinary team: led by an economist, it also included a social urbanist, a project manager, and a data scientist. This diversity of skills and knowledge enabled a broad and complementary approach to the analysis and understanding of the Compaz Network, facilitating an in-depth exploration of its mechanisms and impacts.

From this perspective, the diversity of the team made it possible to apply different evaluation methods. Still in 2021, the NAPCD's first product in relation to the Compaz was a summary evaluation showing that the launch of the first two units of the network was associated with a reduction in ILVC rates in the territories served[15]. These findings reinforced the evidence that the Compaz Network has a positive influence on the territorial dynamics of communities and on the lives of its beneficiaries. At the Compaz Ariano Suassuna, the monthly moving average of intentional lethal violent crimes revealed a fall of 5.8% two years after the launch of the unit. At the Compaz Eduardo Campos, located in one of the most vulnerable communities in the city, the decline was even more significant: 13.8%.

These were important findings that were even used as evidence of the results achieved by the Compaz in the successful submission of the programme to the United Nations Public Service Awards (UNPSA) (Bayma, 2023). The 2022 UNPSA recognised ten innovative initiatives in public services, aligned with the United Nations *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* (UN, 2024).

However, it was still necessary to go further in order to understand the determining mechanisms behind the Compaz Network's results. In this regard, this institutional recognition needed to be accompanied by the generation of evidence regarding the processes carried out and how the results were achieved, thus giving rise to the idea of the participatory evaluation.

The Object of Evaluation: The Compaz Network

The community centres of the Compaz Network are known as *Citizenship Factories*, as they seek to contribute to a culture of peace in the city by offering activities and services for children, young people, and adults in need. The design of the community centre policy was inspired by the Library Parks, a model of social urbanism implemented in Colombia, whose aim is to generate transformation in the communities most affected by crime and social inequality through social inclusion and community strengthening.

The mission of the Compaz Network is to make the city increasingly safer by promoting peaceful social interaction and a culture of non-violence. The Compaz Network is embedded within the Municipal

[15] Although the evaluation report is not published, the City Council makes it available on request. (*https://compaz.recife.pe.gov.br/publicacoes-e-documentos*).

Policy on a Culture of Peace and Restorative Justice of Recife (Municipal Law No. 18,850/2021), from the perspective of developing activities that prevent violence and reduce crime. The policy is included in the municipality's strategic plan and in the municipal plan for urban security and violence prevention, known as the Pact for Life.

The design of the policy is grounded in the evidence-based premise that violence is the result of multiple factors and, therefore, its resolution does not rest on public security alone (Di Tella, Edwards & Schargrodsky, 2010). Thus, the locations of the Compaz units were selected so as to occupy violent and socially vulnerable territories, enabling the local population to access educational, cultural, sporting, vocational training, health, and wellbeing activities. In this way, the population benefits and — through the promotion of basic rights, active citizenship, and the generation of opportunities — it is expected that fewer people, especially adolescents and young adults, will enter or remain in the cycle of violence and social vulnerability.

Between 2016 and 2021, four units of the Compaz Network were inaugurated, implemented in peripheral areas classified among the most vulnerable and violent in the city of Recife, capital of the state of Pernambuco[16]. The choice of location for the units, prioritising territories most affected by violence and vulnerability, took into account the needs of the population in the beneficiary neighbourhoods. To this end, the planning process included moments of community listening and participation, with the aim of ensuring greater community support for the policy being developed. According to the data gathered in the participatory rapid evaluation, approximately 10% of the population residing in the neighbourhoods served by the Network is registered at one of the four units.

The first Community Centre for Peace unit in the network was inaugurated in March 2016, named *Compaz Governador Eduardo Campos*. Among the main services of this unit are the state's largest martial arts training centre and an 850squaremetre library with around 15,000 books in its collection. One year later, the second unit was inaugurated, the *Compaz Escritor Ariano Suassuna*, which features a sports centre with tennis courts, an income-generation training space, legal advice services, and others. The third unit, the *Compaz Governador Miguel Arraes*, was opened in December 2019, offering services dedicated to maker culture, robotics courses, and courses on digital animation and film/theatre, among others. Finally, the fourth unit, the *Compaz Dom Helder Câmara*, was inaugurated one year later, during the Covid-19 pandemic. This unit is notable for its aquatic sports facilities and a radio, television, and photography studio. The main activities offered by the Compaz Network, considering the totality of the units, are summarised in the table below.

[16] Two further community centres for peace were inaugurated after 2021, bringing the total to six centres. The first four were the subject of the participatory evaluation.

Dimension	Activities offered
Sports	- Swimming, Jiu-jitsu, Capoeira, Judo, Taekwondo, Olympic Wrestling, Football, Tennis, Futsal, Basketball, Volleyball, Hockey, Aquagym, Gymnastics, Functional Training, Rugby.
Education	- Technology courses (UTEC), Skills for the Future, Languages, Preparatory Mathematics Course for entrance exams and for admission to Technical Colleges.
Services	- Social Assistance Reference Centre, Procon Recife, the Military Board, Conflict Mediation and the Women's Secretariat.
Health and Wellbeing	- City fitness programme (Academia da Cidade), Psychological Support, Auriculotherapy, Integrative Practices (Biodanza, Meditation, Tai chi chuan), Mãe Coruja.
Culture	- Library, lessons in guitar, drama, singing, ballet, folk dance.
Vocational Training and Income Generation	- Recife Employment Agency, Entrepreneurship Centre, Vocational Courses.

Table 1. *Activities offered by the Compaz Network*
Source: Participatory Rapid Evaluation of the Compaz Network (NAPCD), 2022.

The services available at the Compaz Network units are open to any resident of the city of Recife. However, to participate in the activities, each person must register, and in the case of children and adolescents, the person responsible for the minor must also register.

The Rapid Evaluation of the Compaz Network: A Participatory Perspective

This rapid evaluation was carried out in the context of an expansion plan for the Compaz Network to build new units, in accordance with the Recife Strategic Plan 2021–2024. Thus, in addition to providing evidence for decision-making by managers of the existing Compaz units, the rapid evaluation also sought to gather data and identify potential benefits that would support the decision to expand the policy.

As noted above, the evaluation of the Compaz Network was carried out within the framework of the Rapid Evaluation Call, offered by CLEAR-LAB. The Call was designed to facilitate, through capacity-building in evaluation and the provision of technical advisory support, a rapid evaluation of the selected public policy —as was the case with the Compaz Network—. To make this process possible, an evaluation committee was formed and a series of meetings was organised.

The Evaluation Committee

The evaluation committee was made up of Recife City Council officials, managers of the Compaz units, and members of academia and civil society. The participation of these diverse actors provided the evaluation with a broad, complex, and detailed perspective of the object under evaluation, and was fundamental to obtaining the evaluation results. What follows is a detailed account of the composition of the committee and the respective roles of its members:

- **Four members of the NAPCD (Centre for Public Policy Evaluation and Data Science of the Recife City Council)**: the Centre's role was to coordinate the evaluation and its results as an evaluation team. The NAPCD general manager served as the focal point for communications between the Centre and CLEAR-LAB, which provided advisory support for the evaluation, as well as coordinating relations with the other members of the evaluation committee to organise advisory meetings and to facilitate working groups with participants external to the committee. The NAPCD was also responsible for drafting, finalising, and disseminating, on demand, the final evaluation report, under the City Council's responsibility.
- **One key official from the SESEC (Citizen Security Secretariat of the Recife City Council)**: responsible for institutionally representing the Compaz Network, defining the object of evaluation, and taking decisions on the policy.
- **Four managers of the Compaz units**: the fundamental role of the Compaz managers, also attached to SESEC, was to attend and actively participate in all CLEAR-LAB advisory meetings, providing a strategic overview of the Network and collaborating in and organising the dynamics during data collection at each Compaz unit. The managers also participated in the development of the action plan based on the evaluation recommendations.
- **One PhD student in economics from UFPE (Federal University of Pernambuco)**: the academic member's role was to gather and organise secondary data on the Compaz Network for use during the evaluative process.
- **Two members of Coletivo Massapê (a social organisation for collaborative urban planning in the city of Recife)**: responsible for training the interviewers (in this case, residents living near the Compaz units), finalising the questionnaires, and implementing collection and analysis of primary data for use in the rapid evaluation.

The Advisory Support and the Role of CLEAR-LAB

The role of CLEAR-LAB was to provide advisory support to guide the evaluation committee throughout the rapid evaluation of the Compaz Network. To this end, a series of ten sessions was arranged, combining the presentation of theoretical concepts of monitoring and

evaluation of public policies with practical activities to develop evaluation tools. The sessions lasted two hours each and were held at a frequency agreed upon by the group, between April and September 2022. The majority of the sessions took place online to enable the participation of people in different locations. However, one of the advisory workshops was held in person, with the full committee present in Recife. The session took place at the facilities of the Compaz Governador Eduardo Campos unit, the first to be built in the Network.

Throughout the ten workshops in CLEAR-LAB's rapid evaluation advisory programme, a roadmap was drawn up from the evaluation planning stage, through the construction of monitoring and evaluation tools, the formulation of evaluation questions, the construction of data collection instruments, and finally the analysis of the collected data and the finalisation of the evaluation.

During the consultancy sessions, concepts relating to monitoring and evaluation were presented, and participatory sessions were held to develop tools for the sound conduct of the evaluation. The sessions were thus divided between expository and participatory moments (using an online collaborative platform for the construction of the tools), as well as communications and guidance on the evaluation process.

The main tools constructed during the sessions (*Problem Tree* and *Objectives Tree*, and *Theory of Change*), along with the evaluation questions, are described below.

Problem Tree and Objectives Tree

The concepts presented, and the presence of a diversified evaluation committee, resulted in the construction of monitoring and evaluation tools that captured the complexity of the Compaz Network's reality. The first step was the identification by the NAPCD of the main problems that the Compaz seeks to address. A list was drawn up that included violence indices, such as the homicide rate, the number of ILVC and VCP (violent crimes against property), and education and health indicators for the city of Recife. In the evaluation committee discussions during the advisory workshops, the process of defining the central problem was swift and straightforward, as there was agreement among all committee members that the *high rate of violence in the city of Recife* would be the main problem on which the Compaz Network would focus.

With the central problem established, it was possible to discuss and identify its causes and consequences, thus forming the Problem Tree for the policy (Figure 1). In this process, primary causes were identified, such as social inequality in the city and insufficient public policies. These primary causes lead to a lack of access to various basic elements, such as rights and a sense of citizenship, and quality public services (transport, street lighting, public spaces). This combination results in under-occupation of the territory, creating space for irregular and illicit activities which in turn, combined with a culture of violence in the resolution of conflicts, lead to the central problem: the high rate of violence in

the city of Recife. The identified consequences of this problem were: increasing social inequality, cycles of permanent violence and vulnerability, loss of lives, and deterioration of public spaces.

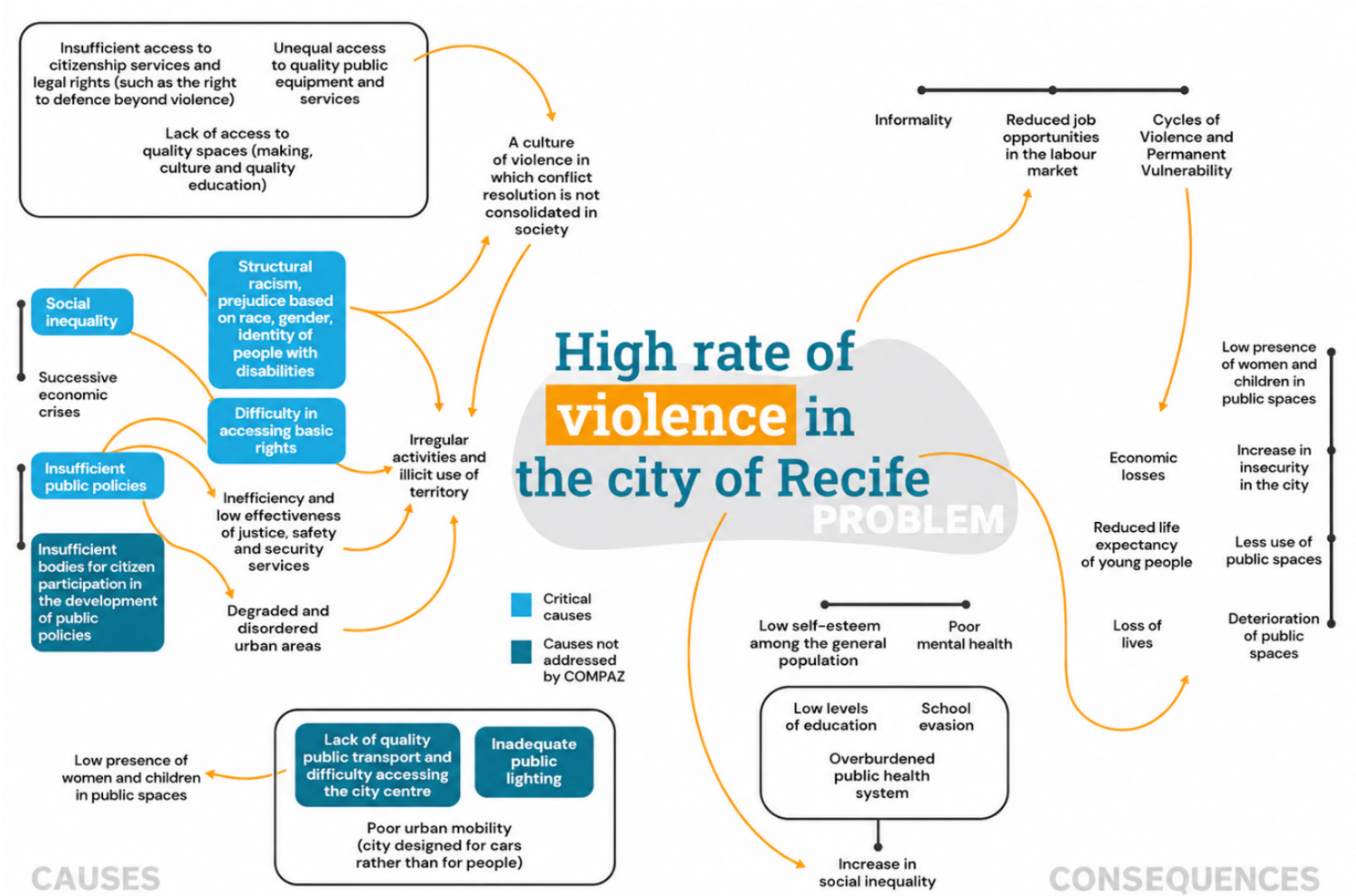


Figure 1. *Problem Tree of the Compaz Network (Recife, Brazil)*
Source: Participatory Rapid Evaluation of the Compaz Network (NAPCD), 2022.

The participatory process for defining the central problem that the policy addresses, its causes and consequences, constituted a rich exchange of perceptions among the various actors on the evaluation committee.

The presence of managers of the Compaz Network units, for example, made it possible to incorporate the perspectives of those who are implementing the policy and tackling the consequences of the problem in their daily work. On the other hand, the expertise of evaluation specialists and academics enabled scientific evidence to be taken into account in establishing the connections between the elements of the Problem Tree.

Mirroring the *Problem Tree*, the *Objectives Tree* of the policy is presented (Figure 2). Accordingly, the central objective is the *reduction in the rate of violence in the city of Recife*. Actions should seek appropriate and sufficient public policies, in the context of social inequalities, promoting greater access to basic rights and quality public services, increasingly occupying the territories, with civilised resolution of problems, closing down spaces for irregular and illicit activities. As a result, with the reduction in the rate of violence, there would be an improvement in social inequality indices, a break in the cycles of permanent violence and vulnerability, fewer lives lost, and the conservation and maintenance of public spaces.

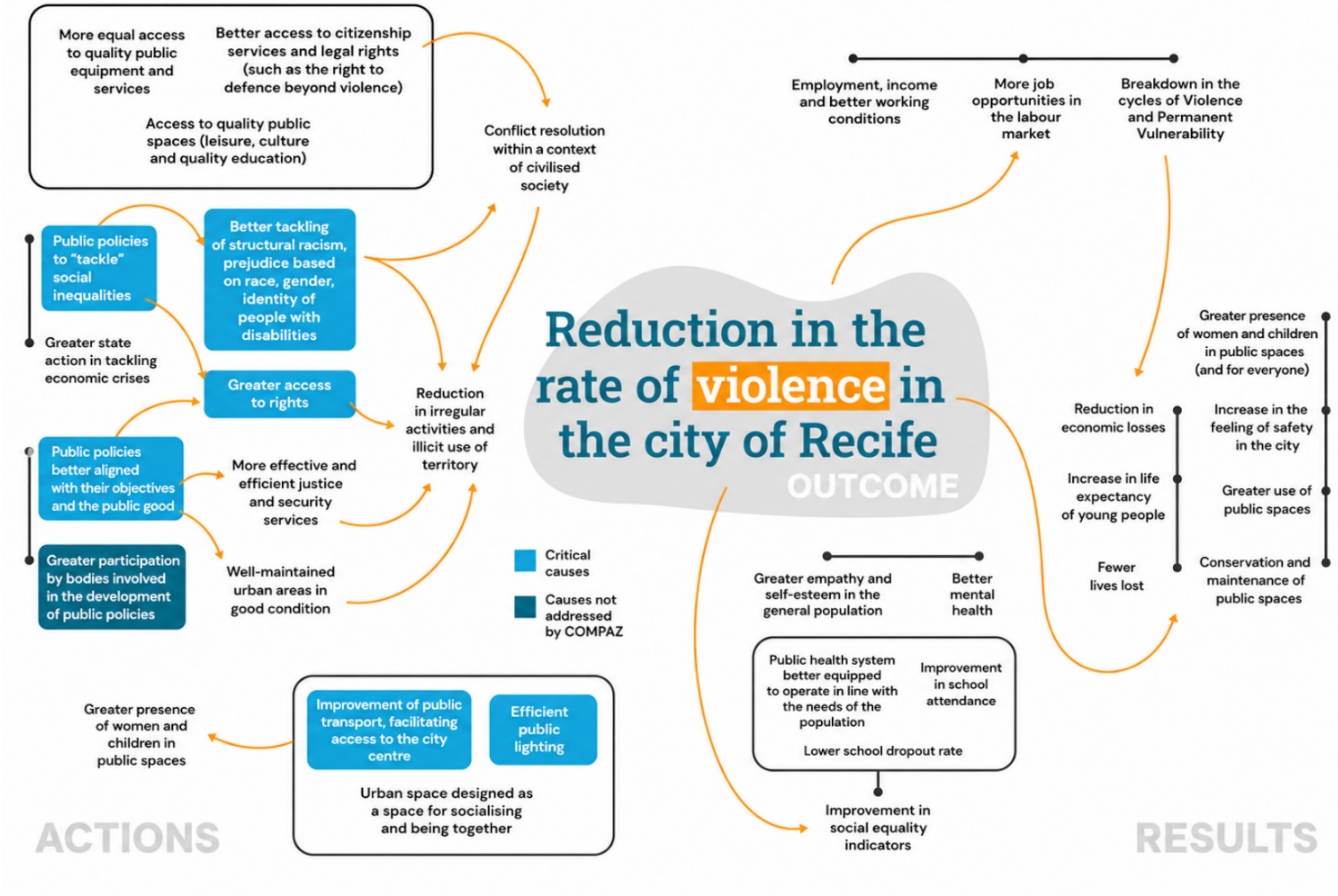


Figure 2. *Objectives Tree of the Compaz Network (Recife, Brazil)*
Source: Participatory Rapid Evaluation of the Compaz Network (NAPCD), 2022.

The collaborative development of the *Objectives Tree* during the technical advisory sessions enabled participants to reflect on the mechanisms of change that permeated the functioning of the policy. However, unlike the discussion on the *Problem Tree*, there was a lower level of immediate agreement during the collective construction of the *Objectives Tree*. Initially, there were divergent views among committee members on the policy actions necessary to achieve the main objective and its potential results. Nevertheless, through the facilitation of the discussion by CLEAR-LAB during the technical advisory sessions, the different actors were able to consider various aspects of the policy's functioning, eventually converging on the final *Objectives Tree*.

Together, the two Trees are relevant diagnostic tools for the public problem and for the ex-post evaluation of the policy design which contributed to achieving alignment within the evaluation committee on the main aspects that should be investigated in the course of the participatory rapid evaluation.

Theory of Change and Evaluation Questions

With the problem diagnosis completed and the *Problem Tree* and *Objectives Tree* constructed, it was possible to trace the design of the Compaz Network on the Theory of Change. This tool makes it possible to express the logical functioning of a policy, setting out the necessary inputs, the activities carried out, and the outputs delivered which, together, will generate outcomes — that is, changes in behaviour or skills in the population. Finally, the Theory of Change culminates in impacts on society, which are a consequence of the outcomes maturing and must contribute to the resolution or mitigation of the central problem identified in the Problem Tree. Therefore, the Theory of Change must describe the entire pathway that enables the outcomes to be achieved through the policy[17].

The Theory of Change of the Compaz Network was developed in several stages. Initially, during the design and implementation of the policy between 2015 and 2020, no methodologically rigorous theory of change or logical framework was constructed. In 2021, prior to the start of CLEAR-LAB technical advisory sessions, the NAPCD team prepared a preliminary version of the tool, based on policy documents. However, during the participatory sessions with the full evaluation committee, the initial version was significantly improved, both in terms of the structure of the activities implemented in the policy and the outcomes expected to be achieved.

Therefore, the final version of the tool, illustrated in summary form in Figure 3, was obtained through the interaction of the committee, facilitated by CLEAR-LAB. In these workshop sessions, the different actors involved in the conception, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the policy were able to present their perceptions of the logical functioning of the Compaz

[17] For more information on the Theory of Change, see Rogers (2014) and Funnell & Rogers (2011).

Network. In this regard, the participation of the Compaz Network unit managers was indispensable in ensuring that the description presented by the Theory of Change was fully faithful to what takes place in the field. It can therefore be assumed that, in this case, documentary analysis alone, carried out by external evaluators, would not have been sufficient to produce a Theory of Change that expressed all aspects of the pathway to achieving the policy's outcomes — making the collaborative construction process with the different actors fundamental.

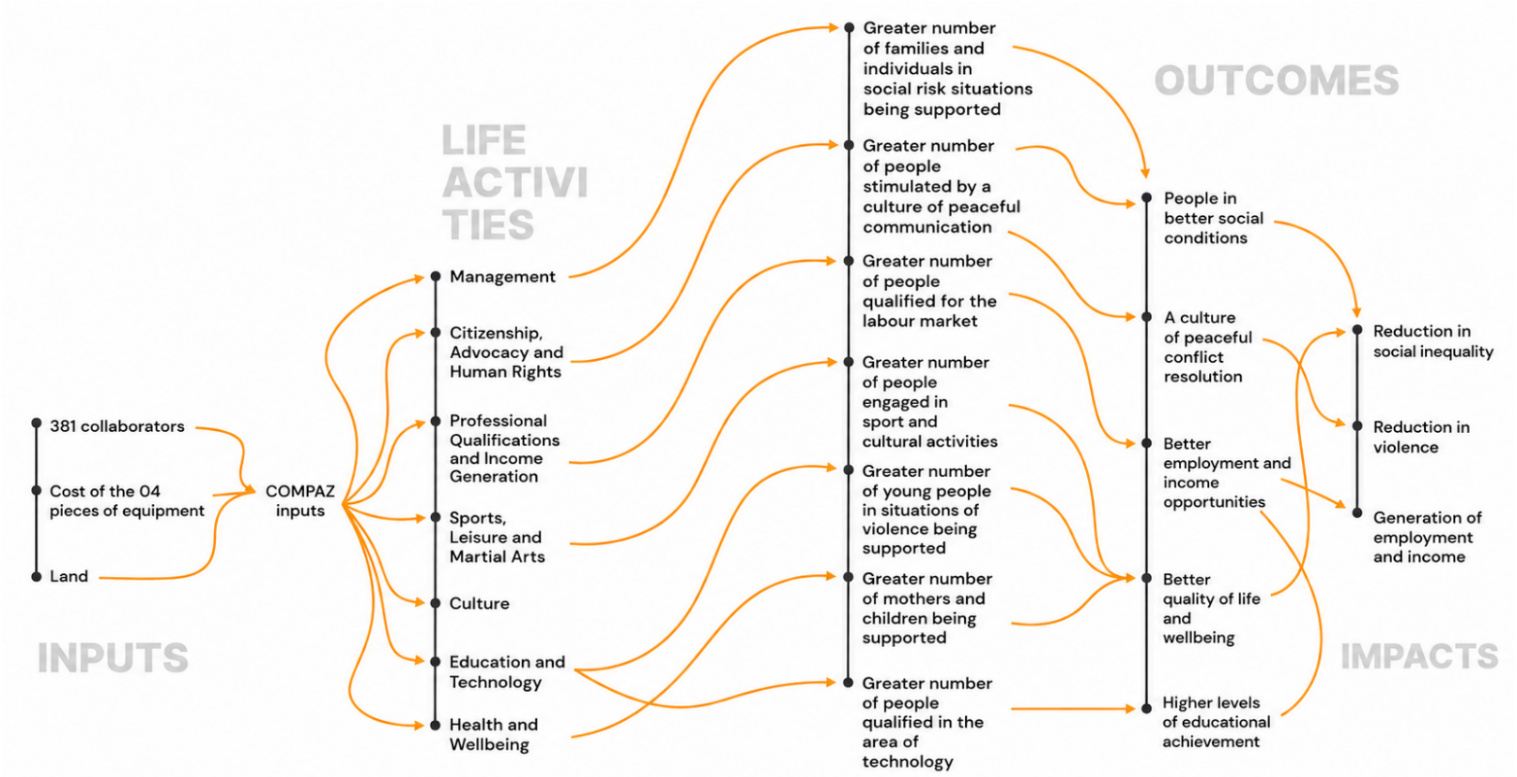


Figure 3. *Theory of Change of the Compaz Network (Recife, Brazil)*
Source: Participatory Rapid Evaluation of the Compaz Network (NAPCD), 2022.

The Theory of Change of the Compaz begins by listing the inputs necessary for the functioning of the policy, namely: (1) its staff, (2) the financial cost of the Compaz units, and (3) the physical land on which the units are located. With these inputs, it is possible to carry out the activities of the Compaz Network, which are classified through the service areas offered by the network, namely: (1) citizenship, promotion and defence of rights; (2) vocational training and income generation; (3) sports, recreation, and martial arts; (4) culture; (5) education and technology; and (6) health and wellbeing. In addition, the Theory of Change also sets out crosscutting activities, which are the management activities of the Compaz units.

Through these sets of activities and the outputs delivered by them, the outcomes and impacts proposed by the policy are expected to be achieved: through access to these activities, in addition to providing support to people in situations of social vulnerability, the population is equipped for the labour market, within a culture of peace. In the long term, this will have an impact both in terms of reducing social inequality in the territories occupied by the Compaz, and in terms of less violence and greater employment and income generation in the municipality of Recife. Based on the Theory of Change discussions, evaluation questions were specified that must be answered in the field research, relating to the perceptions of beneficiaries and people working in the Compaz Network regarding the implementation and results of the policy. At the time of formulating the evaluation questions, the role of the committee —made up of actors familiar with the policy in their day-to-day work— was fundamental.

The collaborative and diverse environment of the committee benefited the process of formulating the evaluation questions, ensuring that the questions prioritised in the evaluation would be relevant for understanding the mechanisms of change of the policy and supporting decision-making. Ultimately, general questions were organised which assisted in the formulation of the data collection instruments for the progress of the evaluation, structured around five axes:

- **Axis 1 |** *Perception of people working in the Compaz:* what is the perception of the staff team regarding the services and activities offered?
- **Axis 2 |** *Perception of citizens:* what is the perception of the people who use or benefit from the facility regarding the services and activities offered?
- **Axis 3 |** *Programme impact on violence prevention:* what is the impact of the Compaz on the reduction of crime and violence rates in the territories served by the facility?
- **Axis 4 |** *Programme impact on health:* what is the impact of the Compaz on the health and wellbeing of beneficiaries?
- **Axis 5 |** *Programme impact on education and citizens' vocational training:* what is the impact of the Compaz on the learning results of the school lives of children and adolescents living in the territories served by the facility?

Field Research and Target Population

During the evaluation process, primary data were collected through individual questionnaires and focus groups, conducted over six weeks between June and July 2022, at the four Compaz units, within each community centre and within a radius of up to 2 km from the unit. The choice of these interview locations was based on a study by the Citizen Security Secretariat and the NAPCD which, by geo-referencing the Compaz administrative database, indicated that around 80% of those registered at a Compaz unit live within 1 km of the facility. Within this collection radius, it would therefore be possible to reach people who reside or work near a Network unit, capturing the perceptions of those in the vicinity of each centre.

The management of the field research was carried out by Coletivo Massapê, which also selected and trained young researchers to carry out data collection in the field. A requirement for the selection of these researchers was that they be residents of the neighbourhoods served by the Compaz units, as will be explained in the next section. The selection of young community members, who were already familiar with the Compaz Network, constitutes another participatory dimension of the rapid evaluation.

The questionnaires included multiple-choice questions as well as open-ended questions to gather the opinions and accounts of those interviewed. Specific flows were structured for each audience, considering different groups of people, namely:

- People who use the Compaz;
- People who use the Compaz little or not at all;
- People who work at the Compaz;
- People who are not familiar with the Compaz.

Considering each audience interviewed, the questions formulated followed the evaluation questions agreed upon by the committee. The questionnaires addressed respondents' perceptions of the facility and the central themes of the evaluation: security, health and wellbeing, and education. The questionnaire target set was 600 per Compaz unit, totalling at least 2,400 questionnaires at the end of the data collection process — that is, the same number of people would be interviewed even though each unit had a different size, in order to standardise the information and observe the Compaz Network in a complete and unified manner.

For the focus groups, four groups were selected per Compaz from the established profiles, according to the characteristics and frequency of attendance of the people at each unit. In addition, to guide the groups, each profile was assigned a guiding question, through which further details regarding the operation of the centres were explored. It should be noted that the focus groups are grounded in the humanisation of the data collected, on the basis of the specific themes and evaluation guidelines for the Compaz. The interviews with focus groups were therefore considered important tools for investigating in greater depth the reasons for satisfaction or dissatisfaction among beneficiaries with regard to the activities or services offered by the policy.

In the end, the collection target was exceeded, totalling 3,551 individual questionnaires and 16 focus groups, distributed across the four units, with different profiles including age, use or non-use of the Compaz as a student, parent, or employee.

The Participatory Context of the Evaluation: Citizen Participation

As noted above, in addition to the participation of members of different municipal secretariats, the evaluation committee also included members of academia and non-governmental organisations, who played an important role in the development and application of the selected evaluation tools and methodologies. In this way, the evaluation managed to overcome the challenge of the limitations of secondary data. The ILVC rate was the main secondary data available, representing extreme violence events (homicides). That is to say, there was no data available regarding the delivery of outputs and intermediate results of the policy, which were necessary for understanding what was happening before the impact of the reduction in homicides was reached.

To overcome the secondary data constraint, a triangulation was carried out involving the NAPCD, COLAB —a GovTech platform for public consultations— and Coletivo Massapê, a social organisation with experience in participatory processes in the field. The development of the data collection tools (questionnaires and focus group scripts for the general public and for Compaz Network employees) involved contributions from the evaluation committee, so that at this stage too there was a confluence of diverse perspectives. As a result of this joint creation, an innovative proposal emerged: new data would be collected in the field with the participation of Compaz users as researchers.

Consequently, this approach involved hiring researchers from the communities themselves, located close to the community centres, ensuring a more authentic research process and fostering a sense of ownership and participation among those involved. Essential for the quality of the evaluation, the researchers received intensive training facilitated by Coletivo Massapê, not only in use of the technological tools provided but also in questionnaire administration techniques, ensuring the effectiveness and efficiency of the data collection process. The premise of this evaluation design was that having community members as questionnaire administrators would facilitate communication and encourage the population to participate in data collection. Moreover, the participation and training of these young people as researchers constituted an initiative of investment in evaluation training and skills development, so that these young people, now with field research experience, can expand their work in the area.

The success of this initiative was evidenced by the participation of over 3,500 people in approximately one month, demonstrating a strong community interest in contributing to the evaluation. Respondents

were distributed across the territories around the four Compaz facilities active during the year of the evaluation, prioritising a radius of 1 km from each centre and reaching up to 2 km. The map illustrated in the figure below shows the location of the four facilities and of the respondents, according to the georeferenced data gathered during the interviews.

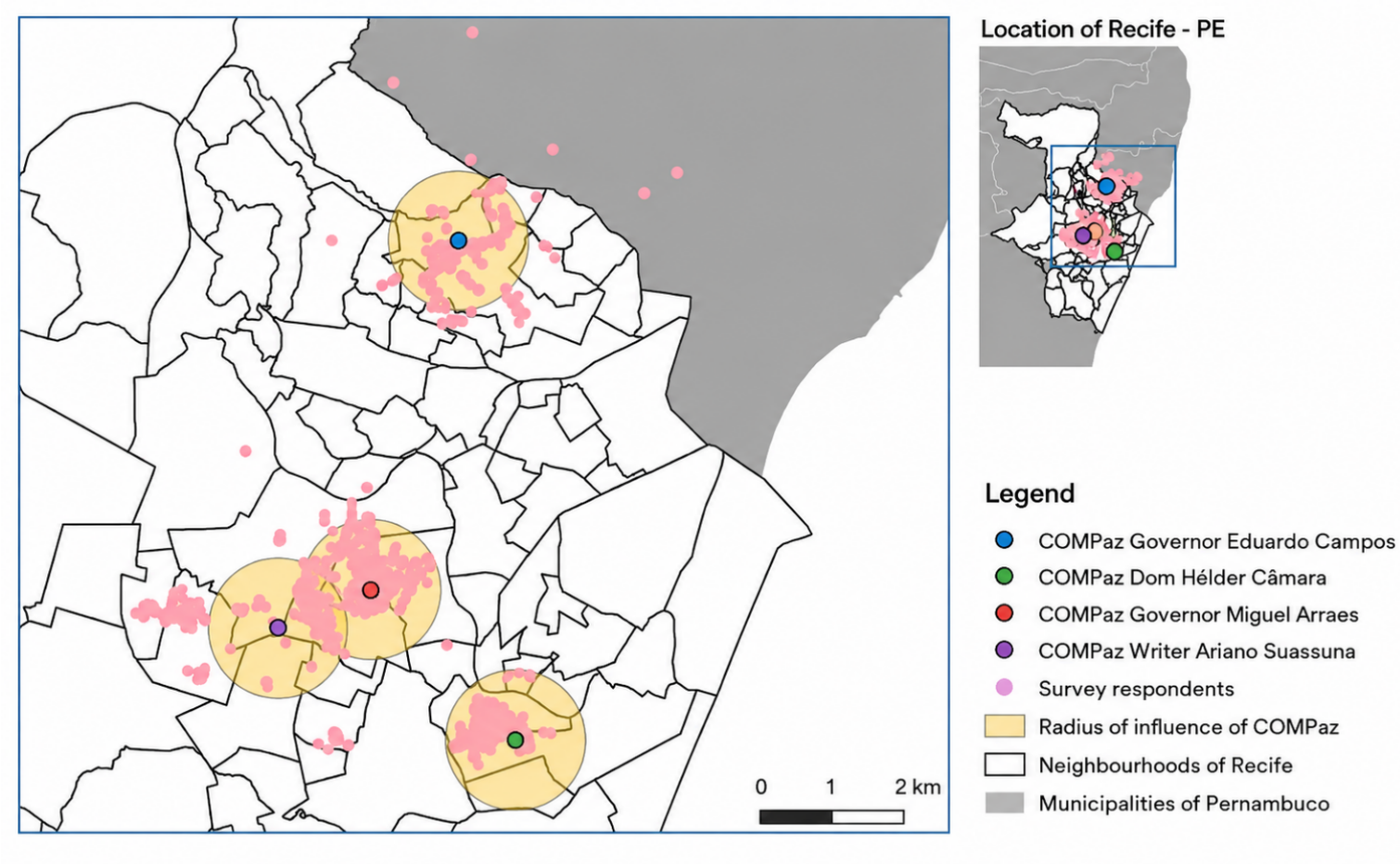


Figure 4. *Location of questionnaire administration and areas of influence of the Compaz.*
Source: Participatory Rapid Evaluation of the Compaz Network (NAPCD), 2022.

The richness of the data gathered provided a solid basis for the analysis of the evaluation's guiding questions, enabling a deeper understanding of citizens' expectations, perceptions, and needs.

In addition to the users of the facilities and their employees, the population residing in the communities close to the Compaz units was also interviewed, even if they were not programme beneficiaries. This strategy made it possible to identify how beneficiaries define the Compaz, what changes in quality of life are observed, the perception of the programme, and the reasons that might lead to greater or lesser use of the facility. Consequently, with a broad and diverse set of findings, it was possible to draw up guidelines for improving the policy and for its continuous improvement, resulting in an evaluation report detailing all the information gathered and the proposals put forward[18].

Results

The preliminary results of the summary evaluation showed that the inauguration of the first two units of the network was associated with a reduction in rates of intentional lethal violent crime (ILVC) in the territories served. Furthermore, the participatory rapid evaluation provided a panoramic overview of the performance of the Compaz Network, at low cost due to the use of in-house resources and staff and the technical advisory support of CLEAR-LAB. In general, the findings show that the Compaz Network has a positive influence on the territorial dynamics of communities and on the lives of its beneficiaries.

Among all the data on community perception gathered in the field research, more than 96% of respondents stated that they would recommend the construction of new Compaz units in the city of Recife. This finding strengthens the administrative plan for the expansion of the network.

Furthermore, 9 out of 10 people surveyed stated that they were satisfied with the activities offered at the community centres. On the other hand, 8 out of 10 beneficiaries would like even more activities to be offered at each centre. This indicates signs of suppressed demand for the Compaz Network's services.

With regard to people's perceptions of the social impact of the Compaz Network's services and activities in the territory, both staff and users of the centres showed a positive view. Among users, 85% state that participating in Compaz activities has brought positive changes to their lives, and 80% perceive positive changes in their physical and mental health since beginning to attend Compaz activities. For staff, 87% believe that the Compaz contributes to the reduction of social inequality in the territory, and 97% state that the implementation of the Compaz has generated positive changes in society.

[18] The evaluation report is available on request from the Recife City Council. (*https://compaz.recife.pe.gov.br/publicacoes-e-documentos*).

The evaluation report also highlights the need to carry out community listening sessions with the population in areas close to the new units to be built, in order to better adapt the activities to be offered. The need to conduct an impact evaluation of the Compaz Network was also mentioned, in order to identify the effects and causal relationships of the Compaz units on indicators of public security, health, education, and social inequality. Despite indications, according to the findings of the participatory rapid evaluation, that the Compaz may have contributed to the reduction of ILVC, only an impact evaluation could estimate this effect.

An essential aspect, arising primarily from the vision of the Compaz staff, was the consolidation of the programme beyond its physical structure, exemplified by the decision to advance the appointment of the management team for the fifth unit while it was still under construction in 2023, ensuring that the management was operational in the territory and aligned with the programme's objectives even before the physical space was inaugurated. Additionally, the need for a second participatory evaluation was recognised, this time with a specific focus on children and adolescents. This second initiative, carried out in collaboration with UNICEF and Coletivo Massapê, sought not only to better understand the needs of this demographic group but also to integrate their voices and perspectives into the development and implementation of actions relevant to them (UNICEF Brasil, 2024).

The evaluation report systematises the main findings classified by theme and suggests guidelines for decision-making on the policy. Each guideline may fall within the remit of different bodies within the Recife City Council and therefore does not have a single responsible sector. The themes used include the continuity and expansion of the Compaz Network, user registration and enrolment in activities, attracting adolescent and young audiences, communication with society, and security.

In general, the Compaz Network was well evaluated by users, with particular recognition of the positive perception of the activities and timetables, as well as improvements in physical and mental health. To ensure the continuity of these results, the evaluation recommends maintaining the quality of services, diversifying activities and keeping the focus on the citizen. As for user registration, it needs to be updated periodically to ensure its effectiveness, and virtual enrolment should be enabled to increase accessibility. The expansion of services must address the lack of vacancies, offering more options in sports and vocational training courses, while also integrating with other municipal services and prioritising activities for people with disabilities.

To address issues of social inequality and structural racism, the evaluation indicates the need to offer diverse opportunities and to consolidate initiatives for tackling racism, in addition to promoting partnerships with civil society. Strengthening community ties by involving surrounding communities and broadening communication about the free-of-charge nature of services are key strategies.

To attract adolescent and young audiences, it is crucial to expand the offering of vocational training courses, sports, and competitions, as well as to create a youth council and to coordinate with social organisations and universities. Physical accessibility must be guaranteed with access routes for pedestrians, cyclists, and public transport, as well as adaptations for people with disabilities. In addition, communication with society needs to be improved through segmented strategies, using popular media and actively seeking out vulnerable audiences. As regards security, it is important to evaluate the impact of the Compaz Network on the reduction of crime, particularly against young people, and to investigate the dynamics affecting security. Finally, the evaluation recommendations emphasise that the expansion of the Compaz Network must prioritise vulnerable areas and listen to local communities.

Action Plan Based on the Results and Recommendations

After completing the evaluation and sharing the report with the SEPLAN and SESEC teams, a crucial moment was the collaborative construction of the action plan based on the findings and guidelines indicated by the evaluation. The development of the action plan was carried out in three collaborative workshops, facilitated by NAPCD members, with the participation of the four managers of the Compaz Network units in the first two sessions and of the Citizen Security Secretary and the Executive Secretary for a Culture of Peace in the third meeting. The purpose of these meetings was twofold: to meticulously analyse the data gathered and to synthesise them into concrete strategies for improving and expanding Compaz activities.

During these sessions, the teams employed a variety of tools and methodologies designed to foster creativity, organise priorities, and plan actions. Firstly, *brainstorming* served as an idea generation technique, allowing participants to propose solutions freely, thereby ensuring a wide range of suggestions. Then, the *GUT Matrix (Gravity, Urgency, and Tendency)* (ENAP, 2024) helped prioritise the problems identified, while the *Eisenhower Matrix* (CRA-SP, 2024) helped distinguish between urgent and important tasks. Finally, the *5W2H methodology (What, Why, Where, When, Who, How, How Much)* provided a detailed structure for the implementation of the selected initiatives, setting out the governance and operational aspects required (Casa Civil da Presidência da República & Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica Aplicada, 2018).

Once this action plan was finalised, it was presented to the relevant stakeholders, providing a structured basis for decision-making and future interventions. Among the final steps, the Secretariat for Planning, Management and Digital Transformation (SEPLAGTD) and SESEC took on specific responsibilities, reflecting the collaborative and cross-departmental nature of the project. For example, SEPLAGTD took on the

development of a new management model, centred on expanding partnerships with social organisations for the delivery of Compaz activities —a measure aimed at broadening the reach and effectiveness of the programme—. It also took on the digitalisation of enrolments in facility activities, a priority demand indicated by users, implemented with the aim of improving the efficiency and accessibility of the services offered.

The participatory manner in which the evaluation was implemented —involving the management teams responsible for implementing the Compaz Network— was a crucial factor in ensuring that the evaluation findings were used for swift decision-making with regard to the policy. In a non-participatory process, the results of an evaluation might have taken longer to be adopted and incorporated into public policy.

Lessons Learned

From the participatory evaluation process of the Compaz Network, it is possible to draw lessons learned, both from a strategic perspective and from an operational point of view. The lessons are described here and summarised in Table 2 below, highlighting the context in which the evaluation was carried out, but in such a way that they can be incorporated into future similar evaluative processes.

Aspect	Lessons Learned
Strategic	- The participatory nature of the evaluation brought together managers and beneficiaries, providing a unique and comprehensive view of the policy, with detailed information from the Compaz Network; - The evaluation being carried out by the Municipality itself enabled the development of internal evaluation skills; - The involvement of the Compaz units' managers from the planning stage facilitated ownership of the results; - The commitment of different municipal sectors encouraged the use of the results in decision-making; - Citizen participation incorporated the beneficiaries' perspective on the policy; - The conduct of complementary external evaluations provides validation and additional perspectives.
Operational	- Operational issues are important to consider when planning the evaluation: deadlines and general bureaucratic procedures must be incorporated into the evaluation process; - The institutionalisation of the evaluation committee, with formalised roles and deadlines; - Communication of results in aggregate form, without highlighting sensitive issues in specific units.

Table 2. *Main lessons learned from the participatory evaluation process*

First and foremost, the participatory evaluation process of the Compaz Network —which involved the participation of a wide range of actors (Recife City Council officials, Compaz unit managers, civil society representatives, members of academia, and the community served by the social facility)— was essential to achieving the good results obtained. It is also worth highlighting that the fact that the evaluation was commissioned by the Municipality of Recife itself was also a relevant factor. In addition to the evaluation plan being prepared by municipal officials, with the support of a technical team from CLEAR-LAB, the evaluation process also enabled, together with the technical advisory support, the development of evaluation competencies within the municipal government.

Notably, the NAPCD was at the centre of the evaluative process, representing the institutionalisation of the use of evidence for decision-making and the improvement of public policies at the municipal level. However, the presence of the managers from the beginning to the end of the evaluation —encompassing its preparation and design, implementation, completion, discussion, and use of results— involved all the policy management agents and enabled rapid ownership of the findings. Consequently, the development of technical capacities and the dissemination of the monitoring and evaluation culture extended to the operational level of the implementation of the Compaz policy.

In this context, it is worth highlighting that the participation of people who are involved in the policy on a day-to-day basis provided valuable information for the sound conduct of the evaluation, as well as for the formulation of evaluation questions that aligned with the Compaz implementation context and could offer useful answers for improving the network. It is important to note that, in order to enable the participation of the managers, the schedule of evaluation process meetings was adapted to the day-to-day routines and availability of the managers of each unit. Given the importance of the evaluation committee members and how their participation led to the results of this evaluation, a lesson learned is that, where feasible, the institutionalisation of the evaluation committee —as occurs in the CMAP at the federal level in Brazil— lends formality to the committee's roles, as does the recording of collectively agreed timelines.

Furthermore, the participation of different sectors and municipal bodies facilitated the use of the evaluation results to support decision-making, both for the existing Compaz Network and for the expansion units. Their involvement in the design of the evaluation, in addition to contributing to the process, also generated a sense of ownership and an understanding of the importance of evaluation, which in turn influenced the use and dissemination of its results. The generation of evidence was used as a basis for argumentation in political negotiations, indicating which aspects should be maintained and strengthened in the activities and services already offered by the Compaz, and which aspects should be adjusted for the new units. It was also agreed that the results would be communicated with reference to the Compaz Network as a whole,

without highlighting sensitive points of any particular unit, mitigating the feeling of an 'audit' and highlighting general concerns and solutions for the entire network. In this way, the management team of the facilities would not feel individually evaluated or that their work was being audited, as that was not the aim of the evaluation.

In addition to the important participation of municipal bodies and managers in the evaluation, citizen participation incorporated the perspective of the beneficiary population and residents of the Compaz territories. This concrete expression of the participatory character of the evaluation was unified and added to the other perspectives on the object of evaluation.

Even with the advantages of an internal view and a greater likelihood of the evaluation being used when it is conducted internally, an external evaluation also has its positive aspects and provides a different perspective on the policy. Therefore, after carrying out this participatory evaluation, further studies were undertaken, including the aforementioned collaboration with UNICEF, with a focus on children and adolescents served by the Compaz Network. In addition to the validation of an external seal of approval with regard to the Compaz policy, the characteristics of this collaboration resulted in good media coverage and wider dissemination of its results[19].

Finally, but no less important from an operational standpoint, a relevant lesson learned is highlighted: deadlines and general bureaucratic processes (applications, tenders, and approvals at the municipal level) must be broadly considered and absorbed when planning the evaluation. Understanding the time required for these processes is significant for good planning and a smooth evaluation flow without major delays.

The reflections of Paulo Moraes, Executive Secretary for Citizen Security at the Recife City Council and member of the evaluation committee, highlight the importance of the participatory rapid evaluation: the results of this process have come to guide the decisions of senior management, promoting adjustments in the existing units and serving as a model for the new ones under construction. Moreover, the emphasis on the use of evidence to support decisions has contributed to the international recognition of the Compaz, demonstrating its positive impact not only at the local level but also globally. Finally, he also highlights that the generation of evidence for decision-making has become established as a routine —a continuous practice that did not stop with the completion of the participatory rapid evaluation—.

[19] Examples of media coverage can be found in two of the most important newspapers in the state of Pernambuco, at the following links: *https://www.diariodepernambuco.com.br/noticia/vidaurbana/2023/11/estudo-do-unicef-aponta-que-compaz-e-referencia-nacional-na-prevencao.html* and *https://www.folhape.com.br/noticias/unicef-e-prefeitura-do-recife-apresentam-estudo-com-dez-recomendacoes/304245/*.

The participatory evaluation of the Compaz Network, coordinated by the NAPCD with the technical support of CLEAR-LAB, stood out as an innovative project in the context of municipal public management. By incorporating the direct participation of citizens, public officials, and members of the academic community and civil society, this process not only went beyond traditional data collection, but also created a sense of community engagement in the evaluation of public policies that had not previously existed in the region. Therefore, the journey of this evaluation reflects an important milestone in the field of municipal public management, demonstrating how inclusion, collaboration, and innovation can collectively shape more effective and meaningful policies for the community, ensuring that every voice is heard and every contribution valued in a process of continuous improvement.

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Chapter 6

The Evaluation of the Holistic Development of Children and Adolescents

Challenges in Building a Participatory Evaluation based on the Work of CSOs in Brazil

Esmeralda Correa Macana | Rayssa Deps Bolelli

Abstract

This chapter analyses how Itaú Social, in partnership with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), developed a Holistic Development Evaluation for children and adolescents in a participatory way. The aim of the evaluation was to raise awareness of the different dimensions of Holistic Development, to encourage reflection on experiences essential to such development, to support the training of educators, and to identify progress in the work of CSOs. CSOs are important agents in promoting holistic development, especially in vulnerable areas. Building the Holistic Development Evaluation involved the active participation of CSOs across six stages, including the definition of the dimensions and subdimensions of holistic development, the creation of data-collection instruments, and the validation of the methodology. The chapter describes the challenges and lessons learned from a participatory process, such as the need to balance power among participants and to ensure mutual understanding among the stakeholders involved. It concludes that the participatory evaluation of holistic development is a complex process that requires the participation of diverse stakeholders and the creation of spaces in which children and adolescents can be heard.

Keywords

Holistic Development, Participatory Evaluation, Civil Society Organisations, Holistic Education.

Citation

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Introduction

The Statute of the Child and Adolescent (*Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente*, ECA), established in Brazil by Law No. 8,069 in 1990, guarantees that every child and adolescent has the right to life; the right to health; the right to freedom, respect and dignity; the right to family and community life; the right to education, culture, sport and leisure; and the right to vocational training and to protection at work. Guaranteeing these rights is the responsibility not only of the State and families but of society as a whole.

However, Brazil faces a major challenge in this area: there are structural inequalities that reduce opportunities for holistic development, especially for historically excluded groups such as Black children, children with disabilities, Indigenous children, children in rural areas, and children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Transforming this situation means breaking with narrow conceptions of human development and education, as well as with the forms and uses of evaluations aimed at improving social programmes. In this context, the Covid19 pandemic has deepened the existing inequalities that reduce opportunities for holistic development, especially for historically excluded groups, making it even harder to guarantee the full development of children and young people.

At present, our educational framework prioritises only certain dimensions, such as the cognitive one, through the teaching of traditional subjects, and neglects others that are equally important, such as the cultural, the social and the physical, starting from a limited perspective of what education is. There is also an impoverishment of the perspective on what education and holistic development are when we fail to recognise other learning spaces beyond the school, which are essential to reducing social inequalities.

The *Cada Hora Importa* (Every Hour Counts) study[20], carried out by Itaú Social and Plano CDE in 2021 (Itaú, 2021), shows that, by the age of 15, children from the wealthiest families have received on average 7,000 more hours of learning than boys and girls from the poorest families. This gap is equivalent to almost 8 years of study at an ordinary school. This calculation takes into account the hours of learning opportunities in formal education from early childhood onwards, as well as learning within the family environment and extracurricular activities such as language courses, the arts, and cultural activities such as cinema and theatre, among others. This is why civil society organisations (CSOs) can change the rules of the game, especially in extremely vulnerable areas.

But how can strategies geared towards holistic development (HD) be evaluated in order to generate lessons that improve policies and programmes? Different organisations or research groups have developed benchmarks for the evaluation of HD, but not always from a participatory perspective. So, what

[20] This study draws on the work of the United States nongovernmental organisation ExpandEd Schools, which estimates, in hours, the gap in learning opportunities for children and young people in that country. See ExpandEd Schools (2013).

happens when one chooses to value local communities and the knowledge of stakeholders outside the school, such as CSOs, throughout the entire evaluation process?

The aim of this chapter is to discuss Itaú Social's strategies and the lessons learned in building a Holistic Development Evaluation (HDE) framework carried out with the active participation of community-based social organisations. With this framework, our aim is to:

- raise awareness of the different dimensions that make up HD;
- encourage reflection on experiences that are essential to promoting these dimensions;
- support educators' training processes and improve actions;
- identify progress and raise the profile of CSOs' work.

The key word is learning. Therefore, rather than producing performance rankings that might stereotype children and organisations, the model proposed for building and implementing the HDE focuses on the formative aspects that can be generated throughout this process and through its results. In this regard, the participatory construction of the framework itself and of its instruments becomes a fundamental element. This chapter shares the processes and learning of this journey, discussing the vision of HD and the role of CSOs in promoting it. To this end, the following section describes the theoretical framework of holistic development in the work of CSOs and links it to the support provided by Itaú Social in a concrete experience. The chapter then gives an account of the process of building the participatory evaluation, describing and analysing its six stages. Finally, it closes with a reflection on the lessons learned from this experience and the main challenges identified for the future.

The framework of holistic development in the work of CSOs and the support of Itaú Social

The Holistic Development framework

The holistic development of children, young people and adolescents is the combination of different processes that converge to allow human beings to flourish in the broadest and fullest sense, so that they can be and do what they value and seek in life and can influence society. It involves considering the multidimensionality of the individual, ranging from elementary functions that are essential to life, such as adequate physical/motor development, through to more complex skills and competencies such as the exercise of autonomy (Sen, 1999; Alkire, 2002)[21].

[21] This definition is based on the Human Development approach of Amartya Sen and other thinkers who follow this author, such as Sabina Alkire (2002).

This perspective aligns with the concept of Holistic Education, which recognises the centrality of the individual and the importance of promoting experiences not only for intellectual development, as is often prioritised, but also for physical, social, emotional and cultural development. Promoting holistic development means giving importance to all of these different dimensions without ranking them hierarchically, understanding that they are irreducible, incommensurable and self-evident, as Alkire argues with regard to her vision of human development (2002):

> Put differently, the dimensions of development are like the 'primary colors' of values. An infinite range of shades can be made from our primary colours, and not every painting (or life or community or income generation project) uses all or even most shades. But if, for example, all yellow hues were entirely missing, then my understanding of color would be consistently skewed. Similarly, while not every community activity will reflect every dimension, if all expressions of the dimension of friendship (such as solidarity, compassion and affection) are missing then our framework of human development may be fundamentally skewed. (p. 186)

In addition to recognising the multidimensionality of holistic development, it is also important to understand the processes that will genuinely make it possible to advance towards this full human flourishing.

Thus, the evaluation of holistic development is much broader than focusing on performance across various competencies: it involves considering the social construct of how these are achieved in relation to opportunities and experiences.

Holistic education is fundamental to promoting this holistic development because it includes the factors, conditions and processes necessary for it: spaces, times and content. The spaces are the different environments in which multiple learning experiences take place with the participation of different stakeholders. These refer not only to the school, but also to spaces such as the family and the community. Time, for its part, goes beyond the concept of chronological time and refers to the subjective learning time that each child may have in their development, according to their particular characteristics. Finally, content for the learning and development of children and adolescents is produced in different formats and languages, designed so as to come close to the realities in which children and adolescents live and interact, in a way that is meaningful to them.

Table 1 indicates the existence of conditions and processes that influence holistic development, and it is in these aspects that the role of social organisations must be recognised, especially in the most vulnerable territories.

Stages	Components
Conditions	- Infrastructure - Resources - Provision/Access - Spaces - Social assets and organisations in the territories - Training of teachers and social educators - Socioeconomic status - Mindsets and expectations
Processes	- Teaching Practices - Quality of the experience - CV - Community participation and inclusion - Networking with agents, sectors and civil society organisations - Family participation - Ways of organising time and space for educational experiences
Outcomes	- Multidimensional outcomes of the subject: Emotional, Cultural, Social, Physical and Intellectual

Table 1. *Conditions, processes and outcomes in the promotion of holistic development*
Source: Authors' own elaboration[22]

HD depends on the conditions both of the family environment and of the opportunities available in the area (for example, the school), or on the possibility of accessing other learning opportunities: for example, those offered by CSOs. The results of HD are therefore multidimensional and reflect the progress of children and adolescents in each of these aspects. Thus, it is not expected that all children and adolescents will become superhumans competent in every area of development, but rather that they can have learning opportunities that allow them to experiment, broaden their repertoire, and acquire greater tools and skills to develop throughout life.

The work of CSOs and the support of the Itaú Social Foundation

According to data collected by *Todos pela Educação* (All for Education) (2021), there were more than 650,000 children and adolescents aged between 6 and 17 in Brazil who were out of school and deprived of their fundamental right to education. This situation is a violation of the Federal Constitution of 1988, which establishes that the right to education is a shared responsibility between the State and society as a whole. In turn, the violation of the right to education is part of a series of violations that occur in our society and that prevent the full development of children, adolescents and young people, such as food insecurity, child labour, various forms of violence, and social exclusion (Macana *et al.*, 2022).

The 2022 Map of CSOs by the Institute for Applied Economic Research (IPEA) (2022) reveals that more than 500.000 civil society organisations operate in

[22] Based on studies by the Itaú Social Foundation and CENPEC (2011), and by the Reference Centre for Holistic Education (Weffort, Andrade & Costa, 2019).

Brazil, working in areas such as the defence of rights, culture, leisure, social assistance, education and research. These CSOs play a crucial role in the holistic development of children, adolescents and young people, giving them access to culture, education, sport and leisure activities. However, despite the importance of their work, CSOs continue to face a lack of recognition and broad support from society, as demonstrated by the Brazil Giving Report 2021, which notes that one third of Brazilians do not trust the work of CSOs (Macana et al., 2022).

An important challenge for these organisations is to demonstrate their impact and to communicate the importance of their work to society, recognising that in the complex context of holistic development it is difficult to measure results and impacts. Through its work in the field of monitoring and evaluation, the Itaú Social Foundation seeks to promote a broader vision of the design, implementation and use of evaluations in order to support social programmes of different natures and complexities in favour of holistic development. Its principles in this regard are as follows:

- **Utilisation-focused evaluations and monitoring.** These should be intended to support management, improve programmes, and generate knowledge and learning, fostering changes in the promotion of quality public education with equity, geared towards the full development of children, adolescents and young people.
- **Methods as a means and not an end of evaluations.** Priority should be given to the use of mixed methods and the triangulation of evidence in order to ensure methodological complementarity and a more complete response, with information gathered through quantitative and qualitative methods.
- **A systemic vision.** Evaluations should focus on the life cycles of programmes: ex-ante evaluations, process evaluations, evaluations of intermediate results (short and medium term), and impacts. Particular attention should be paid to the monitoring and evaluation of the key mechanisms for achieving the programme's objectives.
- **Valuing the collaborative process in evaluations and monitoring.** This entails taking into consideration the diversity and plurality of stakeholders (technical staff, CSOs, managers, beneficiaries, etc.).
- **Transparency.** The communication of results is considered a factor that generates transparency and learning.

The Holistic Development Evaluation is therefore implemented with the aim of providing a benchmark for measuring and evaluating the holistic development of children and adolescents, supporting pedagogical actions and the implementation of social projects and public policies. As a promoter of the ecosystem of social organisations that work on the holistic development of children and adolescents, Itaú Social has taken on the challenge of organising and funding the creation of the Holistic Development Evaluation framework and its evaluative tools.

On the basis of the evaluation principles presented above, the development of this framework was

grounded in a participatory construction that took into account the different perspectives of the CSOs and gave meaning to their work. Thus. the framework includes both a quantitative index for consolidating and analysing the results of the different dimensions, and also pays attention to the training process that CSOs can follow in order to work with children and young people.

Building the participatory evaluation: description and analysis of the 6 stages

Participatory evaluation

Social participation, which aims to involve citizens in the decision-making process on public policies through the work of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), is regarded as a contemporary model of local public management and as a political-administrative principle. Fostering the participation of the various social actors in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies is regarded as a paradigm in many projects for development and innovation of local public policies (Milani, 2008). In addition to being crucial in the decision-making process, social participation becomes fundamental in evaluation processes, in order to legitimise and support social actions in favour of human and territorial development. Likewise, participation can be regarded as a process of learning and capacity building both for the public sector and for these organisations (Ganzeli, 2001).

We can define participatory research and evaluation as evaluation processes that actively involve decision-makers or communities at different stages of the process (Creswell & Clark, 2018; Brandon, 1998). This is a type of evaluation that is not restricted to a single methodology. In the literature we can find some specific approaches, such as Collaborative Evaluation, which seeks to systematically involve decision-makers in the planning and implementation of a programme (O'Sullivan, 2012). Another approach, such as Empowerment Evaluation based on Fetterman et al. (2010), differs from the previous one in that it considers not only the involvement of participants, but also that they have control over the conduct of their own evaluation process and use the results as a form of advocacy to strengthen their own causes (Patton, 1997). Drawing on the work of Vaughn and Jacquez (2020), Figure 1 illustrates the differences in approach according to the degree of stakeholder participation in the evaluation or research.

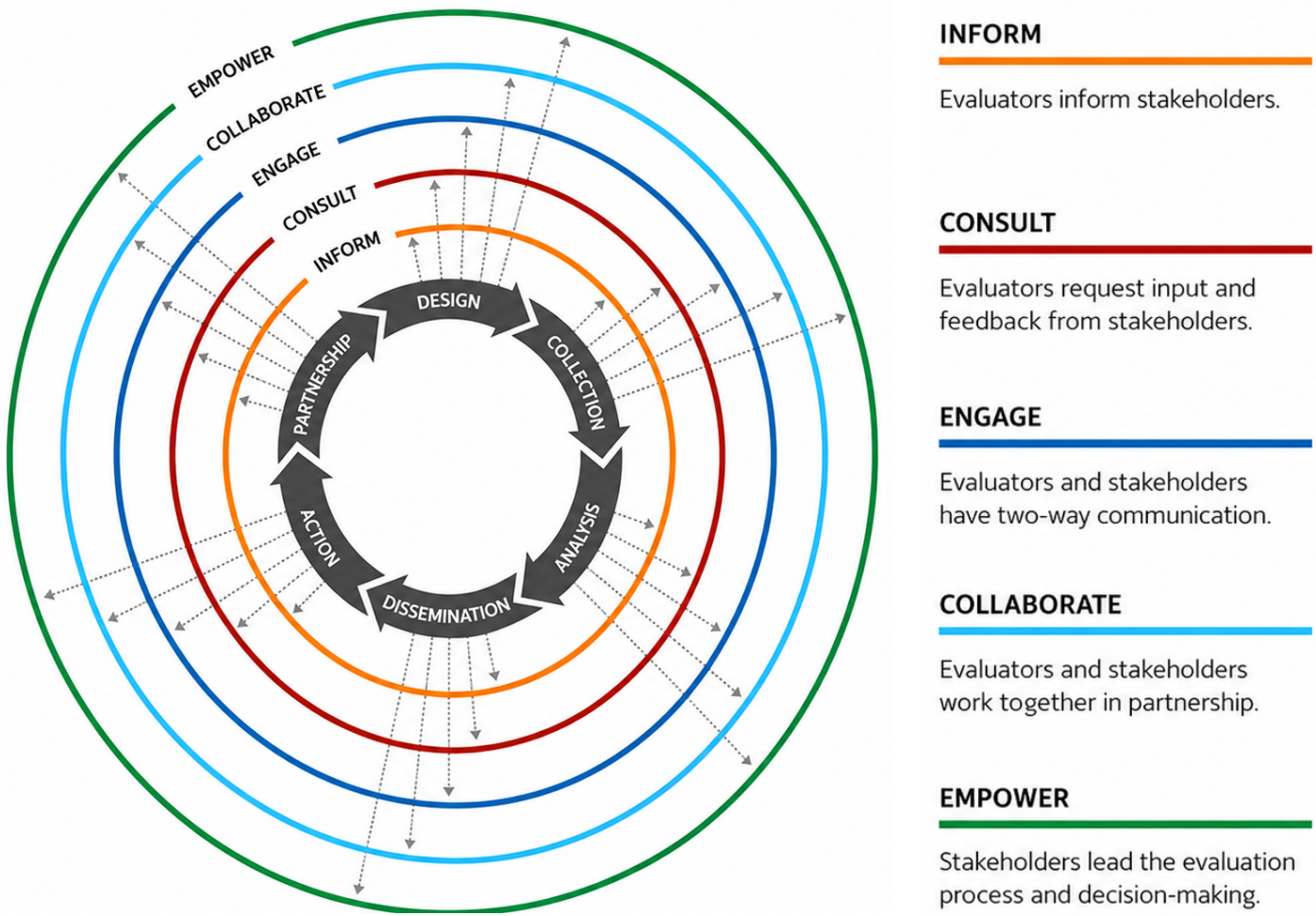


Figure 1. *Levels of participation in programme evaluations*
Source: Adapted from Vaughn & Jacquez (2020)

According to Levin (1993), the purposes of participatory research that can be applied to evaluations can be distinguished across three spheres:

- a pragmatic purpose, in the sense of seeking to enhance the use of the research or evaluation;

- an ideological purpose, which seeks to ground choices according to particular perspectives; and
- a political purpose, which seeks to mobilise the action of the relevant actors.

Patton (1997) mentions a fourth purpose common to any type of participatory approach, which is the commitment to Capacity Building, whether of the community or of the actors. Capacity building is reinforced to the extent that learning occurs in the process and in the use of the results, which strengthens the capacity for participation and advocacy in order to improve interventions in communities and the causes themselves.

Creswell and Clark (2018) also mention that participatory evaluations seek to include the voice of the people affected by the problems, as well as being sensitive and responsive to the cultural and contextual reality of communities. To this end, complex evaluation designs are used, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches (mixed methods).

According to Burke (1998), participatory evaluation does not have a single step or methodology. It is best described through the set of principles chosen and the participation of stakeholders in the evaluation process. For this study, we followed the principles described by Burke (1998), which are more general so as to encompass any participatory approach within social programmes. They are described below:

- The evaluation must involve and be useful to the objectives and users of the programme: participatory evaluations should involve the groups that will be directly affected by the object of the evaluation, that is, the main stakeholders.
- The evaluation must take the context into account, drawing on the interests and problems of the beneficiaries and users of social programmes: this will ensure that the results are more useful for the programme and its stakeholders.
- The evaluation methodology respects and uses the knowledge and experience of the stakeholders, which may be diverse or contradictory.
- The evaluation builds capacities both in the process and in the results for the parties involved: these capacities may be associated with the learning and empowerment of groups who have traditionally been marginalised. It is also related to the way in which stakeholder groups can be strengthened to carry out their own evaluation processes in the future.
- The evaluation favours collective methods of knowledge generation: participatory processes promote joint reflection and planning rather than merely presenting the conclusions of studies by a few specialists. The knowledge generated in this way can continue to be developed, enriched and used.
- The evaluators or facilitators of the process share a balance of power with the stakeholders of a programme.
- The actors who take part in the evaluation continually reflect on and self-critique their own attitudes, ideas and behaviours. In this way, learning is generated from the mistakes and successes of the evaluation processes.

For this evaluation we did not follow any specific approach; rather, we paid attention to the general principles described by Burke (1998) in order to design the way in which the CSOs would participate, while also taking into account their availability of time and their commitment. Thus, the evaluation was built across six stages, as shown in Figure 2, with different degrees of participation, as defined by Vaughn and Jacquez (2020).

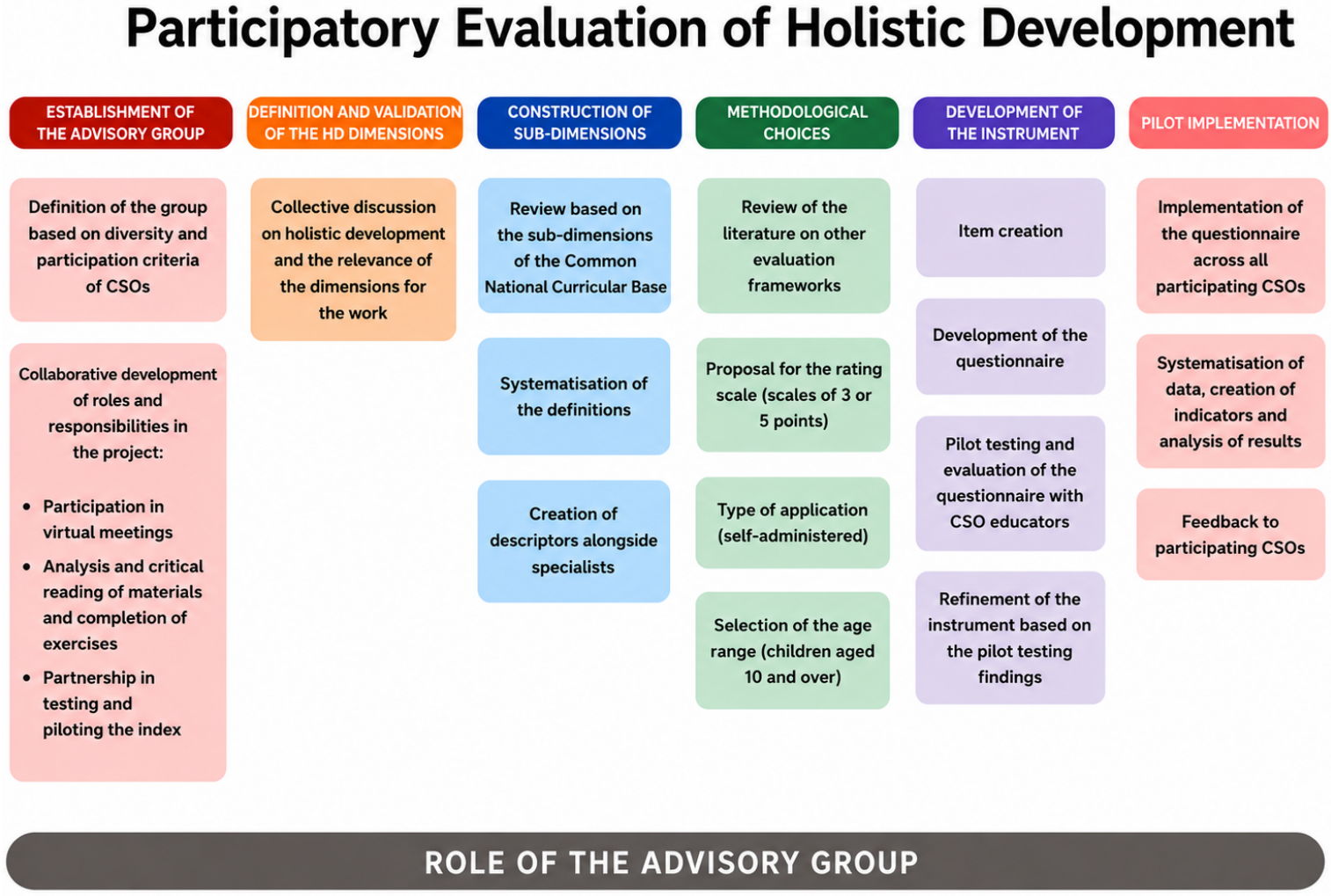


Figure 2. *Participatory process of the Holistic Development Evaluation (HDE)*

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The HDE was designed to meet a need of Brazilian social organisations, who lacked instruments to measure the effectiveness and impact of their actions on the holistic development of children and adolescents, and a need of Itaú Social which, as an organisation developing the Brazilian ecosystem of social organisations linked to education, needed an instrument to assess the impact of its funding on the end beneficiaries (children and adolescents). For this reason, in conversations with organisations supported by Itaú Social that operate in different regions of Brazil, this shared need was identified, and from there Itaú Social began to plan the development of this evaluation. The premise used to build this evaluation is that it does not seek to determine the quality or status of organisations in relation to the holistic development of children. The ambition of the HDE is to support the design and implementation of public policies and the strengthening of institutions that promote holistic development in Brazil. With the HDE we therefore seek to:

- Rate the design, planning and execution of projects
- Support training processes
- Identify the challenges and progress of organisations

Nor does the HDE seek to produce results rankings that might stereotype children and organisations. For this reason, its model of construction and implementation focuses primarily on the training processes that can be generated through its results.

Creation of the Advisory Group

The first step in ensuring the construction of the participatory evaluation was the creation of an advisory group of CSOs in early 2020, whose aim was to ensure that the evaluation took into account the context and interests of the social organisations. Over its more than 30 years of existence, Itaú Social has worked to promote CSOs that work from the perspective of Holistic Education with children and adolescents in various projects, and so certain criteria were used to define a group that could accompany the development of this evaluation. The first criterion was that they should work primarily with children and adolescents from an HD perspective; that they should be CSOs from different regions of the country and with different areas of activity (sports, the arts, culture or social education); and that they should have teams with experience in monitoring and evaluation.

An advisory group of 10 CSOs was created to contribute collectively by sharing experiences, critiques and suggestions throughout the project. These were organisations with different structures and areas of specialisation, spread across the country's five regions, as shown in the map and table below:

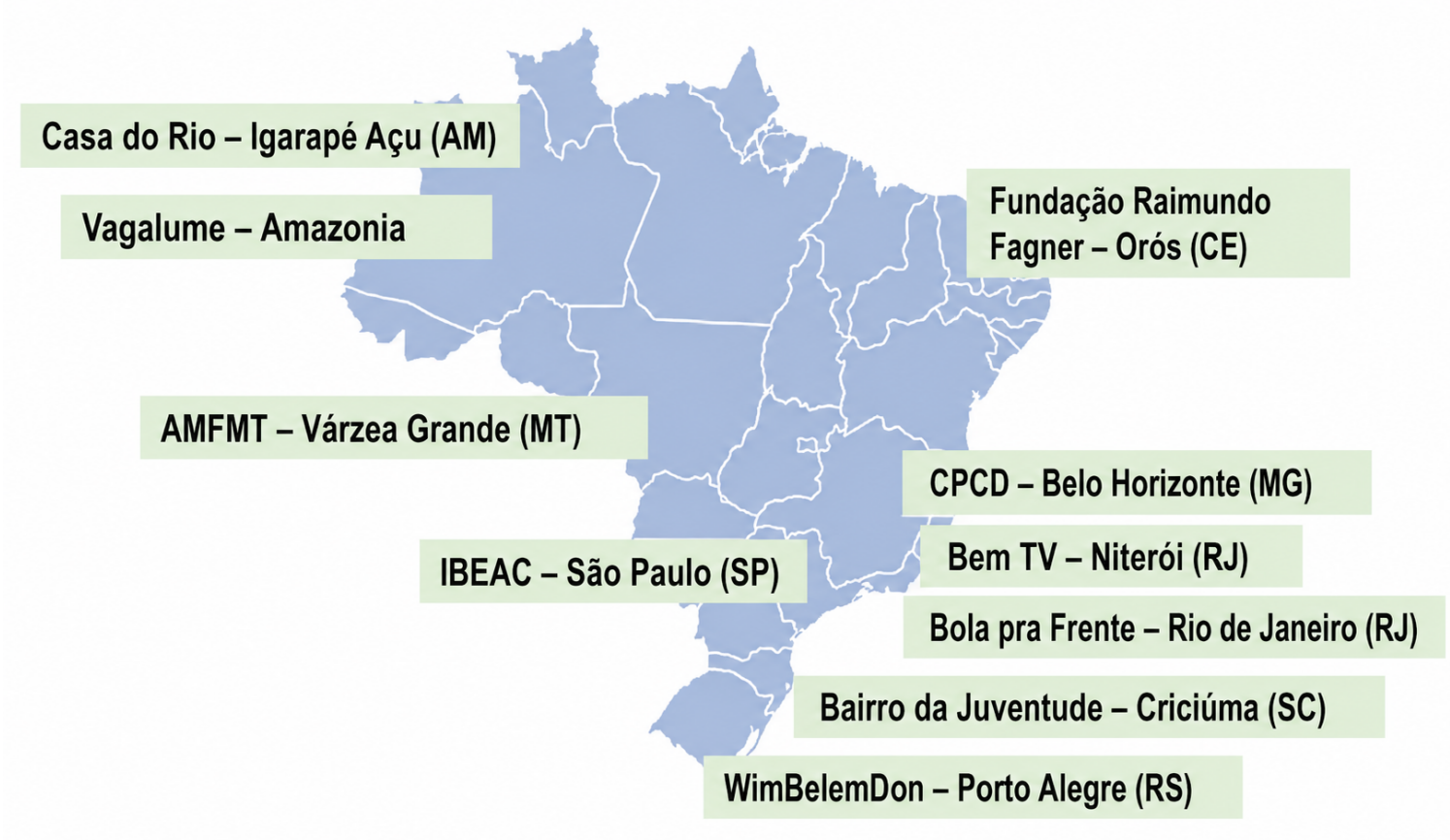


Figure 3. *Civil Society Organisations participating in the Advisory Group*
Source: Authors' own elaboration

Name of organisation	Area of operation	Focus of the initiative
Casa do Rio	Igapó Açu - Amazonas (AM)	Education and Culture
Vagalume Association	Amazonia (states of Pará, Amazonas, Acre, Roraima, Rondônia)	Promoting reading
Raimundo Fagner Foundation	Orós – Ceará (CE)	Education and Culture
Mato Grosso Association of Folk Expressions (AMFMT)	Várzea Grande - Mato Grosso (MT)	Culture
Queiroz Filho Brazilian Institute for Community Support Studies – IBEAC	São Paulo - São Paulo (SP)	Education
BEM TV	Niterói - Rio de Janeiro (RJ)	Education and Culture
Bola pra frente	Rio de Janeiro - Rio de Janeiro (RJ)	Sport
Bairro da Juventude (Youth neighbourhood)	Criciúma - Santa Catarina (SC)	Education and Culture
Wimbelemdom	Porto Alegre - Rio Grande do Sul (RS)	Sport
Community Centre for Culture and Development (CPCD)	Belo Horizonte – Minas Gerais (MG)	Education and Culture

Table 2. *Table of the organisations' areas of operation and activities*
Source: authors' own elaboration

Once the group had been formed, we began to discuss how the CSOs perceived the contribution of this evaluation process to the development of their activities. As the work began in 2020, the year when the Covid19 pandemic started, the meetings were virtual throughout the design and validation phase of the evaluation. The Itaú Social team was responsible for organising the agenda, materials, dynamics and the convening of meetings. The CSOs were responsible for indicating the best time, reading the materials sent in advance, and assigning one or more members of their teams to monitor the development of the work. The organisations were not always able to keep the same person present at every meeting, which made it difficult to follow up from one meeting to the next. The frequency of the meetings depended on the progress of the work, so that we could present the group with something already systematised based on what had been decided in previous meetings. Nevertheless, Itaú Social took care not to leave too long a gap without a

meeting. At first the meetings were held monthly, but once the development of the instruments began, they became quarterly. Some smaller organisations also had technological difficulties, which led to a loss of communication during meetings. But even with these technical difficulties and asymmetries of knowledge, these exercises contributed to a shared vision among the participating organisations; different CSOs mentioned, for example, that:

> [The HDE] *will show the actions/results that already exist but that are not recorded or presented to society, because they are "invisible".*
>
> (Educator from a CSO)

> [The HDE] *prompts organisational self-analysis.*
>
> (Educator from a CSO)

> [The HDE] *can provide access and opportunities in urban and rural areas based on an understanding of the realities.*
>
> (Educator from a CSO)

One of the points that the organisations made most explicit was that currently there are few metrics and indicators to help them diagnose the needs of the children and young people who take part in their projects and to demonstrate the impact of their work on the lives and development of these children. The organisations saw in the development of this work an opportunity to show their relevance to society, to governments and to potential sponsors.

However, from the start of the work, the greatest challenge we were able to observe was the inequality in knowledge about monitoring and evaluation among the CSO teams, and the size of each organisation. Some organisations had large teams specialising in management areas and already had knowledge and practices in the field. Others were small, had a reduced team, and did not have the experience or the repertoire to discuss the best paths to follow with the evaluation. Initially, we managed to overcome this challenge with meetings that were more formative and in which the more experienced CSOs could share their experience with the smaller ones. However, as we will explain below, on occasions, these asymmetries hindered progress in the participatory construction, and we had to devise a strategy to present already-constructed proposals for the teams simply to validate.

Definition and validation of the dimensions and subdimensions of holistic development

The second step consisted of defining the dimensions of HD. This process took as its reference point the Itaú Social's body of work in promoting holistic education, which began in 1995 with the ItaúUNICEF Award, a partnership with the UN agency and CENPEC[23]. This work was presented to the Advisory Committee in a formative way, so that all the representatives of the CSOs present could level their knowledge on the subject of holistic development. We presented Itaú Social's work in constructing HD dimensions together

[23] A non-profit civil society organisation that promotes quality and equity in Brazilian public education.

with the work of the Reference Centre for Holistic Education. In this process, the participating CSOs understood that the dimensions accounted for the different work carried out and represented what was lacking in the holistic development of children and adolescents. Thus, the dimensions were validated by the group known as the Advisory Group. This dialogue with the CSOs defined the five dimensions of the HDE framework, as shown in Figure 4.

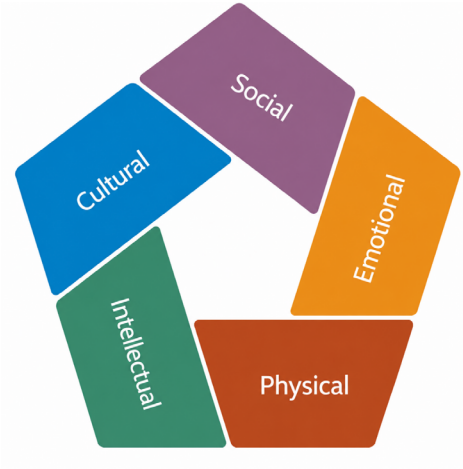


Figure 4. *Dimensions of the Holistic Development Evaluation*
Source: Authors' own elaboration

The physical dimension refers to the understanding of issues related to the body, self-care and healthcare, and physical and motor strength and practice. The emotional dimension refers to issues of self-knowledge, self-confidence and determination, sense of belonging, self-esteem, emotional balance and resilience. The social dimension focuses on social and environmental awareness, the exercise of citizenship, the appreciation of diversity and coexistence, dialogue and collaboration. The intellectual dimension is associated with the acquisition of languages, codes and technologies, the exercise of logic and critical analysis, life planning, autonomy, the capacity for expression, creativity and attention. Finally, the cultural dimension refers to the appreciation and enjoyment of different cultures, questions of identity, cultural production in its different languages, and respect for different social perspectives, practices and customs.

The dimensions were worked on together with experts and CSOs in order to specify their meaning in the context of each of these organisations' work. From there, the subdimensions were developed, which until then had been a gap, as there were no reference points or existing works that specified these aspects of holistic development while taking into account the work of the social organisations. In a series of mediated virtual meetings, the CSOs assessed a list of subdimensions and descriptors generated from the HD dimensions of the Reference Centre for Holistic Education and the Movement for the Common National Curricular Base, using a scale of very relevant, relevant and not very relevant[24]. This work was recorded collectively in a document that was also shared with the educators and technical staff of the CSOs so that they could

[24] The Common National Curricular Base (BNCC) is a normative document that defines the organic, progressive set of essential learning that all pupils must develop throughout the stages and modalities of basic education.

collaborate. On the basis of this joint analysis, the subdimensions were constructed together with their definitions, excluding the least relevant aspects and adding subdimensions related to the work of the CSOs but not covered in these references. Figure 5 consolidates the subdimensions that were defined.

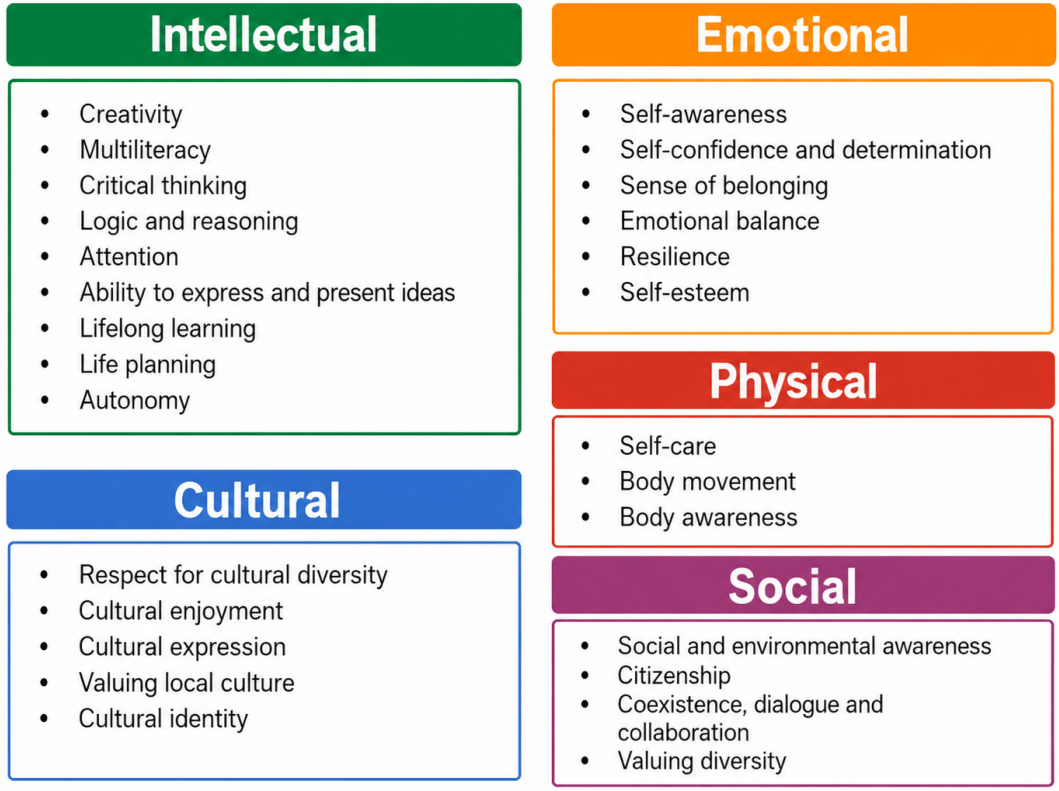


Figure 5. *Subdimensions of the Holistic Development Evaluation*
Source: Authors' own elaboration

In the first half of 2021, the descriptors for each subdimension were created to bridge the gap between the subdimensions and the data-collection instruments. At this stage, the descriptors were proposed by experts in each of the dimensions and then adapted, with the support of the CSOs, to the reality of their work.

Dimension	Subdimension	Definition	Descriptor
Physical	*Body awareness*	Understanding one's own body, its limits and its relationship with others and the environment.	1) Get to know your body, its needs and how it changes
			2) Recognise ways of setting boundaries regarding contact with parts of one's own body and the bodies of others, and the importance of consent
	Body movement	Development of physical skills	1) Develop your motor coordination whilst respecting your physical capacities
	Personal care	Taking care of yourself to promote your own health and wellbeing	1) Independently adopt healthy habits that promote personal wellbeing
			2) Understand the consequences of your actions on your body.

Table 3. *Example of the structuring of the Physical dimension*
Source: Authors' own elaboration

The aim of the descriptors was to identify the competencies that it was important to learn in each subdimension. The challenge at this stage was to reconcile what was expected of a child's or adolescent's development in each of these dimensions with the work that the CSOs actually carried out, since we could not construct a relationship that did not express a result that could be achieved through the organisations' work. At the end of these stages of collective work, we had a framework that linked the dimensions of HD with subdimensions and descriptors.

Methodological options

Once the framework had been established, we set about creating an instrument that would allow us to collect information on the holistic development of the children and adolescents taking part in the CSOs' projects. To support the methodological decisions on what type of instrument to use, we compared the main reference points and methodologies for assessing the development of children and adolescents[25].

The first aspect we investigated was the collection methods. We analysed the pros and cons of each of the methods used, and the evidence indicated that self-

[25] Some of the criteria defined for selecting the development assessment methodologies to be analysed were: (a) evaluations that addressed multiple dimensions with equivalent weighting among them; (b) evaluations that were publicly available and/or validated in Spanish or Portuguese; (c) those focused on the 6–18 age range, excluding instruments for early childhood and adults. Among the selection of approaches chosen for the analyses were: the OECD, UNICEF MENA (Middle East and North Africa); the CASEL framework; the Socio-Emotional Skills Assessment of the Corona Foundation in Colombia; and 21st Century Learning, among others.

administered questionnaires —those that are answered according to the children's own self-perception— were the most viable in terms of ease of application and greater scope for autonomous use by the CSOs, and were considered the least costly. Observation tools that can be applied by educators tend to be more costly, as they involve observing the child's behaviour in a specific activity and over a period of time, and therefore constitute a type of methodology that requires more training and takes longer to implement.

The evidence points to higher response rates for self-reported questionnaires applied to children from the age of 10[26], considering that age is a crucial point when taking into account aspects of language or literacy. From there, it was decided to produce two questionnaires, one with items for children aged 10 and 11 and another for adolescents aged 12 to 18, with different degrees of complexity and related to these age groups. The proposal was drawn up and systematised by the Itaú Social team and presented to the Advisory Group, which validated it and agreed that it was a division that made sense based on the organisations' work experience.

Another point of methodological discussion was which scale to use for answering the questionnaires. In constructing the scale, we sought to ensure that it would be easier for children and adolescents to interpret, as well as to allow greater sensitivity in detecting changes in the indicator over time. At this point, we analysed the evidence for applying 3- and 4point scales, and we decided to take some scale options to discuss with the children in the pretest. This was also taken to the Advisory Group, with the respective methodological justifications. However, we eventually realised that they could not validate or take part in the decision. For this reason, we decided to carry out an empirical validation, testing the questionnaires with children and adolescents.

Development of the data collection instruments

After defining the self-administered questionnaire as the collection method, we began to construct the items and/or questions related to the descriptors. An important point in this construction is that prior evidence and experience have shown that, for children to understand the items better, these should be constructed in a positive way, avoiding changing the polarity of the items or constructing items with double negatives. The proposal was to construct five questionnaires, one for each dimension, that met the following requirements: to be useful and formative for the CSOs; to be easy to communicate, understand and collect; to be self-administered and contextualised by the CSOs themselves; and to be adaptable to the work of each institution (with possible subindices).

[26] Evidence indicates that self-reports on personality and social and emotional skills can be used from the age of 10 (Soto *et al.*, 2008). This capacity depends on a number of critical factors, such as language proficiency, but also on cognitive and social development (De Fruyt *et al.*, 2015). Children must have acquired a certain vocabulary and a basic reading level in order to complete the assessment.

Dimension	Subdimension	Definition	Descriptor	Items
Cultural	*Respect for cultural diversity*	Recognises the existence and importance of different cultures and lives in a way that respects differences.	Recognises, respects and values the cultural diversity of individuals and stories, showing an interest in others and their culture.	I would like to take part in festivals and events related to cultures and religions different from my own.
				I interact with people who have a culture or beliefs different from my own
				I enjoy listening to, talking about or learning about other cultures (languages, food, customs, etc.)

Table 4. *Example of the structuring of the Cultural dimension with the list of items*
Source: Authors' own elaboration

Bearing in mind the premises of participatory evaluation, the greatest challenge we faced at this stage was to keep the CSOs in the advisory group involved in the review of the literature, the definition of the methodologies and the creation of the questionnaire. This involved many technical aspects that the organisations did not fully understand. Initially, we tried to discuss with the Advisory Group a review of the literature on instruments already developed and on national and international experiences in collecting information through self-administered questionnaires. The educators and the organisations' teams pointed out that it was a method they were familiar with, but they had difficulty visualising how all the dimensions, with their descriptors and items, could be asked about in a self-administered questionnaire. For this reason, we decided to draft an initial set of materials and to carry out a prior in-person trial in order to collect the suggestions of the CSO educators and of the participating children and young people.

The pretest was carried out with three CSOs from the advisory group: Bairro da Juventude (SC), Casa do Rio (AM) and AMFMT (MT). In this pretest we administered the questionnaire to 57 children and 21 educators. The organisations were selected so as to ensure the presence of different regional contexts and stages of institutional development. In addition to self-administering the questionnaire, the children and young people were asked to point out the words they did not understand, the points they disagreed with, and their perception of how they felt about answering a questionnaire of this kind. At the end of the self--administered application, we held a conversation with the children and adolescents to learn about their understanding of the questionnaire, their perceptions, and how we could improve it. The educators, for their part, evaluated each of the questionnaire items, indicating their relevance, take-up and comprehensibility, and an in-person round table was also organised for them, coordinated by the Itaú Social team, so that we could explore and talk

about their perceptions of the questionnaire. Both the questionnaire and the reflections on the topics covered were very well received, as illustrated by the testimonies of children and young people:

> *I had never stopped to think about how I felt when I looked at myself in the mirror.*
>
> (child's comment on an item from the self-esteem subdimension)

> *I think this debate about access to culture is very important. Sometimes we have the place, we have the cinema, we have the library, but we don't have access, we can't go because it is far away, because it is expensive, or because we don't even know it is there.*
>
> (comment by a young person in the pretest on an item from the cultural enjoyment subdimension)

They also pointed out that the chat was an important moment for expressing their opinions, raising questions, making suggestions and talking about what they had answered. The children's participation in the pretest made an important contribution to broadening the scope of the evaluation framework, by showing the intrinsic value of children's and young people's self-perception of their own development. There is nothing better and more legitimate than children speaking about themselves. The children and young people found value in being listened to and demonstrated that the evaluation can be a bridge for dialogue and mediation on matters of holistic development.

The educators also emphasised the formative nature of the evaluation. They were pleasantly surprised to identify topics that the children had pointed out and that needed more work on the part of the CSOs.

> *Children and young people want to participate, they want to feel part of the process. By opening up, they show that they want to improve, that they want to help us improve.*
>
> (CSO educator)

In light of the comments from both the children and the educators, improvements were introduced to the tool and some points of the methodology that remained open were defined. One interesting point was the adjustment to enable the instrument to be adapted to different regional contexts. In a vast country such as Brazil, the language undergoes certain variations that make comprehension difficult depending on the term used. One example was the replacement of the term *quermesse* with "regional cultural and religious festivals". In its application in the north and centre-west, it was identified that this was a term referring to Catholic religious festivals that was widely used and understood in the south and southeast of the country, but not in the rest. Another point was the way in which the sentences of the items were written. Some children found it difficult to read sentences with implicit pronouns. It was therefore easier to understand when the pronoun was highlighted. For example, instead of stating in the questionnaire "*Gosto de ler todos os dias*" [Like reading every day][27], we made the pronoun very explicit in this way: *Eu gosto de ler todos os dias* [I like reading every day].

In general, children find simple words and sentence constructions easier; for example, "I am happy when I

[27] [Translator's note: in Portuguese, subject pronouns can be, and normally are, omitted because they are inferred from the endings of conjugated verbs.]

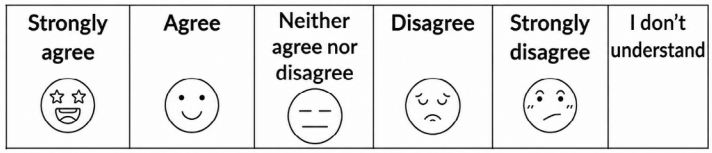
learn new things" is easier for them to understand than "I am happy learning new things".

Based on the conversations with the children and adolescents, we were also able to define the response scale for the questionnaires. The scale chosen was a five-point Likert scale, also recommended in the literature for its greater sensitivity and variation over time. One child commented:

> *I preferred the five-point one because it gave me more options for answering the questions.*
> (adolescent taking the pretest)

Responses could be given in terms of the degree of agreement with the item or the degree of frequency with which the child or adolescent carried out the activity described in the item. Emoticons were also added to help the child identify the point on the scale at which they should respond.

Five-point agreement scale



Five-point frequency scale

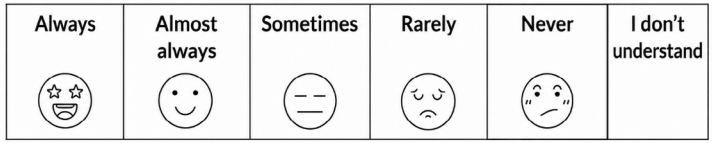


Figure 6. *Scale defined for the instrument*

The conversation was a memorable moment: the children and young people felt welcomed and listened to, and the educators identified opportunities for training and building closer relationships with them. Given these positive results, the process of listening to children and young people alongside the educators was definitively incorporated into the application methodology in its final version. With this feedback from the pretest, the implementation of the evaluation was finetuned in order to move to the pilot phase with all the CSOs taking part in the advisory group, so as to collect a sufficient sample to validate the methodology and the questionnaire.

At the end of this stage, the evaluation consisted of two steps: the application of six questionnaires (one for each dimension of HD and one with profile and context questions) and a subsequent roundtable discussion on the topics covered, how the children felt about answering them, and how the CSOs could work together with them on the points where they felt most uncertain.

Pilot application and results

Once the questionnaires had been adjusted and validated, we moved on to the pilot phase, in which all the CSOs in the advisory group took part. The questionnaires were anonymous, with 144 items covering the five dimensions, of which 18 were profile or context questions and 126 were statements rated on a 5point scale (frequency and agreement).

The items were not distributed equally among the dimensions because of the difference in the number of subdimensions and descriptors for each subdimension. The distribution was as set out in the following table:

Dimension	Items
Physical	13
Intellectual	37
Emotional	33
Cultural	21
Social	10
Profile and Context	18
Total	**144**

Table 5. *Number of items per dimension in the questionnaire*
Source: *Authors' own elaboration*

Most of the CSOs applied it in printed format, but those that had the infrastructure applied it digitally using tablets and computers. The total application time ranged from one hour to one and a half hours, with the following stages:

- Collective briefing on the instrument and its completion;
- Individual completion of a questionnaire (printed or digital), with reading assistance for children and/or adolescents with difficulties;
- A brief round of conversation about the topics covered in the questionnaire and the feelings prompted by the answering it.

In the end, we had the following number of participants in the pilot application:

Audience	Total participants	People by type of application
Children (1011)	269	Print: 170 Digital: 99
Adolescents (1214)	287	Print: 193 Digital: 94
Adolescents (1518)	191	Print: 142 Digital: 49

Table 6. *Distribution of the questionnaires by group*

In general, the children and adolescents found it easy to answer the questionnaire, although for some it gave rise to moments of reflection that were difficult to respond to, which could provoke anything from interest to aversion, as illustrated by some comments made at the round tables:

> *We thought more about ourselves, about things we didn't even know.*
>
> (12–14 years)

> *Difficult, I don't even know who I am! There's no need to ask about life.*
>
> (12–14 years)

Despite this, it was most common for adolescents (provided they remained anonymous) to find it very relevant to talk about their feelings and sexuality, as raised by various items in the physical dimension. They stressed that the questionnaire and the round table were spaces in which to give their opinion, because "I feel I have nowhere to speak". A group of adolescents were asked who they talk to about their feelings, and the answer was that they do not usually talk about it with anyone, or that they only do so with friends or with God. Both the children and the adolescents suggested that the tool should discuss mental health more extensively:

> *Depression is also an illness.*
>
> (10–11 years)

> *I have always kept it to myself, but now I have been able to let it out.*
>
> (12–14 years)

> *Nobody wants to know how I feel.*
>
> (15–18 years)

During the discussion groups there were also further suggestions for questions covering topics that were not explicitly indicated in the descriptors and items, such as: "Have you suffered or do you suffer from bullying at school?" "Have you ever felt uncomfortable about sharing a traumatic experience?"

Another topic that the children and adolescents believe should be discussed is their own family and relationships at home. During the debates, more questions were suggested: "Does your family treat you the way you think you deserve?"; "Does anyone in your family use any kind of drug?"; "Do you see fights at home?"; "Does anyone drink at home?" The children and adolescents also think it would be interesting to send a questionnaire to the family, but they do not believe that parents would be able to answer all the questions, especially about emotions; one question suggested in this regard was: "Do you think your daughter is happy?"

> *I never talk about my whole day, I only talk about things that I know won't be a problem, what I already know.*
>
> (12–14 years)

To systematise the data, it was decided not to create summary indicators at that point. The data were organised descriptively by item, descriptor, subdimension and dimension, quantifying the percentage of children who answered *strongly agree*, *agree*, *neither agree nor disagree*, *disagree*, and *do not understand*. As all the items were worded positively, the higher the proportion of *strongly agree*, the more favourable the assessment of the dimension.

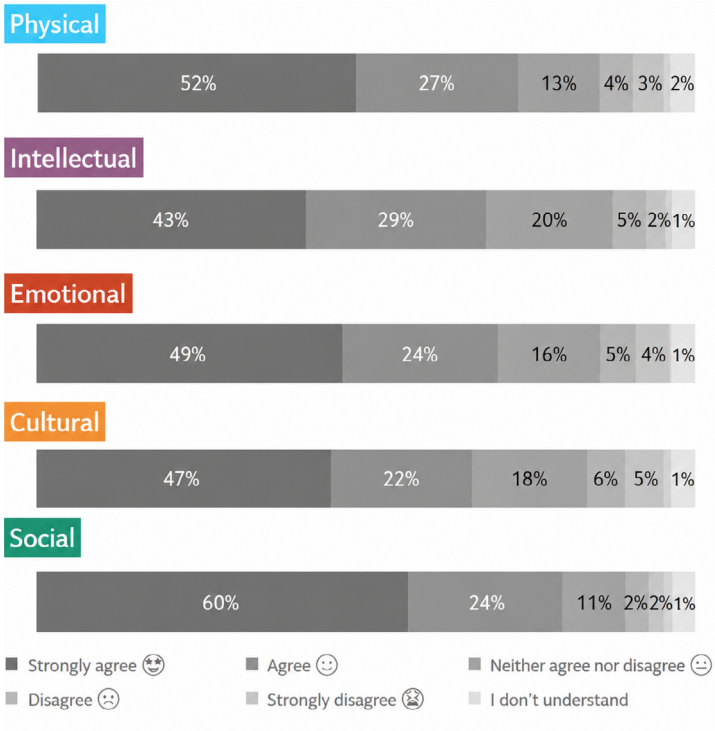


Figure 7. *Distribution of pilot responses by dimension*

The Social dimension is the one that obtains the best results (the highest percentage of strong agreement responses and the lowest disagreement). On average, 6 out of every 10 children and adolescents strongly agree with the items in this dimension. Among the subdimensions, the *appreciation of diversity* was the best rated, while *social and environmental awareness* is the 2nd subdimension with the most positive self-assessments and very little disagreement. Likewise, *Coexistence, dialogue and collaboration* is a subdimension that scores highly among children and adolescents. In this dimension, the *Citizenship* subdimension appears to be the most self-critical topic and the one with the lowest percentage of *strongly agree*, suggesting that this is a priority issue for the CSOs.

As the **Social dimension** is always the last to be addressed, it ends up being the one that children reach when they are already tired. But, despite this, they find the topics covered interesting and, in general, easy to answer. In the conversation circles, the discussion around this dimension focuses on the question of rights, which are sometimes in the back of their minds and at other times mentioned immediately, in the words of some adolescents: "It's the ECA[28], isn't it?".

The **Physical dimension** is the second best rated, with more than half of respondents in strong agreement. Among the subdimensions, *Self-care* is the worst rated, as children and adolescents are more critical of their own habits, especially older adolescents. *Body awareness*, although better assessed, shows how much remains to be done regarding knowledge of one's own body and its transformations, especially among children.

Adolescents from some civil society organisations tended to consider the physical dimension somewhat invasive. Some found it difficult to think about their own body and found it strange to think of sleep quality

28 In Brazil, the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA) is the body of rules within the legal system that aims to protect the rights of children and adolescents, applying measures and issuing referrals to the judge. It is the legal and normative framework for the human rights of children and adolescents.

as a dimension of their development. It is common for them to go to bed late and get up early because of school. Children do not easily understand the term *physical integrity*. The adolescents suggested changing it to *a situation that harms me*. The question about touching the body without permission caused a great deal of discomfort. Among the questions suggested for the block is: *Have you suffered abuse?*

The **Emotional dimension** has a high proportion of *strongly agree*, but also a high proportion of *disagreement*. Of the 5 dimensions assessed by the HDE, the emotional one is the 3rd with the best results, but it also gives rise to a great deal of self-criticism among children and adolescents.

Among the subdimensions, *emotional balance* is the topic that requires the most attention from the CSOs, as it is the one that receives the most negative responses. On the other hand, *Resilience* and *Self-awareness* tend to be well rated. Many of the topics covered indicate that the transition from childhood to adolescence has an impact on self-criticism: adolescents end up losing the confidence, self-esteem and emotional balance that they may have had as children. This points to a challenge for the CSOs in supporting adolescents to maintain these feelings and a more positive vision of themselves.

The **Intellectual dimension** has the lowest proportion of *strongly agree* among the 5 assessed by the HDE; that is, it is a topic that arouses the most self-criticism among children and adolescents. Among the subdimensions, *Life planning* and *Lifelong learning* are the ones that obtain the best results, while the *Capacity to express and put forward ideas* is where they are most self-critical. Although the HDE does not use cognitive tests to accurately assess performance in these areas, it is possible to identify that there is ample scope for the CSOs to act in this field, especially in relation to the organisation of routines and ideas, argumentation, and the creation of causal relationships, among others.

At the round tables, the adolescents were asked about their dreams. Comments about not having dreams or long-term goals were common, but often they were simply embarrassed to share them.

> *It is easier to talk about problems than about dreams.*
> (15–18 years)

The **Cultural dimension** is the one that obtains the worst results, with the highest proportion of disagreement. On average, 1 out of every 10 children and adolescents has a critical opinion (*strongly* or *partly disagree*) of their own knowledge or practices. Among the subdimensions, the assessments by children and adolescents are relatively homogeneous. All age groups obtained better results in the area of *cultural enjoyment*. And the question of *cultural identity* is the one in which self-criticism is most evident, revealing a lack of knowledge of origins and a sense of belonging.

In general, we can see difficulties in communication, relationships with families, and the capacity to express feelings and ideas across all dimensions. On the one hand, we do not expect these issues to be resolved, given that these are children and adolescents in the

midst of a developmental phase, with the anxieties and questions typical of their age. On the other hand, the questionnaire indicates priority situations in which the CSOs can intervene, collaborating with schools, families and the public childcare network, in order to help children and adolescents to develop in a healthy way, without allowing the anxieties of their age to turn into more serious relationship and mental health problems. This is why we believe that, rather than an evaluation, the questionnaire and the round table are instruments that allow children and adolescents to express themselves on topics that they do not feel comfortable talking about on a daily basis.

To inform the CSOs of the results identified, the Itaú Social team held meetings with each organisation, presenting the overall results by dimension. As well as being built in a participatory way, the evaluation was intended to be formative. The results were presented in individual meetings with each CSO, with the participation of the organisation's educators and managers on the basis of the respective data from the implementation at that CSO. In this way, the educators were able to reflect on the responses of the participating children and adolescents and to think about how they would address these points in their respective organisations.

Lessons learned and challenges for the future

Evaluating holistic development is a complex and difficult task. Any questionnaire or index that can be used in an evaluation of this kind has limitations, since they are simplifications of reality. However, this does not mean that they are not important for the strengthening of CSOs, since they establish parameters that shed light on the aspects of their work that are most advanced, as well as on the points that need more support and improvement.

The main value of an evaluation tool such as this is not that it allows us to ascertain the degree of holistic development of children and adolescents, but rather that it enables a space for children and adolescents to be heard, since in the educational context they are the stakeholders whose participation is least called upon in the planning and implementation of social projects and public policies.

We also understand that the importance of the participatory construction process lies in training. The formative approach is fundamental to ensuring reflection and the use of the evaluation in order to identify priority topics and improve the actions and pedagogical practices that are most in line with the needs and with the effective promotion of the holistic development of children, adolescents and young people.

Each stage of the development of the evaluation provided learning about how to ensure genuine

participation that adheres to the principles of participatory evaluations. It was important in the process that the evaluators, mediators, experts and CSOs worked together on the stages and forms of participation, since there is no manual and these processes were not so obvious to any of the parties involved. For this reason, the participation of the CSOs and of the children and adolescents was not homogeneous throughout the process. In line with the work of Vaughn and Jacquez (2020), we can identify that the CSOs were involved in different ways at each stage of the process of building this evaluation, ranging from being informed to being involved.

Given the diversity of existing perspectives, it was not always easy to ensure the balance of power and the reception of contributions. In general, the organisations saw in Itaú Social a reference point and authority on monitoring and evaluation methodologies. They also saw that Itaú Social, as coordinator and funder of the evaluation, would be the leader in that process. With this, it was a challenge to maintain this balance of power and to establish the CSOs as empowered members and active participants in the process. A process of openness and flexibility was required, on the part both of Itaú Social and of the social organisations, respecting the process of going back and forth. The challenge was very rich, given the opportunities for interaction, the review of options, discussions, changes of course and the broadening of perspectives on holistic development.

An important lesson was that, for a participatory process, it is important for the actors involved to go through a formative moment: for everyone to share the same knowledge base, as the basis for communication on a more equal footing. Of course, when stakeholders with such asymmetric knowledge are involved, it is not possible for everyone to know exactly the same, but at least a common base is necessary. It is also important to ensure that the meetings do not take place over too long a period and that the stakeholders are kept informed, even when there is no need for meetings, so that they do not lose their connection and commitment to the development of the evaluation.

Finally, it is necessary to consider the importance of developing simple instruments that can be implemented without much cost and that produce results that are easy to assess, so that the evaluation fulfils its role of enabling organisations to understand their context and to be able to make decisions with the aim of improving their practices and projects.

Recognising the natural complexity of the subject and of the process without becoming discouraged in the face of the challenges allowed us to take important steps with what was feasible at each moment, without waiting for perfect methodologies. The exchanges with the participants contributed far more to clarifying questions and untangling knots than the isolated effort of conducting literature reviews or sophisticated statistical models. By valuing this multiplicity of knowledge and experiences of CSOs, educators, children, adolescents and young people throughout the process, we enrich the perspective of holistic development and the uses of its evaluation.

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Chapter 7

Participatory Evaluation of a Public Policy Supporting Transport

A Perspective of Inclusion and Transformation – Jalisco (Mexico)

Mónica Ballescá | Sugey Salazar | Selene Michi

Abstract

This chapter describes and examines the authors' experience in implementing a participatory evaluation of the "Mi Pasaje" Transport Support Programme in Jalisco, Mexico, as an inclusive strategy for improving public policies. Under the coordination of Evalúa Jalisco, the principles of participatory evaluation, action research and popular education were adopted in order to actively involve the participating stakeholders in the implementation of this public intervention. The methodology comprised workshops, talks and instructional and methodological resources across its four stages. The results show an improvement in ownership of the policy and in the quality of services, by reducing waiting times and optimising resources. It is concluded that this participatory approach fosters an evaluation culture that strengthens public trust and citizen commitment to public policies.

Keywords

Participatory Evaluation, Public Policies, Inclusion, Citizen Participation, Key Stakeholders, Social Programmes Or Interventions, Mi Pasaje, Evalúa Jalisco, Social Development.

Citation

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Introduction

This text is coauthored by those of us who have acted as coordinators and facilitators of the inclusion of diverse stakeholders, through participatory mechanisms, in the evaluation of various public policies and interventions under the responsibility of the subnational government of Jalisco, one of Mexico's 32 federal entities. These activities have been carried out across more than five public interventions between 2019 and 2023, from the Central Evaluation Unit, known as Evalúa Jalisco, within the Secretariat of Planning and Citizen Participation, under the approach of a systemic perspective and the principles of popular education and participatory action research.

Here we address the first of five experiences of evaluation with participatory mechanisms, which involved including in decision-making the community users of the programmes, managers, members of the citizen councils of the subnational state, independent evaluators, and methodological facilitators who, in the various phases of the evaluation, become involved in defining the scope and type of evaluation, in conducting the evaluative research, in analysing and validating the findings and recommendations, and in monitoring the improvement agenda.

The participatory evaluation of the Mi Pasaje Programme —in what appears to be the first exercise of this inclusive evaluation practice in Mexico— began in 2019 with the expectation of concluding in 2020. However, owing to the outbreak of the Covid19 pandemic, it was completed in the last quarter of 2021. This evaluation formed part of an international cooperation project of the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), through the Project for Strengthening Evaluation Capacities in Latin America (FOCELAC), which involved the parallel implementation of the participatory evaluation in Jalisco, Mexico, as well as that of a national programme in Costa Rica, led by that country's Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (MIDEPLAN).

This empirical article will address the following questions:

- Why incorporate inclusive and participatory mechanisms into evaluations managed by a government body?
- What is evaluating with participation, and what is its purpose?
- What did the Evaluation with Participation of the Mi Pasaje Programme consist of, and what was done during it?
- What are the identified effects of the participatory evaluation?
- What reflections, lessons and challenges remain from the experience?

In the first section we present the national context in which the intervention took place. In the second section we explain what government-managed evaluations are and what purpose they serve, illustrating the subnational strategy of Evalúa Jalisco and the debate

between concept, method and scope. The third section then turns fully to presenting and discussing the participatory evaluation of the Mi Pasaje Transport Support Programme, carried out in Jalisco, situating it within the context of an evaluation with participatory mechanisms in the public sector and presenting its phases. The fourth section sets out the effects identified from the evaluation of the Mi Pasaje Programme. Finally, the fifth section closes the chapter with a general reflection on the lessons and challenges we have encountered through the experience of Evalúa Jalisco.

The Mexican national context

In Mexico, evaluation policy is institutionalised; it is one of the countries in Latin America with a robust national evaluation system. At the federal or national level, evaluation policy is led by the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL). The system is complemented by the work of the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit (SHCP), which makes up the National Performance Evaluation System, extending evaluation to the budgetary programmes of the budgetary system. Likewise, the fiscal authority, through the Federal Superior Audit Office, plays a role by making evaluation mandatory for budget programmes funded by fiscal resources transferred to the federal entities.

According to the *National Evaluation Capacities Index (INCE)*[29], Mexico scored 6.11 out of 10 in 2022. By way of comparison, Costa Rica obtained a score of 6.18 the same year. For 2023, Peru scored 4.51; Argentina: 5.97; Colombia: 5.45; Ecuador: 3.54; Guatemala: 3.1; Paraguay: 3.61; the Dominican Republic: 3.36; and Uruguay: 4.23 points.

Of the five dimensions assessed by the INCE, Mexico scored 6.9 for *Institutional structure* (tied with Costa Rica), 7.7 for *Quality of evaluations* and 6.5 for *Use* (these two being the highest scores registered). However, for *Multistakeholder* spaces, which identifies spaces for coordination and the participation of relevant stakeholders, it scored only 3.8, compared with Costa Rica's 6.1. As for *Evaluation offer*, which assessed evaluation networks, training programmes and the existence of professionals and organisations, it obtained 5.7 points, whereas Costa Rica registered 6.3 for the same year, with the availability of training programmes being a particular highlight.

Since 2011, CONEVAL has carried out a biennial *Diagnostic Assessment of the Progress of Monitoring and Evaluation* in the federal entities. Jalisco has ranked first from 2015 up to the most recent measurement in 2023[30].

[29] For further details on the INCE and the assessment of Mexico, see *https://inceval.org/es/country-page/mexico*.

[30] For further details on the Diagnostic Assessment of the Progress of Monitoring and Evaluation in the Federal Entities, see *https://www.coneval.org.mx/coordinacion/entidades/Paginas/Indice_diagnosticos_temp.aspx*.

As a federal country, Mexico has 32 federal entities or subnational states. In 2016, the federal entities formed a Monitoring and Evaluation Network (RedMyE) which is made up on a voluntary basis of the State Evaluation Units and aims to create a peer-learning space for sharing experiences, challenges and knowledge among the federal entities regarding the development and institutionalisation of monitoring and evaluation systems.

Founded in the city of Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco, the RedMyE meets twice a year and, in 2024, was made up of 28 of the 32 federal entities. Each state has a diverse range of institutional structures, but given the mandatory requirement to evaluate programmes funded by federal resources, virtually all of the entities evaluate them; they differ in the extent to which they evaluate programmes financed with their own resources, as in the case of the Mi Pasaje Programme.

With regard to participatory evaluations, the northern state of Chihuahua announced in 2024 the start of a process within its Annual Evaluation Programme; in 2023, officials from that state's Central Evaluation Unit took part in the Diploma Course in Participatory Evaluation from within Government[31] coordinated by Evalúa Jalisco. This course consists of five modules taught by specialists in the evaluation of public policies, programmes and services; it is delivered in a hybrid format, with 67 hours of teacher-led instruction and 93 hours of asynchronous work, as well as 43 hours of in-person work in workshop mode. The aim of the diploma course is for all participants to learn about and develop capacities and projects to manage, promote and facilitate participatory and inclusive mechanisms in the evaluation of programmes, services and public policies, within a systemic and collaborative approach to government management; it seeks to ensure that the practice of participatory evaluation is disseminated, understood and practised as widely as possible.

[31] For further information, see *https://evalua.jalisco.gob.mx/evaluacion-participativa*.

Inclusion and participation in government-managed evaluations: what it is and what it is for

The Evalúa Jalisco subnational strategy

The Secretariat of Planning and Citizen Participation (SPPC) was created in 2019 under the 2018–2024 Administration, with the purpose of implementing and promoting the principle of inclusion of citizen participation in various processes and practices of public management, as well as institutionalising mechanisms of participation. For its part, the practice and technical structure of the Evalúa Jalisco strategy began years earlier with the creation of the Evalúa

Jalisco Trust[32], and its operation has been led by what is now the Directorate-General of Participatory Planning and Evaluation, a technical team that since 2013 has been responsible for compiling the subnational government's Annual Evaluation Programme.

Thus, through the Evalúa Jalisco Trust, the SPPC constitutes the Unit for the Evaluation of Public Programmes and Policies. In 2018, within the framework of the congress of the Latin American Centre for Development Administration (CLAD) held in the city of Guadalajara, a relationship of exchange and collaboration began between Evalúa Jalisco and the Focelac project run by DEval and Mideplan. This gave rise to a large learning and cooperation network, formalised through the signing of a collaboration agreement and the 2019 pilot of the first exercise of Evaluation with Participation in Mexico.

As part of the State's evaluation unit, we are convinced that participatory evaluations, in addition to entailing a collaborative methodology with innovation in participatory/inclusive mechanisms, constitute a perspective that entails a different understanding of evaluation practice —one that transforms the decision-making of those involved—. This new perspective involves addressing the democratic construction of consensus, promoting equity and the inclusion of marginalised groups in evaluation practice by creating multi-stakeholder spaces, as well as recognising the complexity of development. Community transformation and the improvement of public policies or interventions require the recognition and active, equal involvement of all stakeholders.

The debate between concept, method and scope

Recognising that this is a concept under review, with ongoing processes of reflection, analysis and practice, the term *Evaluation with Participation (EwP)* began to be promoted in Latin America by Costa Rica's Mideplan and the Focelac project around 2018, with Evalúa Jalisco joining in 2019. The term "with participation" sought to characterise those evaluations that involve participatory mechanisms in processes managed and commissioned by government bodies and that retain the research phase with external evaluators.

Although much of the EwP exercise in Jalisco was inspired by Costa Rica's prior experience and by the 2019 pilot practice, Evalúa Jalisco made its own adaptations, refinements and developments in the incorporation of participatory mechanisms, and in the practice and conceptualisation of EwP. Between 2019 and 2024, for Evalúa Jalisco this entailed formalisation in legal documents and organic structures. Thus, the Evaluation Unit was incorporated into the *Organic Law of the State of Jalisco* and into the *Internal Regulations of the Secretariat of Planning and Citizen Participation*, as the Directorate-General of Participatory Planning and Evaluation. In addition, the *General Guidelines for the Monitoring and Evaluation of the Programmes of the*

32 A public trust without its own organisational structure.

Government of Jalisco[33] were reformed, which, among other things, included Participatory Evaluation in law as a type of evaluation.

Thus, within the Government of Jalisco, *Participatory Evaluations* are defined as systematic assessments of the design, implementation and results of policies, plans, programmes and projects in which the active and orderly involvement of stakeholders (interested experts, planners, implementers, operators and beneficiaries) in the assessment process seeks to generate evidence-based recommendations with greater potential for usefulness and use, for the improvement of public management, fostering ownership and empowerment among those involved with regard to monitoring of public policies.

Public interventions, known as programmes or policies, are systemic processes in which a set of stakeholders does not act in a linear and disconnected manner but rather as a network: officials who operate from the various government areas, managing services or delivering goods; users or beneficiaries who participate; and, in some cases, they also comprise social organisations or academics who observe, analyse and influence the decisions and processes. All of them, interconnected, create routines, processes and patterns. Many government programmes face complex problems to address that involve a network of multiple stakeholders.[34]

[33] General Guidelines for the Monitoring and Evaluation of the Programmes of the Government of Jalisco, available as of 31 July 2024 at *https://evalua.jalisco.gob.mx/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Lineamientos_MyE2019_13-06-2019.pdf*.

[34] Public interventions, programmes or public policies with appropriate and optimal designs recognise, in their planning, management and monitoring processes, the multistakeholder character as part of the system of actors that influence the persistence of the public problem they aim to address. However, many others, do not recognise, document or account for this.

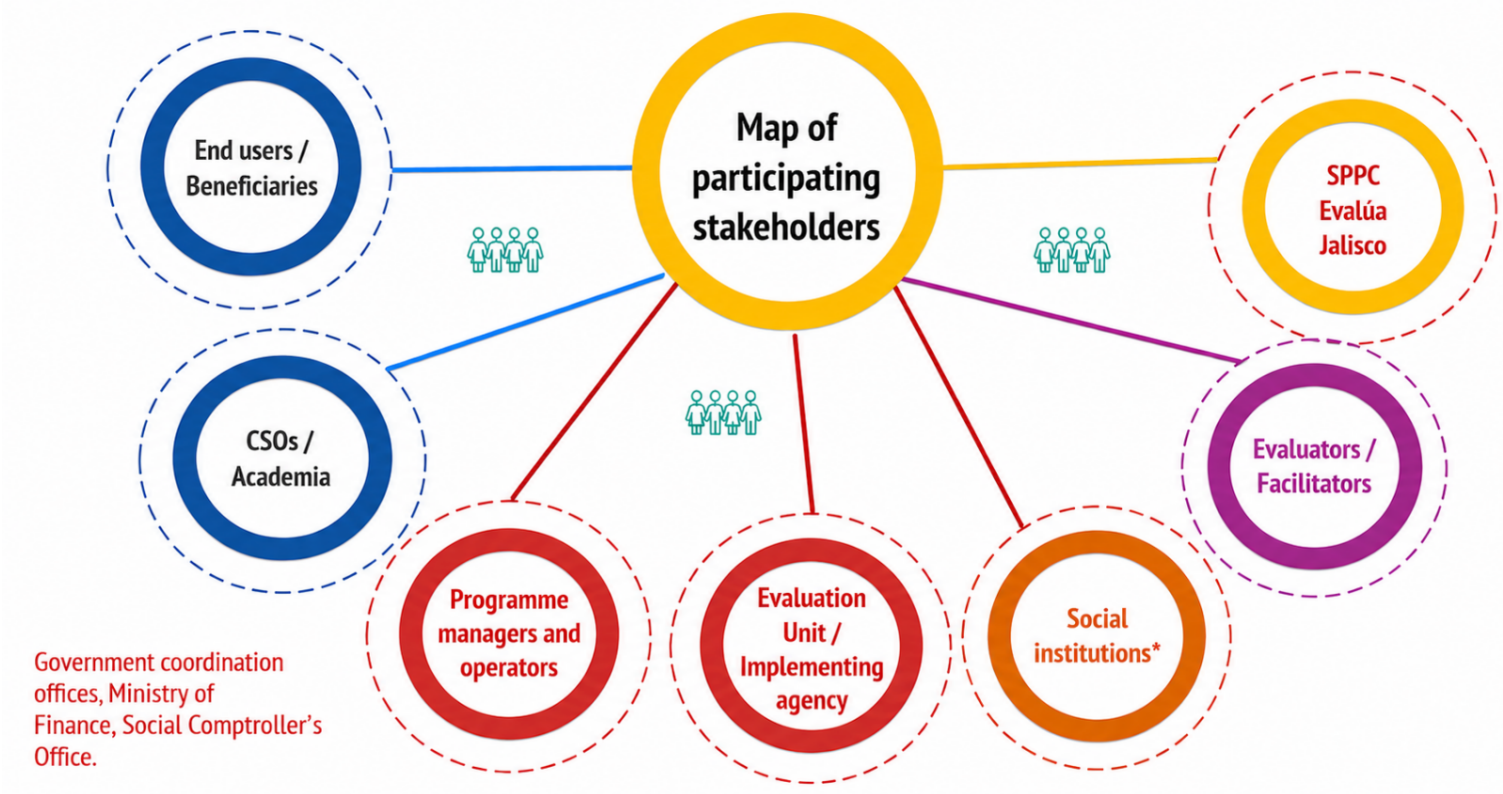


Figure 1. *Map of stakeholders in Participatory Evaluation decisions. Source: own elaboration*

Likewise, Evalúa Jalisco defined a *Participatory Evaluation Roadmap* comprising 4 phases and 14 major processes or activities, as illustrated below. It has also undertaken evaluation processes with some participatory components. This has entailed the incorporation of strategic workshops that have significantly improved the quality of the information, the evidence and the findings, as well as the relevance of the recommendations, which has favoured their use and the ownership of the improvements to the public policies evaluated.

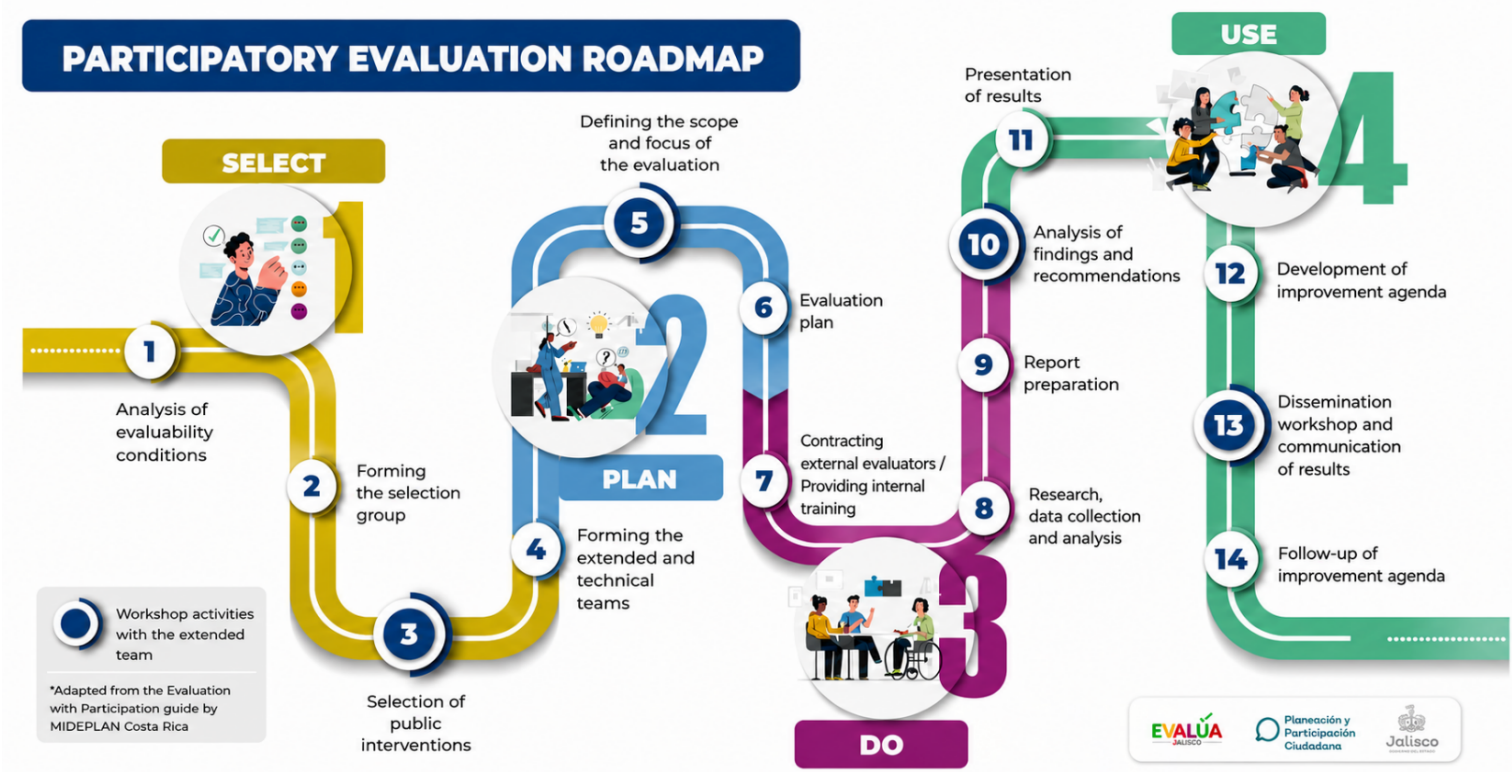


Figure 2. *Evalúa Jalisco Participatory Evaluation Roadmap*

From the perspective of the public sector, evaluation is a process of four major phases that involve selecting, planning, conducting the research and using the information. The process entails the coordination, management and facilitation of the various activities. In contrast to what is usually identified as evaluation, which involves the research, the gathering of information, its analysis and the generation of recommendations: for Evalúa Jalisco, evaluative research is merely one of the phases of evaluation. Although the details of the participatory evaluation roadmap, which includes a participatory workshop for each phase, are not addressed in this document, Evalúa Jalisco is in the process of publishing the *Participatory Evaluation Guide*, based on the experience of having completed four

participatory evaluations covering the entire roadmap.

Although Evalúa Jalisco considers that a Participatory Evaluation entails following the entire roadmap incorporating the various stakeholders, in practice, innovative processes were developed to incorporate the participation of diverse stakeholders in some of the activities — essentially operators, specialised non-governmental organisations and users/beneficiaries. Evalúa Jalisco's experience showed very positive results from introducing participatory mechanisms in the Workshop for the Analysis of Findings and Recommendations. This has been applied to four programme evaluations.

According to the *Ibero-American Charter of Citizen Participation in Public Management*, participation in public management reinforces the active position of people as members of their communities; it enables the expression and defence of their interests, the harnessing of their experiences and the strengthening of their capacities, thereby contributing to improving the population's quality of life. Participation, on its various scales, ranges from participating at the most basic level in consultation processes to the deepest extreme of participating by influencing decision-making. It is precisely here —at this level of recognition of processes of influential participation, recognising the interaction of the various participants in the management and functioning of a public policy— that Participatory Evaluation is situated.

Participatory Evaluation arises from the identification of two needs and the recognition of a human right:

- **The principle of inclusion.** Based on the right to equality, we identify the need to include all parties involved in the functioning of a public intervention in order to advance along the path to development proposed by the 2030 Agenda —that of advancing *without leaving anyone behind*— as set out in Mideplan's *Guide to Evaluation with Participation*.
- **Complex problems require systemic perspectives.** Most of the public problems faced by government programmes are complex, which makes it essential for all the stakeholders involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of a public policy to take part in the decisions to improve its functioning and to achieve the solutions proposed. Complex problems interact as systems in which all the parties involved are interconnected and require one another in order to be transformed.
- **The greater the participation, the greater the use of the evaluation.** Managing an evaluation is no easy task: it requires time, financial resources, an optimistic attitude and the motivation that it is possible to break with inertia, to win over the will of others and to influence the decisions of political authorities in order to improve a public intervention. Reaching the conclusion of an evaluative research study is often an uphill process; it might seem that

having the evaluation reports amounts to achieving its purpose; however, in terms of being a government body, this is perhaps only halfway along the road.

If the purpose of an evaluation is the improvement of public policy, the use phase that arises after the evaluative research is fundamental to achieving improvements and, thereby, to attaining the objectives of the public policy. Thus, at Evalúa Jalisco we have a need to improve the use of the information and of the lessons learned, and so we start from the hypothesis that Evaluation with participatory mechanisms will generate better conditions for increasing the use of the findings of the evaluative research, but above all of the lessons learned during the participatory process of managing the evaluation.

Participatory evaluation in Jalisco: the case of the Mi Pasaje Transport Support Programme

Evaluating with participatory mechanisms from within the public sector

Unlike "traditional" evaluations, which mainly serve the needs of decision-makers, political legitimacy or accountability, Evaluations with Participation place greater emphasis on the ownership and learning of the various stakeholders involved in the functioning of a public policy who, by being involved in the evaluation process, in negotiation and in the capacity for dialogue, generate a systemic perspective for addressing the complex problems that the public intervention seeks to change.

Participatory Evaluations require, of public officials, a change of mindset and the use of new tools in order to create spaces of proximity, equality, trust and collaboration that foster and accept co-creative decisions. For participants from outside government —whether evaluators, expert citizen participants, users or beneficiaries, and operational intermediaries— they require trust and knowledge of administrative and bureaucratic processes. There is no doubt that incorporating participatory mechanisms into evaluation demands of everyone more time, dedication, empathy, openness and a new outlook —that of seeing the other as a valid interlocutor, understanding the intervention as a system of multiple interconnected stakeholders who are indispensable for achieving the results expected by the community—.

It is worth noting that the following steps —specifically the first two— are additional to the Participatory Evaluation Roadmap of Jalisco, and relate to the preplanning and the decisions that should be considered before beginning the process. This helps to create a favourable, contextualised and manageable environment, in line with the needs and resources

available, in order to successfully complete the full participatory evaluation roadmap. This primarily involves senior management and key decision-makers.

The first step in the Evaluations with Participatory Approaches project[35], which began as a result of the collaboration and agreement signed with Focelac and Mideplan as mentioned above, consists of deciding on the degree of participation of the stakeholders — that is, deciding the phases and activities in which the various stakeholders will be involved. This degree of participation in the evaluation process may vary depending on the intervention in question, although in all cases the highest degree is sought — that is, that the stakeholders be involved in as many phases and activities as possible. Thus, up to now, the incorporation of multiple stakeholders in all the evaluation stages, or in any one in particular, has been a deliberate choice on the part of the public sector. Nonetheless, as detailed below, steps were taken to open up the process.

By way of example, in the first exercise of evaluation with participatory approaches —that of the Mi Pasaje programme— the stakeholders began their participation in the Design phase of the evaluation. By contrast, in the four evaluations launched in 2020, the participation of the stakeholders started from the very outset, with the decision on which interventions would be evaluated.

The second step in evaluations with participatory approaches consists of the preliminary mapping of stakeholders, which is complemented in the evaluation planning phase and which makes it possible to profile the working groups: the Extended Working Group and the Technical Team. The former is a group made up of people representing three types of stakeholders: Government (public officials, intervention managers, evaluation managers), Beneficiaries of the interventions, and Citizens (academics, representatives of civil society organisations, external allies, etc.). The Technical Team is a subgroup made up of one representative of each of the three types of stakeholders, whose functions are more operational and logistical.

The third step consists of carrying out each of the phases and activities of the Participatory Evaluation Roadmap with the Extended Working Group and/or the Technical Team, as established in the first step. It is worth noting that all activities are carried out using participatory techniques, such as: Timelines, Roleplay, Sociograms, Visual Maps, Brainstorming and the World Café, among others. The application of these techniques depends on the particular objectives of each activity.

It is important to mention that, although in the case of Evalúa Jalisco —as occurs in some evaluations at Mideplan— the collection and analysis of data, the

[35] In 2019, the Government of the State of Jalisco, through the Secretariat of Planning and Citizen Participation, launched the "Evaluations with Participatory Approaches" project, with the aim of improving evaluation management processes and increasing the "evaluation culture" in the state through the incorporation of innovative methodologies. The project was guided by, and arose from, the collaboration and agreement signed with Focelac and Mideplan.

preparation of the report and the workshop for the analysis of findings and recommendations (steps eight, nine and ten of the "Doing" phase in our participatory evaluation roadmap) are carried out by external parties through tendering or contracting processes based on the Terms of Reference, there are experiences of national and subnational governments in which these activities are carried out by intergovernmental research teams, which entails training processes for the collection and analysis of information.

According to Evalúa Jalisco's Participatory Evaluation Roadmap, Phase 3 (Doing) includes activities 7 (Drafting of Terms of Reference for the Contracting of External Evaluators), 8 (Research and gathering of information), 9 (Preparation of the Report) and 10 (Workshop for the Analysis of Findings and Recommendations). Steps 8, 9 and 10 are those that are actually outsourced; the rest of the roadmap is coordinated and managed by the governmental team of Evalúa Jalisco with the participation of the Extended and/or Technical Group.

It is worth noting that, in the case of Evalúa Jalisco, there was methodological facilitation support across the various participatory evaluations, mainly for the workshops, identified as activities 3 (Workshop for the Selection of public interventions to be evaluated), 5 (Planning Workshop for defining the scope and object of evaluation) and 13 (Workshop for the dissemination and communication of the results).

The *Mi Pasaje* Programme

The Mi Pasaje intervention is a social programme at state level that began operating in 2013 (previously called Bienevales) and which, for the 2019 financial year, operated with a state budget of 155,820,587 Mexican pesos (equivalent to 8.2 million US dollars at the July 2024 exchange rate), making it one of the programmes with the greatest social acceptance and budget in Jalisco. It consists of granting a direct subsidy of the cost of public transport in the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area and in 9 municipalities in the rest of the state to three sectors of the population: students, older adults and people with disabilities. The programme's objective is to provide accessibility to the public transport service in order to contribute to the household economy of older adults over 65 and people with disabilities, and of students at the lower-secondary, upper-secondary and higher-education levels of the state of Jalisco, with an income below the welfare line, through a transport subsidy mechanism.

By 2019, the year in which the evaluation began, the beneficiary users with transport support totalled 162,486: 90,005 students, 65,752 older adults and 6,729 people with disabilities.[36]

The selection of the Mi Pasaje Programme as the first participatory evaluation exercise at Evalúa Jalisco was

[36] In 2024 the Mi Pasaje Programme contemplates extending its coverage to a fourth population group: women. For further information, see https://misprogramas.jalisco.gob.mx. [Note from the editors: As of 2026, women who are heads of households are also eligible for the programme.]

based on a couple of criteria and through a process comprising several activities. The selection criteria were:

- **The budgetary and strategic relevance of the programme:** Mi Pasaje is one of the social programmes with the largest budget (state resources) and the largest registry of users/beneficiaries.
- **The consistency of the available information, which would enable access to data, historical series and information for analysis:** the programme began in 2013 with support for students only; in that year an evaluation of its design and operation was carried out, resulting in information-recording processes that were maintained and that were followed up in 2015 by Evalúa Jalisco, the same year in which it increased support for the older population and people with disabilities.
- **Having the willingness and openness of the programme's management team and of the institution in charge to carry out the evaluation:** without the openness and willingness to be evaluated, it would have been extremely complicated and difficult to achieve the process and the results obtained.

For this third criterion, Evalúa Jalisco developed a process of information, training and awareness-raising. In 2019, as the first action along the Participatory Evaluation roadmap in Jalisco, an Open Conference was organised for interested parties, delivered by Andrea Meneses, of Focelac, who had taken part in a participatory evaluation in Costa Rica coordinated by Mideplan. Likewise, an informational talk was held with the officials from the agencies of the Government of Jalisco who are designated as evaluation liaisons and who are responsible for advancing the evaluation agenda in their institutions, as part of Evalúa Jalisco's network of formal liaisons.

In the following months, materials, documents and experiences were distributed to the network's liaison officials, along with the news of the conclusion of the international collaboration and cooperation agreement to carry out the pilot exercise with Focelac and Mideplan; this entailed the Evalúa Jalisco team holding several meetings with the Focelac and Mideplan team in order to understand and define the work plan, as well as to get to know the external facilitator of the process.

Once the terms of the cooperation and the work plan had been defined, the Evalúa Jalisco team identified 2 programmes that met the first 2 criteria (the budgetary and strategic relevance of the programme and the consistency of the available information); we held discussions with our fellow evaluation liaison officials in the agencies, and only one expressed interest and institutional willingness. They, who are allies (being internal evaluation units), arranged a further meeting, this time with the programme's management team. The challenge with this team was that they had no prior experience of participatory evaluation, which required a couple of unhurried and empathetic conversations with the director and his team. We explained the Costa Rica experience and the planned process, raising awareness of and motivating them with the approach

of using evaluation to improve the programme itself. We also presented them with the map of stakeholders that we had identified to accompany the process, and proposed criteria for choosing the users who would be invited to participate as the Extended Group, leaving the selection of these users to them.

We can situate the Mi Pasaje intervention as a policy at subnational level that seeks to mitigate the expenses of the three population sectors already mentioned, in line with Social Development rights, as set out in the *State Plan for Governance and Development 20182024 – Vision 2030*: by supporting transport and setting out various objectives by beneficiary population, with a goal-level indicator (the Gini Coefficient), it seeks to reduce the public transport fare by 50% so that beneficiaries can use those resources in other areas. Tickets are provided, whether printed or via an electronic card, to the population sectors already mentioned, in order to help towards their transport costs.

The Evaluation with Participation of *Mi Pasaje* and its phases

It was thus that, in 2019, work began on what would become an Evaluation with Participation conducted by the Evaluation Unit and the Evalúa Jalisco Strategy, which was supported by Focelac. This exercise was carried out through the joint work of the Social Development Coordination Office, the General Secretariat of Government, the Secretariat of the Social Development System and the Secretariat of Planning and Citizen Participation, through its evaluation unit. In order to account for the way in which the participatory evaluation of the Mi Pasaje programme was carried out, we have organised this section according to the phases presented earlier: Planning, Doing and Use, presenting the key actions taken in each of them and reflecting on the achievements and challenges encountered.

Plannnig

In the first instance, introductory talks were held with the programme's directors and operators. At the same time, the evaluation unit began to plan what would become the first Planning Workshop for the evaluation with participation of the Mi Pasaje programme.

We can state that this phase entails one of the highest levels of participation, since it involves forming the extended and technical teams; delimiting the scope and object of evaluation; and preparing the Evaluation Plan. The delimitation of the scope and object of evaluation was carried out in the participatory Planning Workshop. To do so, various working meetings were held with the facilitator contracted by the Focelac project37 and with fellow public officials from Mideplan in Costa Rica. In these meetings, the methods for collecting and systematising the information obtained in the planning workshops that had been carried out in both countries were shared. Furthermore, in this phase, another in-person workshop was held —the Workshop for the validation of the terms of reference—

[37] Dr Juan Murciano, from Andalusia, Spain.

in which the methodology for collating the information obtained in the first workshop was explained, the work carried out by the technical team was presented, and interactive group activities were used to seek the approval of the final evaluation questions, the criteria and the type of evaluation (by part of the extended team).

The Participatory Workshop for the Planning of the Evaluation: What to evaluate? was carried out with the extended group over the course of a week in November 2019, with 4 sessions of 5 to 6 hours in an in-person format, in which we, members of the Extended Group, got to know one another, learned the details of participatory evaluation, understood the objective and the theory of change of the Programme to be evaluated and, above all, we were able to establish the evaluation questions —that is, what we wanted the evaluation to answer for us—.[38]

The main moments and techniques used in the participatory evaluation Planning workshop:

- *Definition of evaluation:* starting from a brainstorming session, a collective definition of evaluation and its objectives was constructed.
- *Evaluation roadmap:* identification of the phases and activities involved in the evaluation process.
- *Reconstruction of the object of evaluation in working teams* made up of at least one representative of each stakeholder involved.
- *Collective construction of the results chain:* the inputs, activities, goods or services and results that make up the intervention were identified collectively.
- *Formulation of the evaluation questions:* through a brainstorming session, the teams put forward questions or matters they would like to explore about any aspect of the intervention.
- *Identification of the evaluation criteria:* collectively, the questions were organised into an Evaluation Map.
- *Establishment of the evaluation roadmap:* once the questions and their respective criteria had been defined, the Evaluation Roadmap or Timeline was established. Along a timeline, the next steps to be taken are agreed, the roles or activities of the participants are defined, and the responsibilities and other agreements for the evaluation process are established.

[38] It is worth noting that, for Evalúa Jalisco, one of the most significant stages in terms of levels of participation and information gathering is the evaluation planning workshop —a key moment for pooling knowledge, for reframing the traditional evaluation process into the participatory evaluation process, and for building the trust needed to generate changes with public value—. We therefore consider the planning workshop to be a requirement of the utmost importance when carrying out a participatory evaluation from within government.

Stakeholders	Members
Evaluation Unit of the Government of Jalisco (Evalúa Jalisco)	A team comprising officials from the Directorate of Evaluation for Public Improvement and the person holding the post of Director-General of Participatory Planning and Evaluation
Management team	A team comprising officials from the Government Evaluation Unit (Evalúa Jalisco), a representative from the General Strategic Coordination Office for Social Development, two representatives from FOCELAC, as well as the heads of the Directorate General for Programme Planning and the Directorate of State Programmes at the Secretariat for the Social Assistance System (SSAS).
Technical team	A team comprising three officials from the Government Evaluation Unit (Evalúa Jalisco), two representatives from the Directorate General for Programme Planning, one representative from the Directorate for State Programmes of the SSAS, and one representative from the General Strategic Coordination Office for Social Development.
Extended working group	Comprising the technical team, representatives of the TISA company (the programme's intermediary organisation), the Secretariat for the Social Assistance System (SSAS), the Secretariat for Transport (ST), the Secretariat for Planning and Citizen Participation (SPPC) and at least two beneficiaries per programme component.

Table 1. *Stakeholders participating in the Evaluation with participatory mechanisms of the Mi Pasaje programme.* Source: *produced by Evalúa Jalisco*

On concluding the workshop, the technical team systematised and processed the information gathered in order to prepare the proposed Terms of Reference, which was then put to discussion with the extended working group.

A total of 125 questions arising during the workshop were assessed; these were grouped according to the criteria reviewed during the workshop, with the majority corresponding to criteria of quality, followed by Effectiveness, Relevance, Coherence, Efficiency and Sustainability.

Once the Terms of Reference had been validated by the Extended Group, the lengthy administrative process of contracting the evaluation team was carried out.

As regards the achievements in this first exercise, we realised that we managed to adapt the existing tools within the State government for communicating what we wanted to do and how we wanted to do it, as the existence of the state planning liaisons was the key

to enabling communication to flow more smoothly and effectively —which reflected directly in the outcomes achieved through the implementation of the improvements to the programme arising from this evaluation.

The challenges at this stage were of various kinds: at the interinstitutional level (since talking about innovative exercises in the evaluation of programmes or public policies involved dialogue), it was necessary to persuade, and even to train, those involved in the evaluation facilitation processes; at the internal level (which entailed carrying out, in a different way, the technical work that had always characterised the State's evaluation unit — developing terms of reference from the compilation of the local knowledge of the programme's own beneficiaries, planners, operators and directors), it meant finding a language that was comprehensible to all those involved, as well as a sharing of common ground that, without losing methodological rigour, was playful and accessible.

Doing

We can maintain that this stage entails consultative participation at the end of the research, since the tendering processes are strictly internal due to their administrative nature. The Roadmap identifies the actions of the Drafting of Terms of Reference and the Contracting of external evaluators in the case of Evalúa Jalisco, the Conduct of the research and gathering of information, the Preparation of the Report and the Workshop for the Analysis of Findings and Recommendations. Owing to the Covid19 pandemic, the process of contracting the Evaluation Team was considerably delayed. Once it became possible, it was carried out through a National Public Tender — an open and transparent competition in which all evaluation teams meeting the technical requirements may take part. In Jalisco, at the moment an evaluation is awarded, an initial meeting is held with the team; on this occasion the aim was to immerse the team as fully as possible in the process that was already under way within the evaluation with participation of the Mi Pasaje programme.

With regard to the administrative process, the procurement request was successfully submitted in March 2020; however, during the pandemic there was a period of uncertainty surrounding the National Public Tender processes (April–July); in the months of August and September the call for tenders was published, and with it, by October, the decision and the notification of the selected evaluation team were obtained.

Once notified and with the research work under way, the evaluation team committed to six specific deliverables: the evaluation project, the preliminary report, the participatory workshop for the analysis of recommendations, the final report, the infographic and the presentation of results. Likewise, owing to the delay in the face of the Covid19 contingency, it was necessary to hold a virtual meeting with the Extended Group in order to reflect on the new possible

scenarios for the evaluation, possible adjustments to the programme and any implications for the objectives and/or questions of the evaluation.

Finally, the participatory workshop for the analysis of recommendations was held. That is, before completing the research work, the evaluation team gives a presentation of results in the form of a workshop, where the recommendations were analysed and, in some cases, reformulated and approved by all the stakeholders involved (the extended team), envisaging the application of participatory methodologies or techniques and the participation of all the stakeholders involved in the evaluation.

The evaluators made 18 recommendations, on the basis of which 14 commitments to action were established in the Improvement Agenda. The positive and negative findings, as well as the summary of recommendations, were placed in the evaluation infographic.[39]

One of the challenges that became one of our most significant achievements in this phase was to adapt and bring into line the way in which the external evaluators had been approaching the participatory approach; this meant inviting the team to position itself from a different facet and from an analytical perspective other than the one they were accustomed to working with: one that was understood more as a technical and methodological facilitator of the processes and a source of support for resolving doubts, building trust and horizontality, and acting as an ally to the intervention that helps to improve it. In addition, they were invited to learn more about what the participatory methodology entails, with material on the subject shared with them as support for carrying out the evaluation in line with this approach; finally, they were invited to share their experience on a panel during evaluation week, as well as to take part in and be students of the first cohort of the Diploma Course in Participatory Evaluation of Public Policies from within Government, described above.

It is important to say that, although this was achieved with three of the four evaluators in charge of the projects carried out by Evalúa Jalisco, it was not the case for one in particular, with whom the change of paradigm was not achieved: we did not manage to convey to him the importance of participatory processes in evaluations, nor was this new role of the evaluator understood; there were tensions and conflicts in achieving the purpose. Nonetheless, given the robustness of the terms of reference, the contract and the knowledge and experience of the management team, it was possible to carry the project through as stipulated — although neither the change nor an understanding of the importance of participation, that new role and those new functions in his work was achieved; nor was any collaboration achieved beyond the project. It stands out that, thanks to this, it was indeed possible to strengthen, in future terms of reference, the importance

[39] Details of the evaluation, reports and presentations are available at *https://evalua.jalisco.gob.mx/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/Infografia_EcP_EMT_0.pdf*. Details of the improvement agenda are available in the Evalúa Jalisco Improvement Agendas System at *https://agendasdemejora.jalisco.gob.mx/panel/verAgenda?id=130*.

and weight of the evaluator's profile, both in terms of specific experience and of training.

Use

This was one of the key stages for the implementation of the recommendations arising from the research. The support and willingness that the members of the extended team showed in the working sessions was always one of cooperation and contribution, even despite the issues arising from the Covid19 pandemic. In the Participatory Evaluation Roadmap, this is the Phase with the greatest number of activities and processes, which involve: the Presentation of results, the Preparation of the improvement agenda, the Workshop for the dissemination and communication of the results, and the Follow-up of the improvement agenda.

Within the Evaluation Unit of the government of the state of Jalisco, there is a consolidated strategy for the use of evaluation, since the Improvement Agenda System has been developed —an online platform that helps the operators and decision-makers of the programmes to define and communicate the recommendations, consolidating them as commitments to improve the evaluated programmes themselves—. The Improvement Agendas strategy consists of providing support in carrying out the activities arising from the commitments previously accepted by the planning liaisons. It also makes it possible to report on and monitor progress in fulfilling these activities and commitments for public improvement. It is worth mentioning that the acceptance of the recommendations arising from participatory evaluations is higher: in the case of Mi Pasaje, 18 recommendations were obtained, of which 14 became commitments and were taken through to implementation for the improvement of the programme; work on some of them began as early as the planning workshop, owing to the closeness of the co-creative work of the operators, decision-makers and the programme's beneficiaries themselves.

The process of formalising or consolidating the Improvement Agendas in the state of Jalisco involves four short stages:

- the signing of an Institutional Position Statement by the planning liaisons responsible for the programme,
- the carrying out of the Analysis of Recommendations by the programme's operational staff and those responsible for it,
- the Establishment of Commitments, and
- the Follow-up through to their Conclusion.

This process is carried out in all the evaluations conducted by the State's Evaluation Unit: in the case of the formalisation, implementation and follow-up of the Mi Pasaje agenda, a new process of mutual support was carried out between the programme's director, the public transport implementers and the Evaluation Unit: the participatory work was key to understanding the importance of applying these commitments. In this case, the negotiations for fulfilling the agenda took place between the Planning and Programming Coordinator of the Secretariat of Transport (ST) and

the Director of State Programmes of the Secretariat of the Social Assistance System (SSAS), with the advice and guidance of the Evalúa Jalisco unit of the SPPC.

Also in this phase, in the case of Mi Pasaje, two further follow-up workshops were held. One, led by Focelac one year after the research work had been presented and concluded, was the Follow-up workshop "Was it worth it?", where all the stakeholders involved in the evaluation process were brought together again; the aim was to revisit the improvements implemented as a result of the evaluation with participation, to gauge the views of the stakeholders involved in the process, and to reach action agreements for the completion of the improvement agenda arising from the evaluation (since, at that point, some activities in the improvement agenda remained to be completed). The other, of participatory activities, took place a few months later and was led by the State's Evaluation Unit itself; it was an exercise in presenting and disseminating all the work carried out and implemented by the programme's operators, addressed to all the members of the Mi Pasaje programme's working team.

As part of the achievements in this phase, it should be clarified that all the programme's operational staff had the opportunity to learn what this participatory evaluation process was and how it was carried out, since, once the process had concluded and the follow-up workshop had been held, a process of disseminating the work was set in motion that had never before been undertaken.

Effects identified from the evaluation of the Mi Pasaje Programme

Another aspect that has permeated participatory evaluations in Jalisco is the improvement in the results of the evaluated interventions; this has been achieved partly thanks to the generation of more relevant evaluation questions and to the level of knowledge contributed by the various stakeholders, which ranges from the technical expertise of academic specialists to the experiential knowledge of beneficiaries and operators in the day-to-day running of the programmes. These questions have produced an increase in learning and in the understanding of the evaluated interventions.

Our hypothesis is that changes to the programme began as early as the first evaluation planning workshop. Following interviews and conversations with fellow operators and directors of the programme, they told us that listening in spaces of reflection and dialogue with beneficiaries, as well as with all those involved in the programme, enabled them to understand different perspectives and problems faced by both users and drivers.

According to the implementers, before concluding the evaluative research the programme itself made substantial changes:

- **Waiting times at the service points:** year after year, attention to beneficiaries has been improving.

In 2019, the average time was 40 to 50 minutes per person; by 2020 it was reduced to 30 minutes, while for the service that began in 2022 the average is 15 minutes.

- **The reinforcement of the initiative to migrate from the physical ticket to the electronic card:** in the workshops, the argument of the benefit to users was strengthened, given that using an electronic card —as nonbeneficiaries do— prevents discriminatory treatment by drivers.
- **The reduction of the number of documents required:** previously 4 documents were requested and now only 1 is required, plus proof of study in the case of students.
- **The improvement in the use of transport itself:** beneficiaries complained that, on some routes, on seeing that people had a ticket, the bus would not stop for them.

For their part, the managers of the interventions have shown an increase in their acceptance of being evaluated, since the process has enabled them to understand that the purpose of evaluations is constructive and that it seeks learning and continuous improvement rather than sanction and punishment —that is, they have been able to identify a benefit—.

All those involved in the process, especially the beneficiaries and citizens, responded positively to the recognition of their capacity to contribute and to generate knowledge that leads to improvements. They adopted a stance of empowerment and came to see themselves as leading stakeholders of the change they wish to see generated, and not merely as observers and recipients of government benefits.

The training and capacity-building mechanisms for all those involved in the process are undeniable, they enable closer ties to build teams and to work towards common ends across all spheres. This has facilitated continuous institutional learning and growth, as well as greater closeness to the population involved in the process.

Nonetheless, the sustainability of this practice does not escape facing some challenges, the most notable of which is the great deal of management effort and time on the part of the coordinating/facilitating teams, since the participation of a wide diversity of stakeholders entails the complicated task of adjusting availability, timing, schedules, spaces, and so on. Much of the success of this kind of practice requires a high level of commitment and participation from all the stakeholders involved.

The duration of evaluations carried out with participatory approaches increases considerably. Conflicts also arise between approaches and points of view. Having a greater diversity of stakeholders enriches the information, the practice and the learning, but this entails a greater challenge: placing the common good above particular interests and reaching agreements and consensus with all the participants —something that is not always possible to achieve—.

A lack of competences, skills or abilities in matters of evaluation, or in any matter related to the process, tends

to be a challenge that must be overcome at the start of evaluations with participation. To this end, initial training sessions and formative workshops on these topics were carried out, so that all the stakeholders stood on a minimum common ground. Added to this was the context of the Covid19 pandemic, which forced us to resort to digital platforms with which most of the stakeholders involved were not familiar, entailing additional processes of training in digital literacy. Finally, there was the task of adapting the content and terminology of participatory evaluation for a less technical and academic understanding among the diversity of participants. All of this without losing sight of the strong formative and capacity-building component that the process entails.

Lessons learned and challenges from the experience of Evalúa Jalisco

In the following lines, the knowledge constructed from the authors' experience is offered analytically, with the intention that the reflections, lessons and challenges arising from the participatory evaluations managed by Evalúa Jalisco may serve other readers interested in carrying out this kind of evaluation practice in their own contexts.

Some of the advantages inherent in incorporating participation into evaluation processes include a strong formative component through which capacities are developed in all the stakeholders who take part: such is the case of the need to create a level playing field among the participating group — making use of popular education, with simple analogies from everyday life and playful tools with very concrete objectives, it becomes possible to explain and provide training on what an evaluation entails, what a criterion is, how evaluation questions are constructed and defined, where a finding or a recommendation comes from, and so on. This process helps to build trust and horizontality within the group, in addition to contributing to the generation of evaluations with more relevant questions, objectives and criteria, adapted to the contexts in which the evaluations are conducted. Like any process oriented towards learning, it requires time, additional effort and adaptation of the methodology and the tools used, which must be focused on placing the stakeholders at the centre, never losing sight of who the participants are and what particular needs or characteristics they have for learning and for developing their participation.

On the other hand, one of the strong criticisms that have been made of this kind of evaluation is that, as mentioned, the processes involve training and adaptation, which is why the times for completion tend to be longer than for conventional evaluations; however, an important element — in addition to those mentioned in this document — is the fact, highlighted here, that improvements to interventions may, and tend to, arise from early stages such as the planning phase, since, with different stakeholders taking part in the processes (ranging from the intervention's

decision-makers to the operators and beneficiaries), it is possible that, without the need for a final evaluation report, necessary and relevant improvements are detected, expressed and fed back by the different stakeholders, which can be implemented in parallel to the evolution of the evaluation.

The foregoing has implications for greater use by policymakers, both of the evaluation results and of the process itself. A first reflection of this is, as has been seen, an increase in the percentage of acceptance of recommendations within the mechanism implemented in Jalisco for following up and applying the recommendations arising from evaluations: namely, the Improvement Agendas. Following an evaluation, the recommendations are analysed and subjected to an assessment of feasibility, viability and the availability of human and material resources, between the central evaluation unit, the operators and the decision-makers of the programme, in order to become commitments to improve the programmes. These set out activities, completion dates and means of verification, fed in real time by the liaisons of the agencies, and can be monitored publicly through the public platform.[40]

Another aspect that it is considered important to clarify is that a Participatory Evaluation, or one that considers participatory mechanisms within its process, does not entail a loss of technical or methodological rigour: this is a relevant, necessary and non-negotiable factor in any kind of evaluation. The truth is that it is also considered equally relevant to bring together a diverse team under principles of collaboration, horizontality and trust, since this generates more relevant processes and is, moreover, an important component for the sustainability of the changes after the evaluation.

For its part, at Evalúa Jalisco the terms of reference are drawn up to strengthen both the mechanisms that foster methodological and technical rigour and the atmosphere of collaboration, horizontality and trust, as for any other "traditional" evaluation. To this end, clear objectives are considered, emanating from research questions associated with evaluation criteria (all of them participatory, arising from selection and planning workshops), and the Evaluation Matrix is developed within them. On the one hand, the matrix must contain a proposal by the evaluator/facilitator which, associated with those criteria, questions and objectives, is complemented by a robust methodological design proposal that is appropriate for answering the questions. On the other, it must contain data collection and analysis techniques, as well as their sources and the participatory mechanisms that will be used —and in what way, or to answer which question—.

Within this document, the experience, training, skills, education and area of expertise of the evaluation/facilitation team in relation to the object of study and the participatory approach to evaluation are assessed, by means of a rubric of points and percentages.

On the other hand, for the phases and stages in which an external party is not involved, and which are

[40] The public platform is available at *https://agendasdemejora.jalisco.gob.mx/*.

carried out by the Evalúa Jalisco team, evidence of the processes is generated and documented publicly through the Evalúa Jalisco platform, the Improvement Agendas and the various social media. In addition, within the team, diversity and complementarity of profiles are sought, as well as constant training, in order to learn the tools and develop the skills required in participatory evaluation processes, acting in the Selection, Planning and Use phases as managers, but also as facilitators of the processes. An example of the foregoing is the development and implementation of the Diploma Course in the Evaluation of Public Policies from within Government, which, in collaboration with the Jalisco College, is aimed at officials, evaluation managers and evaluators interested in replicating these processes, and which now has a second cohort. It is worth noting that the Evalúa Jalisco team takes part both in the development and delivery of content and in the tutoring of the students taking the diploma course.

The training and capacity development of the evaluators, facilitators and managers of the evaluations takes on importance because, in participatory processes, tensions arising from the diversity of opinions are normal and desirable: embracing conflict, and having and developing the skills to know how to manage that conflict between the parties in a constructive and efficient way (achieving collective intelligence), is the duty of the management, facilitation and evaluation teams. It is, moreover, another of the fundamental elements that must permeate a participatory evaluation process in any of its phases, since without it, it would not be possible to reach consensus and generate collective and relevant results. The evaluators take on a new role as facilitators of the process and of the transformation following the use of the information gathered, and should preferably take part in the entire process, whenever the regulatory framework of each setting so allows.

Participatory Evaluations require a change of mindset on the part of officials and the use of new tools in order to create spaces of proximity, equality, trust and collaboration that foster and accept co-creative decisions. For participants from outside government —whether evaluators, expert citizen participants, users or beneficiaries, and operational intermediaries— they require trust and knowledge of administrative and bureaucratic processes. There is no doubt that incorporating participatory mechanisms into evaluation demands of everyone more time, dedication, empathy, openness and active listening in order to move from “mine, yours, theirs” to a clear “ours” with a new outlook: beginning to see the other as a valid interlocutor, understanding the intervention as a system of interconnected and indispensable multiple stakeholders needed to achieve the results expected by the community.

Another aspect that becomes relevant when carrying out participatory evaluation processes has to do with balancing the extended teams that will be formed to take part in the decisions that will guide the evaluation. This is a key factor in avoiding possible future biases in the development of collective intelligence. What do we mean by this? The fact that, at the moment when the

different stakeholders are invited to participate, the aim should be for the groups by type of stakeholder (government, citizens, CSOs, partner institutions, etc.) to carry equal weight, attempting to ensure that the same number of people participate per representation group, which will allow for a distinction of approaches, creative solutions and conflict between perspectives, but without polarising or biasing in favour of majorities. This tends to represent a considerable challenge given the differing availability of some to participate compared with others; nonetheless, this aspect is considered crucial: if it is attended to from the outset, it will allow for a better development of the whole process.

Within these extended working teams, the importance of the evaluation managers stands out in ensuring that those in charge of evaluations within the agencies and programmes become strategic allies, convinced of the importance of the process and of the participation of the different stakeholders for a better result that benefits all those involved. Their role is key for the convening/inviting of beneficiaries/users to participate, and for the very knowledge of the programme's operation and its results, as well as for verifying the possibilities the evaluated intervention has of being maintained and for agreeing some mechanism that may help to guarantee its continuity beyond two years.

Likewise, although the participatory approach can be used in any kind of intervention to be evaluated (thanks to the adaptation of tools and the permitted adjustment of the assessment elements for the different objectives and settings of the evaluation), it is suggested/recommended that, in contexts where this kind of process is being undertaken for the first time, a profile be sought for users/beneficiaries that entails a certain level of continuity —that is, that they not be one-off-contact interventions, but rather beneficiaries who will hold that status for at least a period of one year or more. This contributes to the difficult challenge of ensuring that beneficiaries, in particular, continue participating throughout the entire evaluation process—. In this same sense, it is suggested that care be taken over the type of user/beneficiary —referring to those who have been denied or had interrupted one or more of their human rights— given the nature of such cases and the special care needed in order to avoid re-victimising them or exposing them to processes that are uncomfortable or that are not ideal for the benefit of their situation. In this regard, it should be clarified that it is not that this kind of approach is not recommended in such cases: on the contrary, it is considered entirely appropriate; however, a certain level of experience in this respect is indeed required in order to achieve it without causing harm to any actor.

Finally, as part of the authors' reflections, challenges and lessons learned, it is considered important to mention that, although this endeavour involves sharing —from an experience of public-sector work— the things that have worked, those that have represented a challenge and those that are considered appropriate to adjust or replicate, it is important to recognise that, even though there are certain conditions in the environment that must permeate this kind of process and some premises that must be guaranteed, there is

no ideal scenario for taking the decision to incorporate more voices into the decision-making over whom, what and how to evaluate in public interventions, because the ideal context does not exist: in our experience, it is more a decision that is taken in the knowledge that it will entail navigating situations previously unknown in "traditional" evaluation processes. It thus entails changing the paradigm and ceding the power that was previously believed to be the territory of only a select few who mastered the technique and a certain terminology; when that premise is overcome, spaces are opened up to create creative solutions to the complex problems experienced in the different contexts, and bonds are generated that extend beyond the evaluation processes and the improvements achieved in the interventions.

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Chapter 8

Participatory Evaluation

3 Public Interventions in the State of Zacatecas (2020)

Janett Salvador

Abstract

With a disruptive approach, the team leading the state evaluation system in the Mexican state of Zacatecas became pioneers by evaluating three public interventions in a participatory manner. Two elements of innovation were identified. First, the paradigm of evaluating programmes was broken, as the evaluations covered a project within a strategy, a component of a programme, and a cross-cutting model; the main feature of these interventions was that, from their design and implementation, they had experiences of citizen participation. The second innovative element was the inclusion in the evaluation's decision-making process of those responsible for implementing the interventions and/or those who had participated in other stages of the interventions. This chapter documents the process, the challenges and the lessons learned. Whilst each participatory evaluation process is unique due to its specific characteristics, they can serve as a basis for the design and implementation of other evaluations with which they share certain similarities.

Keywords

Participatory Evaluation, Evaluation Of Public Interventions, Zacatecas.

Citation

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Participatory evaluation of government interventions in Mexico is a recent practice, no more than 5 years old. The institutionalisation of evaluation in the country, at the federal and subnational levels, has standardised the terms of reference of traditional evaluations with no participation of the stakeholders involved in the interventions. In 2020, the Government of the State of Zacatecas made a disruptive move by incorporating into its Annual Evaluation Programme the participatory evaluations of 3 public interventions: these were not budgetary programmes (to which evaluations are usually applied), but rather a strategy for gender equality, a project for the social prevention of violence, and a component of a programme that receives resources transferred by the federal government.

This chapter has been structured to first outline the context of the institutionalisation of evaluation in Mexico at the federal and subnational levels, and to attempt to convey how subnational governments — particularly the states— have greater potential for innovation than the federal government in matters of evaluation, owing to the regulatory framework governing them and the political plurality within which they operate.

It is important for the reader to be aware of the pandemic context in which the evaluations were carried out and the constraints that had to be faced in implementing them. Even with these limitations, the results of the evaluations proved valuable for the interventions. The recommendations, which can be consulted in the evaluation reports, were enriched by the experience of those who collected data in the field, those who implemented the interventions and those who analysed the systematised primary data. This wealth of opinions, knowledge and practical lessons cannot be achieved in traditional evaluations conducted by an external evaluation team working solely with desk-based research and documentary evidence.

Finally, the lessons learned from implementing these evaluations —such as the analysis of the challenges faced and how they were resolved— are useful tools for anyone wishing to implement a participatory evaluation of government programmes.

The context of evaluation in Mexico

In Mexico, since the late twentieth century, evaluations have been carried out on programmes and public policies whose operating rules mandated their evaluation. However, it was not until the emergence of the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL) in 2004, the enactment of the *Federal Budget and Fiscal Responsibility Act (LFPRH)* in 2006, the publication of the *General Guidelines for the Evaluation of Federal Public Administration*

Programmes in 2007 and the constitutional reforms of 2008 that the regulatory framework was established for the implementation of the Performance Evaluation System (SED) at the federal level (CONEVAL, 2016).

This was replicated at the state and municipal levels, prompting subnational governments to move towards models of results-oriented public administration. In compliance with federal regulations, the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit (SHCP) draws up each year a Diagnostic Report on progress in implementing the Results-based Budget (PbR)-SED in the federal entities and municipalities[41], and, since 2012, CONEVAL has produced the Diagnostic Report on progress in monitoring and evaluation in federal entities[42]; these instruments have resulted in some states and municipalities developing and strengthening their evaluation systems (CONEVAL, n.d.).

Zacatecas: a state at the forefront

For its part, the Mexican state of Zacatecas established the State Evaluation System as an inter-institutional mechanism to promote the external evaluation of public policies, programmes or development initiatives driven by the State Government. In 2018 the *General Evaluation Plan* was approved, whose objective was to link evaluations to the priority public policies derived from the *State Development Plan* then in force. Each year, the State Evaluation Council, (hereinafter "the Council"), which is the decision-making body for evaluation in the state, determines the programmes to be evaluated and the type of evaluations to be carried out on the basis of the aforementioned General Evaluation Plan. One of the criteria for selecting interventions to be evaluated is that they have *operating rules* (ROP) and that they are a priority for achieving the objectives of state policies (Consejo Estatal de Evaluación, 2018).

Strictly speaking, no methodology for the design of evaluations was developed within the state, since, for the commissioning of external evaluations, the *Terms of Reference (TOR)* developed by CONEVAL and the SHCP were adapted, both for state programmes and for those carried out with federal resources. This led to evaluations having little or no participation from the people who run the programmes, and to the complete absence of participation from other stakeholders related to the programme. The participation of the people responsible for the planning, implementation, operation or monitoring of the programme in the evaluations was limited only to the submission of the requested documents and, on rare occasions, to taking part in interviews. Even in the implementation of the recommendations derived from the evaluations through the mechanism of *Areas for Improvement (ASM)*[43], participation was passive and limited. This

[41] See https://www.transparenciapresupuestaria.gob.mx/Entidades-Federativas

[42] See https://www.coneval.org.mx/coordinacion/entidades/paginas/indice_diagnosticos_temp.aspx

[43] Commitments assumed by the agencies or entities of the Federal Public Administration (APF) based on recommendations or findings from external evaluations, with the aim of implementing improvement processes within programmes (CONEVAL, n.d.).

meant that the results of the evaluations were biased by the vision and opinion of those who designed and conducted them, without taking into account the point of view of those who participate in the processes of generating and delivering the goods and services that the interventions produce, or of those who receive them, except on occasions when there was some kind of assessment of the latter's satisfaction.

In 2020, the Annual Evaluation Programme (PAE) of the state of Zacatecas incorporated 3 participatory evaluations of state public interventions that contributed to the policy of equality and social wellbeing. Not only was the participatory methodology itself an innovation, but it was also a major change to move from evaluating programmes to including evaluations of a strategy, the component of a programme, and a project that forms part of a programme, since traditionally in the country, at both the federal and subnational levels, evaluation is carried out on public programmes (Gob. Edo. Zac., 2020).

The interventions evaluated

Each of the 3 interventions selected to be evaluated under a participatory methodology had had some kind of participation from other stakeholders during its design or implementation, such as beneficiary communities or civil society organisations, so participatory evaluation was the next step. Each intervention is detailed below.

The gender perspective in state public policies: the Model for Equality between Men and Women

Although laws had been enacted in the state of Zacatecas since 2008[44] to promote equality between men and women, and to prevent, address, punish and eradicate violence against women, in 2016 there were still high rates of violence against women. According to data from the 2016 *National Survey on the Dynamics of Household Relationships, (ENDIREH)*, 59% of women in Zacatecas had suffered at least one incident of discrimination or emotional, economic, physical or sexual violence over the course of their lives, whether at school, at work, within their families or by their partners (Secretaría de las Mujeres, 2017).

In 2017, the Executive Secretariat of the National System to Prevent, Address, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women admitted the Request for a Declaration of a Gender Violence Alert against Women

[44] In 2008 the Act on Equality between Women and Men in the State of Zacatecas was enacted, which promotes women's access to social, economic and cultural rights and the full enjoyment thereof. In 2009 the Act on Women's Access to a Life Free from Violence for the State of Zacatecas was enacted, the purpose of which is to prevent, address, punish and eradicate violence against women in the state, and to establish coordination between the bodies of the state public administration and the municipalities.

(AVGM)[45] for the state of Zacatecas, filed by various civil society organisations (SEGOB, 2018).

Against this backdrop, one of the responses of the Government of the State to achieve the policy of equality within the State Public Administration was the implementation of the Model for Equality between Women and Men (hereinafter this intervention is referred to as "the Model"), under the responsibility of the Secretariat for Women (SEMUJER), which seeks the generation, application, evaluation, monitoring and improvement of public policies with a gender perspective and a human rights based approach. The Model consists of four sections:

> The first, concerning the diagnostic assessment, helps to contextualise the inequalities between women and men in the state, which serves as an input for the design of policies or actions deriving from this Model; it fosters knowledge of the regulatory framework that requires the development of such policies. The second corresponds to the requirements that each body of the government of the state of Zacatecas must meet for the formulation, implementation, monitoring and improvement of public policies with a gender perspective. The third and fourth contain the list of international and national regulations on human rights of women, in which a matrix of responsibilities of public entities is established. (C-evalua, 2020, p. 15).

To this end, the following actions were considered:

- the formation of a so-called Equality Committee in each of the agencies and entities of the Government of the State, with people responsible for planning, operational areas, evaluation and monitoring, who were in charge of implementing the Model's actions;
- the preparation of a diagnostic assessment of the situation of the gender perspective in the public policies of the government body;
- the definition of an action plan;
- monitoring of the action plan.

The activities included in the action plan include: training on the gender perspective and human rights for the body's staff, the planning of public policies with a gender perspective, and citizen and interinstitutional audits, among others.

The Model is aimed at state agencies and entities, and its direct recipients are the individuals who take the training courses and are supported in carrying out their duties to incorporate a gender perspective; society as a whole, who visit the offices to carry out administrative procedures, and those who receive the goods and services of public programmes, are the ultimate beneficiaries of the Model.

The Model provides for the creation of Equality Committees within the agencies; these lend a plural character to the implementation of the Model, since they involve staff from each agency and from other government bodies through interinstitutional audits[46].

[45] This is the set of emergency government measures to confront and eradicate femicidal violence in a given territory.

[46] As part of the requirements of the Model, the citizen and interinstitutional audits made it possible to verify the progress of the Model's implementation through the joint and coordinated participation of the government, civil society organisations and specialised academic bodies.

The Model was one of the three interventions selected to be evaluated with participation due to the participatory nature of its implementation through the Equality Committees, and because of the network of stakeholders that had been created around it within the agencies and entities. In this intervention, it is government bodies that participate as implementers and as direct beneficiaries of the Model.

The community's commitment to the sustainability of its water systems: the Citizen Participation component of PROAGUA

Drinking water coverage in Zacatecas in 2020 stood at 96.1% at the state level (CONAGUA, 2021). However, there are still rural communities that do not have this service. For this reason, the Secretariat of Water and the Environment (SAMA) is responsible for the construction, improvement and expansion of infrastructure in localities of fewer than 2,500 inhabitants, with organised community participation.

The rural section of the Drinking Water, Drainage and Sanitation Programme (PROAGUA)[47] supports the creation of infrastructure to address the shortfall in the coverage of drinking water, sewerage and basic sanitation services, involving organised community participation in the operation and maintenance of the systems. The social care and community participation component strengthens the organisation of communities for the construction and conservation of the services, with the aim of helping to generate the co-responsibility of the beneficiaries for the future operation, maintenance and efficient administration of the installed system. (SEMARNAT, 2019).

For its implementation in the state of Zacatecas through SAMA, the Citizen Participation component (hereinafter this intervention is referred to as "the Component") of PROAGUA comprises three phases (SAMA, 2020):

- **Participatory diagnostic assessment.** These are carried out with the participation of 50% of the beneficiary population; community works committees with gender equality are formed. Social feasibility reports for the projects are drawn up.
- **Construction process.** A social oversight committee is formed, to which SAMA presents the project for the works to be carried out, the committee then verifies that the necessary rights of way are in place and that there is legal certainty over the plots of land to be used. During the construction of the project, SAMA provides 80% of the beneficiary population with training on sanitary matters and water culture, as well as on the operation, maintenance and administration of the hydraulic infrastructure. During this time, community agreements are also established to ensure the permanence and sustainability of the service (fee rates, rights and obligations of the committees, rights and obligations of the beneficiaries, election of the committee for

[47] A federal programme run by the National Water Commission (CONAGUA). For each state, the federal government enters coordination agreements to provide resources, which are to be used in accordance with the programme's operating rules.

the sustainability of the service). Upon completion of the construction, they hand over the works and the basic file to the Sustainability Committee.

- **Monitoring.** The sustainability committees prepare an annual maintenance plan against which the operating conditions of the delivered systems are monitored, and SAMA provides technical and social advice following the handover of the works.

This intervention requires the committed participation of the population that receives the drinking water systems, from the diagnostic stage through to their operation. During the time in which the water systems are built, the programme implementers work directly with the communities to foster a sense of cohesion and awareness regarding the commitment they take on for the proper operation of the systems.

There are communities that have developed solid teams for the operation and administration of the drinking water systems, with formal procedures for collecting payments and for the operation and maintenance of the equipment, while others have not achieved a commitment to paying the fees and face difficulties in covering the cost of inputs and services for operation, and rely on state or municipal resources for repairs when the equipment fails, since they do not carry out preventive maintenance.

The direct beneficiaries were the families living in the communities in which the drinking water systems were built; municipal authorities and SAMA staff were also involved.

Strengthening community cohesion: the Strategy for the Social Prevention of Violence and Crime with citizen participation

The Abel Dávila neighbourhood is one of more than 90 urban neighbourhoods in the municipality of Fresnillo. At the time the project was carried out, the neighbourhood had been founded barely 10 years earlier, had around 500 inhabitants, and most of the population was aged between 15 and 29. The main economic activity of the families was in the municipality's mines, which forced the fathers to be absent, with family care falling mainly on the mothers (UNODC et al., 2020).

One characteristic of the neighbourhood was that close to 40% of the dwellings were abandoned, in a state of physical disrepair, with broken windows, covered in graffiti and even without doors. This turned them into points for drug dealing and consumption, as well as targets for unauthorised occupation by third parties.

The *Strategy for the social prevention of violence and crime with citizen participation*, under the responsibility of the Undersecretariat for the Social Prevention of Crime (SSPSD) within Zacatecas Secretariat of Government (SGG), seeks to contribute to the reduction of violence and crime through coordination with the state agencies. One of the actions of the strategy is to foster community development through social prevention campaigns and events aimed at the vulnerable population (C-evalua, 2020).

An intervention in the Abel Dávila neighbourhood in Fresnillo was evaluated (hereinafter the intervention is referred to as "the Project"), an area characterised by high levels of insecurity. It is important to highlight that this project was carried out within the framework of the collaboration agreement between the government of Zacatecas and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Mexico for the monitoring, evaluation and promotion of the actions that made up the *2017–2021 State Strategy for the Social Prevention of Violence and Crime with Citizen Participation*.

The activities carried out within the framework of this intervention began with the preparation of a participatory diagnostic assessment, the purpose of which was to ascertain citizens' perceptions regarding the security conditions in their neighbourhood, and how these positively or negatively affect their quality of life and their behaviour. The participation of the population and collective construction from within the community and at the local level were sought, with bottom-up approaches, in which the community identified the most important risk and protective factors to work on. The focus was on building trust among the residents, and on ensuring that they would seeking improvements through joint action for the collective benefit (Secretaría de Gobierno, 2019).

As a result of the participatory diagnostic assessment, the following risk factors were identified: alcohol consumption, drug consumption, school dropout rates, low educational level, aggressive and violent behaviour and attitudes among girls and boys, violent play dynamics, teenage pregnancies, single motherhood, family dynamics with absent father figures, family violence, poverty, the possible presence of organised crime, the presence of gangs, vandalism, the presence of shootings in the neighbourhood, few public spaces for social interaction and the deterioration of those that exist, a lack of street lighting, sexual harassment towards women, a weakened social fabric, and an absent or scarce police presence (UNODC et al., 2020).

Colectivo Tomate was in charge of implementing the project through participatory schemes for local integration, using art and mural painting to reflect the community's sense of collective peace. This project sought to strengthen community cohesion in order to reduce the incidence of crime, based on the premise that greater interaction and trust among the neighbourhood's inhabitants leads to a greater sense of belonging, more active the participation, and better resolution of local conflicts or problems; this in turn, leads to greater security and common wellbeing.

The activities carried out for the implementation of the project included the following:

- Planning and identifying areas on the ground to carry out the community intervention, and mapping key local stakeholders.
- Engaging with the community to present the project and to identify the families who were willing to take part in the community intervention and commit to the process.
- Raising awareness among the mural artists who would take part in the community intervention process.

- Engaging the community in the process through integration activities with the muralists and collecting narratives about the participating families' collective vision of peace.
- Intervention by the artists on murals with active citizen participation, giving form to the collective vision of peace.
- Inauguration of the project with local authorities, presentation of the murals, and a closing dialogue session with the community.

In this project, the direct beneficiaries were the residents of the neighbourhood, and the stakeholders who took part were Colectivo Tomate, the UNODC and the Undersecretariat for the Social Prevention of Crime of the Zacatecas Secretariat of Government.

The evaluations

The purpose of carrying out the participatory evaluations of three priority public interventions was to obtain a panoramic view of them that would bring together the perspectives of both those who operate them and those who receive their goods and services, and thereby achieve comprehensive improvements to the interventions. In addition, the aim was to develop a culture of evaluation among the people responsible for the interventions and those who receive them. The interventions evaluated were those described in the previous section:

- the Model for Equality between Women and Men (the Model);
- the Citizen Participation component (the Component) of the Drinking Water, Drainage and Sanitation Programme; and
- the Strategy for the Social Prevention of Violence and Crime with citizen participation (the Project), in the Abel Dávila neighbourhood.

The same methodology was followed for the three interventions, the training sessions were delivered jointly, and some of the members of the evaluation teams took part in two evaluations.

The participatory evaluations carried out in the state of Zacatecas had the following characteristics:

- **Selection of the participating parties:** owing to the point during the pandemic at which the participatory evaluations were carried out, it was not possible to open participation up to the full range of stakeholders; however, in each of them there was diverse representation: (1) in the evaluation of the Model, the evaluation team included staff responsible for its implementation and people from the agencies that were direct recipients of the Model; (2) in the evaluation of the Project, the staff from the implementing body took part only in the design stage, while staff from the citizen oversight committee took part in conducting the evaluation; (3) in the evaluation of the Component, staff in charge of implementation and social oversight staff participated in the implementation, the latter also took part in the monitoring stage.

- **Control of the evaluation process:** the decision to carry out the participatory evaluations was taken by the Council together with the heads of the agencies responsible for the interventions. The stage of selecting and contracting the facilitation team for the participatory evaluations was the responsibility of the Council. The selection of the people who would make up the evaluation teams was carried out jointly by the Council, the agencies responsible for the interventions and the facilitation team for the participatory evaluations. The facilitation team for the participatory evaluations was in charge of training the evaluation teams and coordinating their activities throughout the evaluations. It was the evaluation teams who made the decisions about the evaluation process.
- **Depth of participation:** the evaluation teams received intensive training throughout the evaluation process, and were responsible for: (1) designing of the evaluation, defining the objective, evaluation criteria, evaluation questions and data-collection methods; (2) the implementation of the evaluation: the development of the instruments for collecting data in the field, conducting interviews, surveys and direct observation, and carrying out systematisation and analysis; (3) drafting the evaluation reports and the slides for their presentation; (4) presenting the evaluation results before the Council and the heads of the agencies responsible for the interventions.

Methodological approach for the participatory evaluations in Zacatecas

The participatory evaluations were carried out at a time of uncertainty due to the onset of the Covid19 pandemic, so it was decided that they should be implemented remotely, using technological resources and with face-to-face activities kept to a minimum, which made the involvement of beneficiaries of the interventions hardly feasible.

The Council invited consultancy firms to submit proposals for the implementation of the evaluations. The firm selected was the Centre for Programme Analysis and Project Evaluation (C-evalua) which, aware of the context of restrictions on in-person activities and the difficulty of incorporating beneficiaries from the population, proposed an evaluation that could be carried out through online tools, with the use of virtual platforms, remote sessions via streaming, and the greatest possible use of technological tools.

Objective of the participatory evaluation proposed by C-evalua

The aim was to establish a team of individuals involved in the intervention and, with the guidance and support of an external facilitation team, to identify those aspects of the intervention that were of interest to the evaluation team for making the necessary improvements to the intervention.

A key aspect of the evaluation proposal presented by the selected facilitation team was the development of skills and capacities in evaluation to be worked on with the people who would make up the evaluation teams.

Among the main expected results of these evaluation exercises were (C-evalua, 2020):

- ownership of the intervention on the part of the implementing body and of those who were users or recipients of the intervention's products;
- the development of skills —such as the capacity to reflect, to analyse and to propose solutions— among the people taking part in the evaluation teams;
- learning and improvement processes for the intervention and for future interventions;
- accountability.

With this objective in mind and based on the expected outcomes of applying the participatory methodology, the three evaluations were carried out under the facilitation of the C-evalua team.

It is worth noting that the Council granted the facilitation team trust and freedom in conducting the evaluations, with ongoing monitoring through internal coordination meetings between the facilitation team for the evaluations and the Secretariat of Public Administration *(SFP)*. The aim of the meetings was to learn about the progress, challenges and difficulties faced during implementation and to help find solutions that would guarantee the continuity and conclusion of the evaluations.

Stages of the methodology

The facilitation team proposed a methodology of 3 stages which, added to the one that had already been started by the Council within the Government of the State of Zacatecas, gave a total of 4 stages.

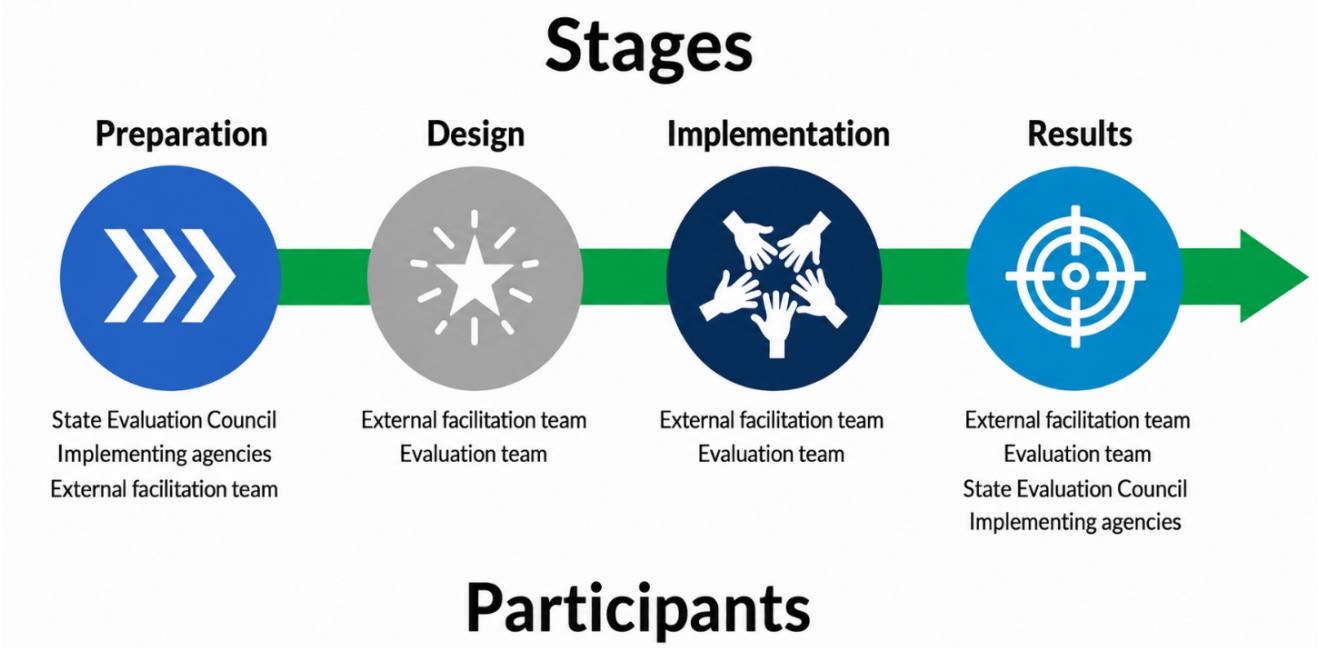


Figure 1. *Stages of the methodology implemented for the participatory evaluations in Zacatecas. Source: Own elaboration based on the methodology employed by C-evalua in 2020.*

The following section describes the stages of the methodology, while also describing the development of the evaluation and the lessons learned.

Development of the evaluation

There was a period of 8 months from the start, in March 2020, with the evaluation preparation stage, to the presentation of results in December 2020, a period that was divided into the 4 stages described below.

Stage I: Preparation of the evaluation

How does one come to recognise the need to incorporate participatory approaches into evaluations? The Council included visionary individuals who had taken an interest in seeking new horizons in evaluation and bringing them to Zacatecas in order to deepen the results of evaluations. People such as José de Jesús Flores[48] and Claudio Pérez[49],

[48] Director of Planning at the Zacatecas State Planning Council.
[49] Evaluation Unit at the Secretariat of Public Administration.

who followed the activities of the evaluation networks of Mexico (ACEVAL) and Latin America (ReLAC), as well as of EvalParticipativa, and who had taken part in conferences, seminars and the occasional participatory evaluation workshop, presented to the Council the existence of this type of evaluation in other countries, pointing out the importance of implementing it in those interventions that, from their design, had the participation of different actors.

In a session of the Council[50], it was decided that participatory evaluations would be implemented for 3 public interventions, owing to the need to develop a culture of evaluation among the people responsible for the programmes and their beneficiaries, and it was considered that the application of participatory methodologies would contribute to a better understanding of the programmes and would raise awareness of the importance of improving them with a more comprehensive vision.

Since this took place at the onset of the Covid19 pandemic, at a time of uncertainty about its evolution and the repercussions it would have for the implementation of the evaluations, as well as for the availability of budgetary resources —because dealing with the health crisis took priority— it was not until July that the appropriateness of carrying them out was assessed, when better conditions for doing so already existed[51].

The Council reached agreements with the 3 secretariats responsible for the interventions in order to explain the participatory methodology, which was an innovation within the Government of the State. Among the main points of agreement were granting permission to the staff who would take part in the evaluation teams to devote themselves to the tasks entrusted to them, and not attempting to interfere in the results of the evaluations.

Once the institutional arrangements for carrying out the participatory evaluations had been made, the Council invited proposals form evaluation consultancy firms that had previously carried out evaluations in Zacatecas, and that could demonstrate experience and/or professional training for this type of methodology.

Each firm had a presentation meeting with the members of the Council and the heads of the selected interventions, in which they explained the methodology to be followed, the activities to be carried out at each of its stages, the teaching resources to be used, the degree of participation and involvement of the people who would make up the evaluation teams, the schedule of activities, and the expected results. The Council and the agencies responsible for the interventions deliberated in order to select the consultancy firm that

[50] At the First Virtual Ordinary Session of the State Evaluation Council on 26 March 2020 the Annual Evaluation Programme was approved and, with it, the 3 participatory evaluations (Coordinación Estatal de Planeación, 2020).

[51] At the First Virtual Extraordinary Session of the State Evaluation Council on 16 July 2020, it was agreed that the Secretariat of Public Administration would coordinate the participatory evaluations with external advice and with the participation of the Directorate of Social Oversight (Coordinación Estatal de Planeación, 2020).

would be in charge of conducting the 3 participatory evaluations.

What responsibilities did the facilitation team have? C-evalua, the facilitation team for the participatory evaluation, was involved in the process from this first stage of evaluation preparation, with the following functions:

- **Preparation of the work plan for the design and implementation of the participatory evaluation.** This required gathering secondary and primary information through initial interviews with the people responsible for the interventions, in order to obtain information about them and to ascertain the specific interest of the agencies regarding the evaluations. These activities allowed the facilitation team to immerse themselves in the interventions for the design of the work plan and a strategy for the selection of the people who would make up the evaluation teams.
- **Selection of the people who would make up the evaluation teams.** The Council, the agencies and the facilitation team selected the people who would take part as members of the evaluation teams. The ideal profile for participants was:
  - knowledge of the programme;
  - awareness of the sociocultural characteristics of the programme's beneficiary population;
  - experience in fieldwork and in the use of data-collection tools;
  - experience in the use of remote communication media;
  - time availability to take part in training, coordination meetings and the collection and systematisation of information;
  - experience in collaborative work;
  - a willingness to learn.

Since it was difficult for everyone to cover the entire profile, priority was given to the participation of those who met the greatest number of requirements, with availability of time to participate being a key factor. Each agency was responsible for informing the selected people about their participation in the evaluation teams; this task was not assigned to the facilitation team, but was carried out by the agencies, and not in all cases did the participants receive clear information about their involvement. Indeed, some people were not even consulted about their availability to participate, which caused some delays or low involvement in the teams. All the teams initially had between 8 and 10 members; one team ended with 5.

It was with the formation of the evaluation teams and the approval of the schedule of activities that the evaluation preparation stage concluded, and the evaluation design stage began.

Stage II: Design of the evaluation

What responsibilities did the facilitation team have? The role of the external facilitation team at this stage consisted of:

- **Developing the necessary competencies and skills within the evaluation teams to design the evaluation.** Online workshops were held in which they were first provided with theoretical elements of evaluation, which were subsequently applied to the design of the evaluation of the interventions. The training was carried out in the form of workshops, involving the three teams, conducted synchronously and online. The practical application was carried out individually with each evaluation team, synchronously. In general terms, the three teams followed the same schedule; however, each team progressed at different rates.
- **Facilitating the development of the evaluation design.** Throughout this stage, individual and tailored attention was given to each evaluation team, as a form of support, to help them resolve doubts and to motivate them to make progress in the evaluation; they were instilled confidence in what they were doing, and priority was placed on fostering team spirit.

What activities were carried out at this stage? Once the three evaluation teams had been formed, they received training on the intervention and on evaluation topics, so that they would have the information needed to take part in the evaluation. The training was delivered in the form of workshops and was initially envisaged as virtual sessions on non-consecutive days, so that the teams could meet in between to discuss the activities and tasks assigned to them.

The workshops had two parts: a theoretical part and a practical part. Since not all team members the teams had full knowledge of the interventions[52], and only some of them had had prior training in evaluation topics, it was necessary for the workshops to deliver the theoretical fundamentals of evaluation and immersion activities in the interventions.

The theoretical part addressed fundamental definitions of evaluation: *the objective, the evaluation questions, the data-collection techniques and the sources to be consulted*. The practical part was developed in parallel with the theoretical one so that, at the end of these workshops, the design of the 3 evaluations would be in place. The facilitation team for the workshops, made up of 3 people, would support each of the evaluation teams in the practical activities.

The workshops were carried out remotely, using the Zoom platform for the online broadcasts, tools such as Jamboard, Google Drive and Google Forms for the activities, and WhatsApp groups were created for the communication of each team. For the development of the practical phase of the workshops, work was carried out in small groups using Zoom's Breakout Rooms tool.

The workshops covered the following topics:

- **Defining the objective of the evaluation.** Although the areas responsible for the interventions had previously been consulted about their specific interests in the objective of the evaluation, the objective of each evaluation was developed with the teams, incorporating wherever possible the

[52] The staff of the Directorate of Social Oversight had limited knowledge of the interventions to be evaluated.

objectives previously expressed by the areas responsible for the interventions. The role of the facilitator in each team was to provide support in reaching a consensus on the objective of each evaluation. In this first activity, it was necessary to explain how the online collaborative-work platforms worked.

- **Defining the evaluation criteria and questions.** The theoretical part covered the evaluation criteria of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the types and use of evaluation questions. In the practical phase, the evaluation teams defined the criteria they would use in line with the objective they had already defined, and subsequently the evaluation questions. The role of the facilitators was fundamental in conducting the activities, supporting the teams in the use of the technological tools, and guiding them through to the definition of the questions. However, the facilitators did not intervene in the decision over the evaluation questions, although they did provide support for the clarity of the wording and the scope of each question.
- **Defining evaluation indicators.** The theoretical part addressed explanations and examples of indicators; in the practical phase, the teams were supported in defining their indicators. The role of the facilitator was fundamental in clearing up doubts and in enabling the teams to define appropriate indicators. The teams were encouraged to meet on the days when there were no virtual workshop sessions, in order to catch up on the practical work and to continue without delays; the facilitation team was available to take part in those meetings or to answer questions through remote means.
- **Defining the data-collection methods and identifying the information sources.** In the design stage, theoretical training was provided on data-collection methods and on how to identify information sources; it was not until the implementation phase that the instruments they would use were designed. The practical phase for the design consisted only in identifying the type of data-collection instrument they would use and in an approximation of the sources they would consult.

This information was concentrated in the Evaluation Matrices of each team.

The techniques used were the following:

- They introduced themselves using an icebreaker technique.
- Brainstorming on the Jamboard platform.
- Drawing up the evaluation matrix in Google Docs, using cards that could be moved, added or deleted.
- Conversations through the Zoom platform.

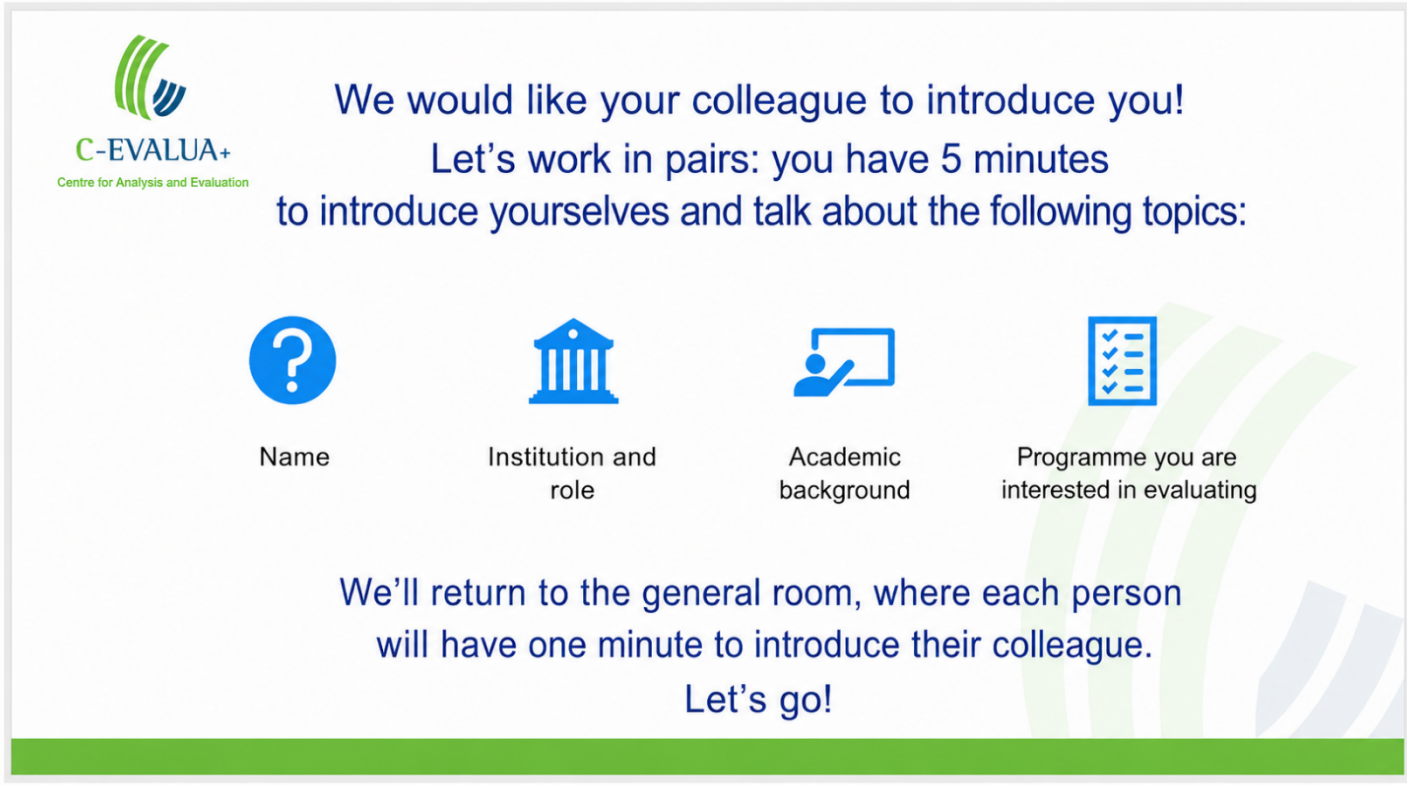


Figure 2. *Example of the use of remote tools for the workshops.*
Source: C-evalua, 2020.

What limitations did the facilitation team and the evaluation teams face at this stage? The first limitation was that the workshops could not be carried out in person; this delayed the integration of the teams and somewhat reduced the participants' gains. A large proportion of the members of the evaluation teams had limited access to computer equipment, since they were working from home with their own resources; this constrained the facilitation team, who had to use few online tools and ones that could be used from mobile phones. Other situations that limited the performance of the teams were: connection problems, work activities that prevented attendance, and family circumstances.

Even so, the training was very valuable in enabling the evaluation teams to acquire the knowledge and competencies needed to design the evaluation in a participatory way.

Stage III: Implementation of the evaluation

The core part of an evaluation is its implementation. This stage is when the evaluation team gathers the information to answer the evaluation questions that have been posed.

What role did the facilitation team have? Among other things, to motivate and empower the participants. At this stage, the facilitators provided training and support to the teams for the collection, systematisation and analysis of the information. The facilitation team worked remotely through the Zoom platform and WhatsApp groups, on an individual basis with each evaluation team.

This stage was crucial for the evaluation. The teams had to collect information; some people had never conducted an interview, so they were trained in a practical way and instilled the confidence to go out into the field. As facilitators, it fell to us to motivate and to make it happen: a stage in which we were spectators of the first results of the training offered to the teams. It was extremely gratifying to hear the satisfaction of the people who conducted not just one but eight interviews in their first experience; it was fascinating to witness how, little by little, their perception evolved regarding the problem addressed by the intervention and the situation of the populations in relation to the problem and the programme; it was very enriching to see firsthand the effects of the participation of the people involved in the evaluation.

At this stage, the integration of the teams was achieved, and so too was the departure of some people from these teams, with the collection of information and interaction.

What activities were carried out at this stage? The three evaluation teams began this stage with their evaluation matrices completed and reviewed by the facilitation team. The implementation schedule allotted 6 weeks to this stage, for the following activities:

- **Preparation:** during virtual sessions, the facilitators supported and guided the evaluation teams in carrying out the following activities during the first week of the implementation period:
  - *Design of instruments for collecting data in the field*. Training and support were provided in the preparation of interview guides, survey questionnaires, direct-observation guides, informed-consent forms, lists of stakeholders and people to interview, and the size of the sample to survey.
  - *Piloting of the instruments* during the training and support sessions.
  - *Logistical preparation for fieldwork*. The evaluation teams were responsible for requesting appointments or permissions to visit the localities to carry out the surveys and interviews, securing transport resources, ensuring that they had the equipment and instruments needed

to record the interviews, ensuring there were enough printed copies of the surveys to cover the sample, and so on. The role of the facilitation team was to give them support and to resolve doubts about the activities.

- **Data collection:** over the following three weeks, the teams for each of the evaluations carried out different data-collection activities, as can be seen in the following table:

Activities	Model for Equality between Women and Men	Strategy for Social Prevention of Violence and Crime in the Abel Dávila Neighbourhood	The Citizen Participation component of PROAGUA
Desk review	Yes	No	No
Fieldwork: Virtual interviews	Yes	Yes	No
Fieldwork: Face-to-face interviews	No	Yes	Yes
Fieldwork: Online surveys	Yes	No	No
Fieldwork: Face-to-face surveys	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fieldwork: Semi-structured observation	No	Yes	No

Table 1. *Data-collection activities carried out by the evaluation teams.*
Source: *Own elaboration with information from C-evalua, 2020.*

Owing to the health conditions and the restrictions on group gatherings imposed in response to the Covid19 pandemic, the data-collection activities were carried out both in person and online. While the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) offers relative advantages in terms of saving time, travel expenses and online systematisation, at a significantly lower cost than carrying out the fieldwork in person, their main disadvantages are that they represent a barrier to effective contact with people —above all those who are not familiar with these technologies— and that these barriers limit the depth

of the interaction and can sometimes bias the results. Other challenges are also found: a lack of internet coverage in some regions and a lack of equipment with the technological requirements to sustain video conferences, among others.

In the cases where it was possible to coordinate the in-person collection of information, the teams took precautions for travel and for the care of the people being interviewed. In the collection of primary information, the teams were organised so that the people from the areas responsible for the interventions would not take part in these activities, and instead it was people from the Directorate of Social Oversight, and from other agencies (in the case of the Model), who were in charge of conducting the interviews, surveys and direct observation.

Among the challenges faced were failing to locate the people to be interviewed; having to reschedule the visit to the Abel Dávila neighbourhood due to a criminal incident that had occurred days before the visit; and having to make arrangements with the Secretariat of Public Administration because some people from the agencies did not agree to grant interviews to the evaluation team, since they expected the facilitation team to accompany them, among others.

- **Processing of the information.** Once collected, it was necessary to organise, classify and systematise it. For this, support was requested from other areas of the agencies that form part of the Council, since the agencies responsible for the interventions would not take part. Because of the limited time for the evaluation, these activities were carried out at the same time as the evaluation teams were collecting the information. Field-data processing matrices were used. The role of the facilitation team consisted of training the people who would process the information and conducting random checks of the audio recordings and the records in the matrices in order to validate the consistency of the information.
- **Analysis of the information: conclusions and recommendations.** In the fifth week of the implementation period, daily virtual meetings were held with the evaluation teams for the analysis of the information collected in the field. Drawing on the knowledge of the programme, the information collected and the systematisation carried out, collaborative activities were undertaken using Google tools in order to generate the main findings that would answer the evaluation questions. It is important to note that the number of participants in the teams had decreased: some people had not obtained permission to go into the field to carry out surveys, interviews and direct observation, and decided not to continue in the process. On the basis of the analysis of the findings, the evaluation teams drew up conclusions and recommendations. The role of the facilitation team was to train them in the stages of the evaluation and to moderate the working sessions in which the conclusions and recommendations were generated.

Stage IV: Results of the evaluation

What was the role of the facilitation team? To guide the teams in presenting the results, and to empower them to present before the heads of their agencies with the certainty that they knew all the information because they had generated and analysed it, as well as defining the findings and recommendations. The facilitation team carried out group-integration activities, recognised the work done by the teams, was readily available to support them with any doubts and questions they had, and practised active listening and empathy.

What activities were carried out? Once the evaluation had concluded, the *Evaluation Results Report* was compiled. The facilitation team designed a document to set out the results and separate set of slides for presenting them. Both were developed collaboratively:

- The team responsible for the intervention was tasked with developing the section corresponding to the description of the intervention.
- The facilitation team was in charge of developing the methodological chapter.
- The rest of the evaluation team was responsible for incorporating the findings, conclusions and recommendations of each evaluation into the documents.

The presentation of results to the State Evaluation Council and the heads of the agencies responsible for the interventions was carried out following the same order and distribution of tasks.

Feedback

At the end of the presentation of results, participants were asked how they felt after having taken part in the evaluation teams: the great majority of the responses were of joy and satisfaction, acknowledging that they had learned a great deal.

Under state regulations, the dissemination of the results and the implementation of improvements fall within the remit of the Secretariat of Public Administration, so the scope of the evaluations did not cover those activities.

Model of the participatory evaluations of 3 public interventions in Zacatecas

The methodology developed by the facilitation team in coordinating the three participatory evaluations is summarised in the following diagram.

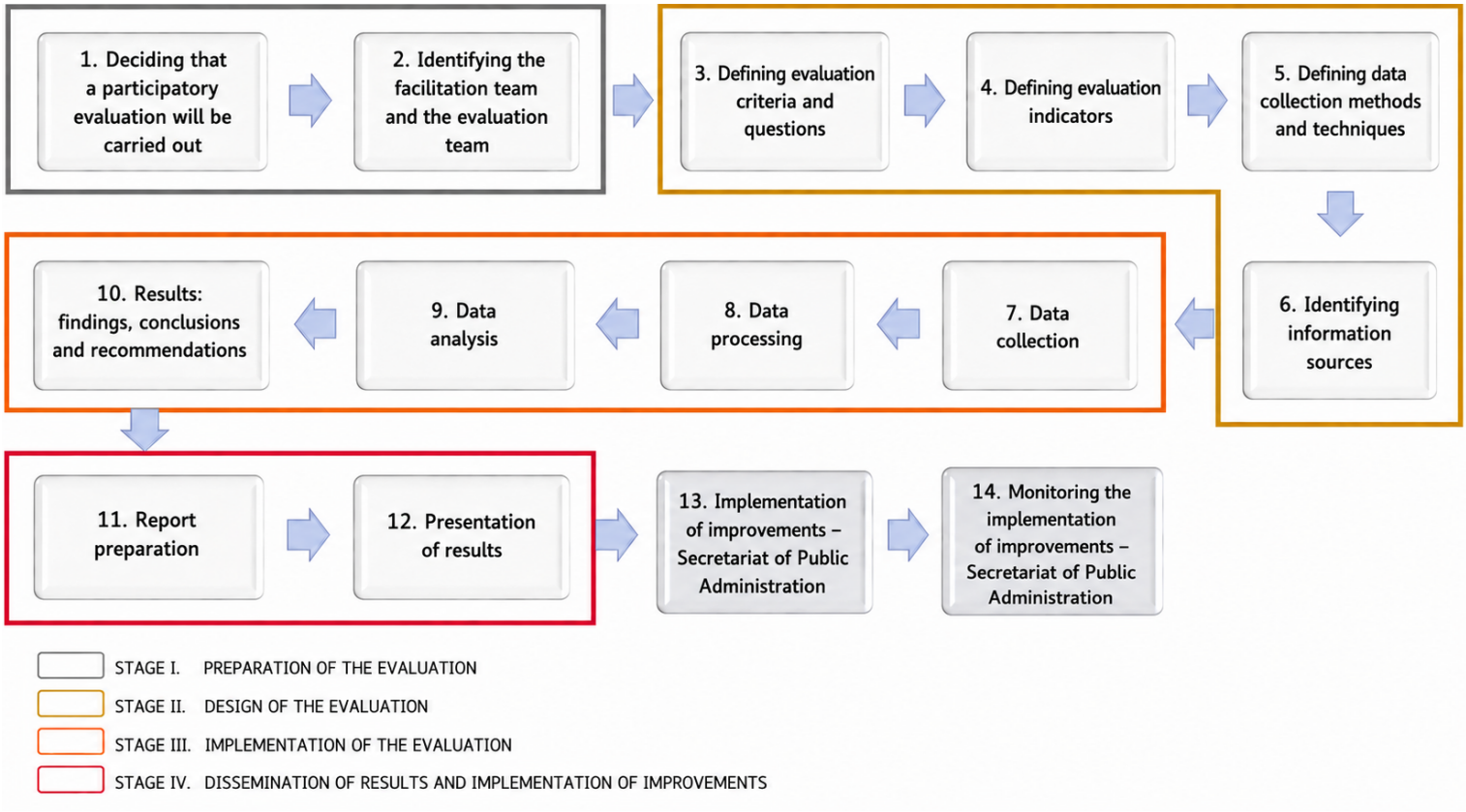


Figure 3. *Participatory evaluation model implemented in Zacatecas, 2020.*
Source: *Adaptation of the model presented in the reports of the participatory evaluations, C-evalua, 2020.*

Reflection on the experience

The evaluations of the 3 public interventions of the State of Zacatecas were the first experiences of participatory evaluation of public interventions recorded in Mexico. We now know that, at the same time, the state of Jalisco began a process of evaluation with participation of the programme ***Mi pasaje***, aimed at "students, people with disabilities and older adults", which was concluded and published only in 2021; consequently, there were no references available for consultation when the evaluations in Zacatecas were carried out.

The greatest merit that can be considered for this exercise is that, in more than one sense, it broke the *status quo* of programme evaluation in Mexico. On the one hand, it was innovative by using a hybrid participatory methodology, between a *practical participatory evaluation*[53] and a *transformative participatory evaluation*[54]; and, on the other hand, by conducting evaluations of interventions such as a crosscutting Model, a Project and the Component of a programme instead of taking a budgetary programme as the unit to be evaluated.

Carrying out these evaluations during the onset of the pandemic introduced high levels of uncertainty and limited the in-person activities and the participation of the beneficiary population of the interventions. However, despite these limitations, the results of the evaluation exercise —in terms of lessons learned, the development of competencies among those who took part in the evaluation teams, the ownership of the process and result of the evaluations, and the very richness of the findings, conclusions and recommendations derived from the evaluation— were superior to what would have been obtained in a traditional evaluation.

The coordination of the evaluation by an external facilitation team guaranteed the rigorous application of methodologies for the design of the evaluation, the collection of information and its analysis, as well as the inclusion at each stage of the opinions and experiences of the members of the evaluation teams. At the end of the evaluations, a robust survey was administered to the people who took part in the evaluation teams, which documented the experience from their perspectives, and which has served to record the perception of the process held by those who made up the evaluation teams.

At some forums where this evaluation experience has been presented, questions have been raised about the internal nature of the evaluation, since, in two of the three evaluations, there was no participation of the beneficiary population. The involvement of the Directorate of Social Oversight in supporting the evaluation in two teams, and of the agencies participating in the Citizen Audit processes in the third team, broke with the endogenous character

[53] It seeks a concrete utility within the intervention being evaluated: in Zacatecas it was characterised by the participation, for the most part, of the people implementing the interventions.

[54] It seeks collective empowerment and the deepening of social knowledge; this was present throughout the evaluation process.

of the evaluations, as did the fact that the collection of information was carried out by people external to the programme. In this regard, a factor that is often overlooked in these criticisms is the Council's willingness to open up an evaluation process to the participation of other people from the state; even though what is desirable for a *transformative participatory evaluation* is that those who receive the goods, services and benefits of the intervention should be the ones who conduct the evaluation. In 2020, in Zacatecas, inviting other areas of government to take part in the evaluation teams was something disruptive and aligned with the characteristics of a *practical participatory evaluation*.

The following sections detail the main challenges and difficulties faced, as well as the main lessons learned from this experience for other evaluation exercises; some of these have already been mentioned throughout the document.

Challenges arising from the context and the environment in which the evaluations were developed

This section covers the situations external to the interventions and the coordination of the evaluations that affected their conduct. For each case, the measures taken to resolve them are outlined.

Virtual working and "social distancing"

Owing to the limitations on travelling, holding in-person meetings and bringing people together in enclosed spaces, it was necessary to resort to technology to carry out a large part of the evaluation activities. This represented great challenges in terms of technology, attention and the use of teaching resources, and it reduced the learning and enthusiasm of the participants.

The facilitation team was flexible with those people who were unable to connect, and also progressively eliminated the activities that involved the use of platforms, retaining only the minimum online collaborative activities. In some cases, individual sessions were held with those who had connection problems, in order to ensure a consistent basis across the evaluations.

Health problems among members of the evaluation team

Some people caught Covid19 and were absent from activities for days or weeks. This situation delayed progress slightly; nevertheless, through team effort, work continued while the others rejoined. When requested, the facilitation team held individual sessions with those who had been absent due to COVID, in order to bring them up to date and to ensure a consistent basis across the evaluations.

Risk of infection

This applies mainly to the people who carried out data-collection activities, or those who had to go to their offices to be on duty. In-person activities were limited as much as possible in order to avoid risks of infection during the evaluation.

Difficulty in obtaining all of the documentary evidence from the authorities

This challenge was faced mainly in the evaluation of the Model, which included several activities of rigorous documentary review: keeping some offices closed, or else rotating staff attendance to maintain social distancing among those present, were some of the measures implemented within the Government of the State because of the pandemic. This made it difficult for the agencies selected in the sample to send the evaluation team all of the requested documents. The evaluation team itself, familiar with the Model's processes, requested from SEMUJER the documents that were missing and that the agencies in which the Model had been implemented could not provide.

Insecurity in the intervention's study area

This challenge was faced in the evaluation of the Project, since there are high crime rates in the Abel Dávila neighbourhood. In the days prior to carrying out the fieldwork, there was an incident that led to the temporary suspension of data collection: the area was guarded by state police personnel, and it was necessary to wait at least two weeks for calm to return to the neighbourhood in order to carry out the fieldwork.

To ensure the safety of the members of the evaluation team in charge of carrying out the fieldwork, the direct support of the Undersecretariat for the Social Prevention of Crime was requested so that it would intervene and request the support of the neighbourhood networks that had been created through the intervention, in order to enable the team carry out the information collection. The number of interviews conducted was lower than planned, but given the circumstances, the sample size had to be reduced.

Within the evaluation team

The nervousness of those who would be presenting the results of their work publicly for the first time; pressure arising from the expectations of the people responsible for the programmes regarding the results of the evaluations.

Institutional challenges

Those inherent to the institutions, their regulatory framework and their organisational aspects, which affected the performance of the evaluation teams.

Implementation timeframes

The timeframe for carrying out the evaluations was a scant 3 months, which had to be allocated to the training for the evaluation design; the preparation and conduct of the fieldwork, its systematisation and analysis; and the drafting of the final report and the slides for presenting the results.

One of the most frequently mentioned suggestions for improvement in the survey carried out is that more time should be allocated to each activity: to the training (which would allow for a greater benefit from the knowledge gained), to carrying out the fieldwork and to systematisation and analysis (which would allow the members of the evaluation teams to engage more deeply with the results of the evaluations), and to preparing for the final presentation.

From other experiences of participatory evaluations of public programmes that have been published in other states (Evalua Jalisco, 2024), it has been observed that the processes have taken over a year to complete. The facilitation team tried to be as flexible as possible with the timings; however, there was an established date for the delivery of the final evaluation reports that could not be moved.

Technological challenges

Not everyone had the technological resources needed to carry out collaborative activities, and some people who did have them were not familiar with the use of interactive platforms. This posed a challenge for the facilitation team and for the working teams, since it caused delays or misunderstandings in communication, resulting in lower efficiency of the work.

The facilitation team trained the members of the evaluation teams so that they could use the communication and remote-working tools on the devices they had available (whether phones or computers), and the activities were adapted so that some people who could not connect to Zoom could participate via telephone call.

Pressure from senior management regarding the results of the evaluation

Traditionally, in the state, numerical indicators have been used to reflect evaluation results; for this reason, some senior management figures in the evaluated agencies were keen for their scores to be high —that is, for them to "come out well in the evaluations"—. This meant that the staff of the implementing areas who took part in the evaluation teams rejected the findings that reflected opportunities for improvement, or requested the opportunity to make corrections in the programme's implementation so that they would not be included in the evaluation report.

Upon becoming aware of these situations, the facilitation team talked with the implementing staff to remind them of the nature of the evaluation: to seek lessons and areas for improvement in the interventions.

Low level of commitment among some members of the evaluation teams

Some people were not consulted about their interest in participating, instead they were added to the evaluation teams on instructions from their hierarchical superiors. This situation caused low levels of performance and commitment in their teams.

Another factor that influenced the level of participation and involvement was that the evaluation was an additional task to the everyday work they carried out, since their workloads were not reduced so that they could take part in the evaluation.

The role of the facilitation team was also to motivate and foster the commitment of the participants. When a person was absent, they were contacted to find out, first of all, whether they were in good health, and then to invite them to resume the evaluation activities.

Lessons learned

The survey administered at the end of the evaluations has been a valuable instrument for extracting lessons and suggestions for improvement from the people who took part in the evaluations. The lessons are summarised below.

On the organisation of the evaluations

- It is essential that the people who join the evaluation teams be informed of the scope of their participation and the level of commitment and dedication required before inviting them to participate.
- People must give their consent to joining the teams. The forced participation of people has repercussions for their involvement, performance and the result of the evaluation.
- The information provided to them should be comprehensive, clear, using simple language and presented openly; the nature of the evaluation should be explained at length, since many of these people have not previously taken part in an exercise of this kind and may feel apprehensive about getting involved. When they are invited, their questions about their participation should be listened to and answered, and they should be asked about their expectations. The forced participation of people has repercussions for their involvement, performance and the result of the evaluation.
- For greater dedication and commitment to the evaluation, it is important that those who make up the evaluation teams have the time to carry out the activities —in other words, that the other functions inherent to their post be reduced during the implementation period—.
- When deciding to implement a participatory evaluation, it is important to quantify the cost of acquiring the basic equipment (audio recorders, cameras, etc.).

On the implementation of the evaluations

- Training has a greater impact in terms of benefitting from the knowledge imparted if it is carried out in person and with more time, so as to avoid overloading the participants with information.
- Incorporating activities to raise participants' awareness of the importance of the evaluation and to strengthen their commitment will enrich the collaborative work.
- People contribute more if they are given the opportunity to express themselves and to share their knowledge and experience about the programme and about the sociocultural context of the environment in which the programme is implemented. This is the richness of participation in the evaluation.
- The role of the facilitation team in providing support during the stages of the evaluation is valuable as it builds confidence and fosters the participants' commitment.
- The role of the facilitation team is also to motivate and empower the evaluation team.
- Training serves to develop capacities in the people who take part in the evaluation teams and in the institutions in which they work. Comments expressed in the survey point to the acquisition of competencies in terms of the use of tools for remote collaborative work, the design and application of tools for the collection of primary information, and its systematisation and analysis.
- The workshops should be longer in order to make better use of the content; efforts should be made to raise awareness and foster commitment among the participants so that they engage with the activities and further enrich the collaborative work; they should also be held in person so that they are more dynamic, and it is advisable to provide more examples before moving on to the practical part.
- It is important to recognise the efforts of the evaluation teams, since this motivates them and helps them value the evaluation experience more highly.
- More time should be dedicated to training during the implementation of the evaluation; bearing in mind that the participants have no prior training in evaluation or research. More time should also be given to systematisation and analysis since, being the first time that many of the participants have carried this out, they require more time to do so. The people who reached this stage within the teams were more motivated than at the start of the evaluation.

On the results of the evaluations

- One of the greatest achievements of the participatory evaluations in Zacatecas was the ownership of the interventions and of the evaluation process that was attained within the evaluation teams.
- It is essential to raise the awareness of the heads of the implementing areas and of those who take part

in the evaluation teams so that they accept findings, conclusions and recommendations without resistance.

- The results of the evaluations were relevant to the improvement of the programmes.
- The people who took part in the teams now know the benefits of evaluations.

The future of participatory evaluations of public programmes in Mexico

- An increasing number of federal entities are interested in implementing participatory evaluations of their government programmes, and there are more and more evaluators seeking to acquire the training to carry them out. There is a training programme in participatory evaluation promoted by the Government of the State of Jalisco.
- It is important to continue strengthening the practice of participatory evaluations, because of the great benefits they bring to public interventions, to the development of institutional capacities and to the strengthening of the culture of evaluation.

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Chapter 9

Evaluation in Costa Rica

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

Karol Cruz Ugalde | Eddy García Serrano | Juan Murciano

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.

Citation

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The voice of the voiceless, as they say,
is taken into account
(Johnny Núñez Herrera[55])

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 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)

[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*.

[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 source[59], 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 participate[60].

[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 living[61]. 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 PwD[62].

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 poverty[63].

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 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).

[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).

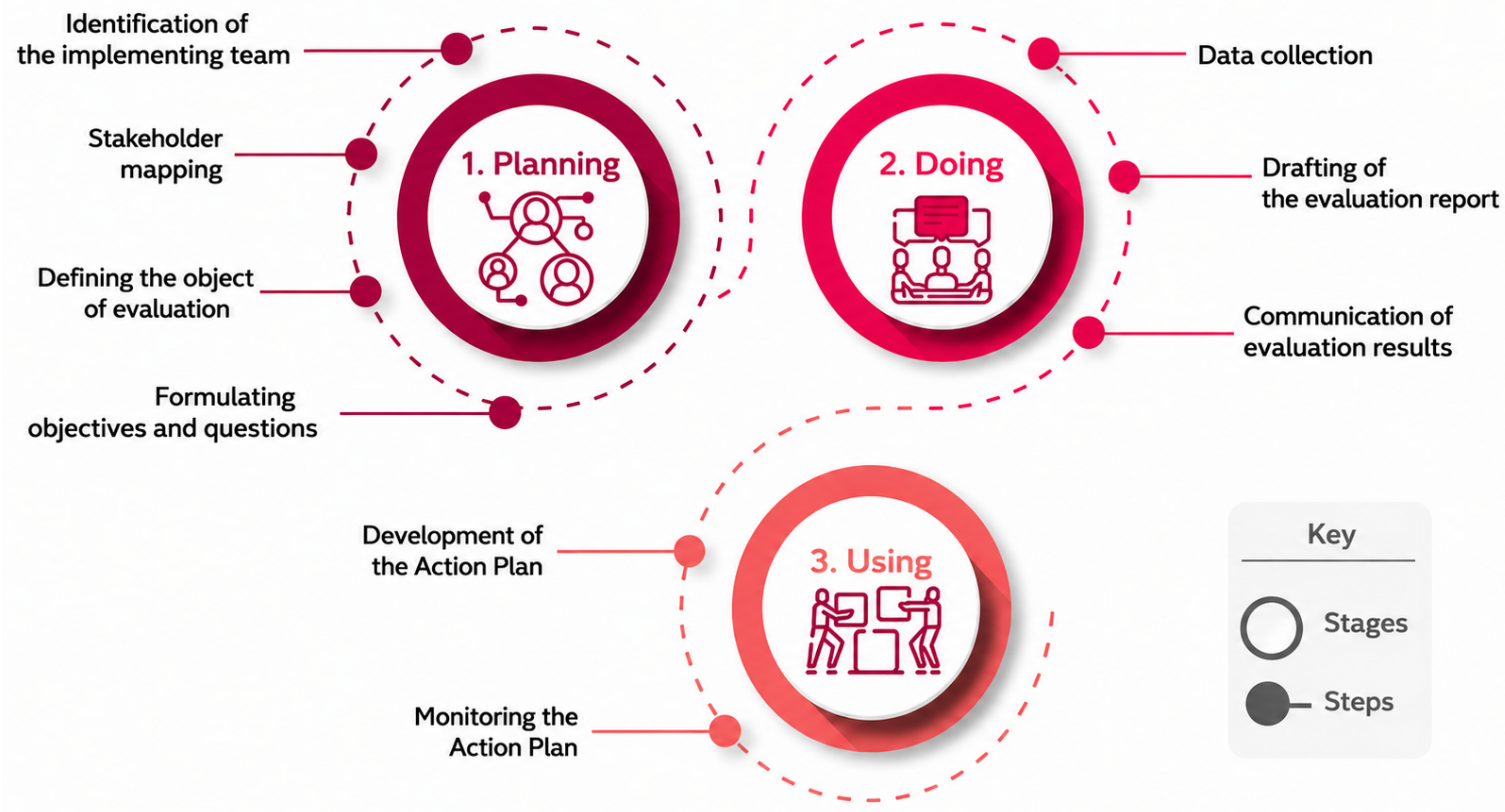


Figure 1. *Evaluation process.*
Source: *Mideplan (2019, p. 22).*

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.

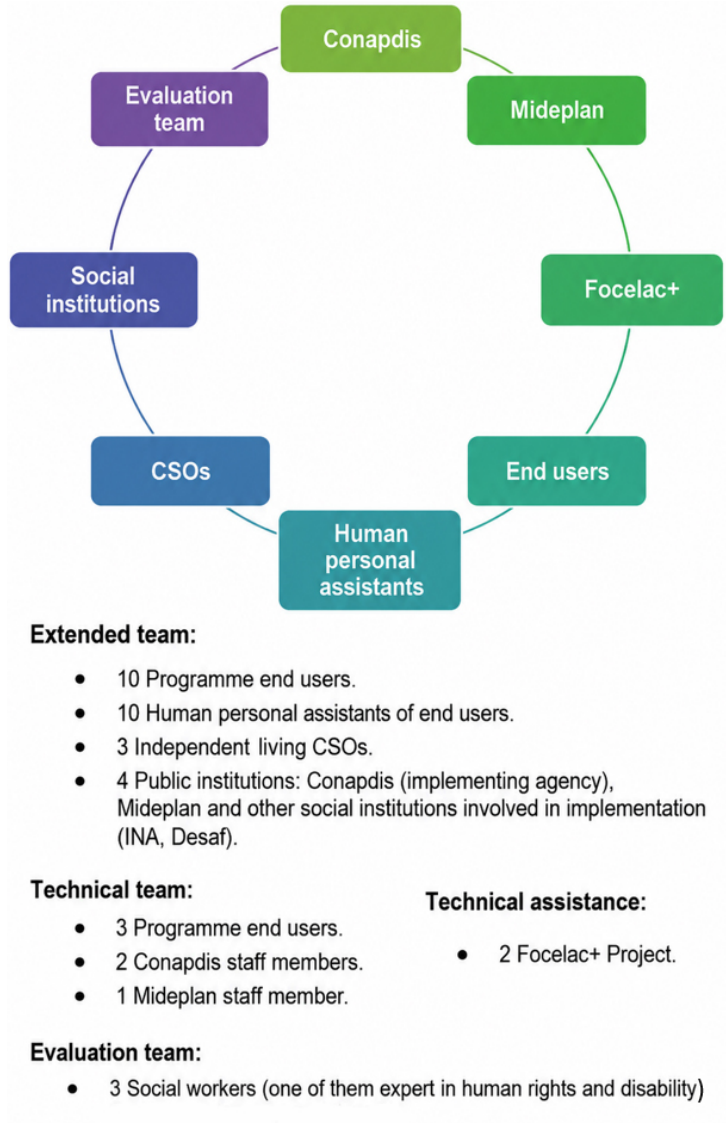


Figure 2. *Configuration of teams.*
Source: *Prepared by the authors.*

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 Workshops[65], 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 directed[66].

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).*

[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.

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 Team[68], 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 context[69].

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

[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).

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 report[70].

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 form 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, he 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 reference[71], 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 takes 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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Chapter 10

Design of the Participatory Evaluation of a Public Care Service for Older Adults in Ecuador

Carmen Lucía Jaramillo | Joselyn Corrales

Abstract

This chapter presents the design process of the first participatory evaluation driven from within the public sector in Ecuador, led by the National Planning Secretariat (SNP) —the governing body of the country's Monitoring and Evaluation Subsystem— and supported by the Focelac+ project. It sets out the path taken to secure the commitment of various institutions to working in a participatory way, including the population benefiting from the service, with the aim of defining the evaluation of the Socialisation and Encounter Spaces for Older Adults, a programme run by the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES). The chapter describes the approach, the methodology and the key moments in designing the participatory evaluation, highlighting the reflections and lessons that emerged during the process, as well as the uncertainties and challenges faced. This reflection on the practice of inclusive social evaluation underscores the central role of the human factor, which made it possible to develop the participatory design of the evaluation in just six weeks. The evaluation itself became an exercise in inclusion, respect and appreciation for the older population living in poverty and vulnerability — a population that is seldom taken into account in the evaluation of public policy.

Keywords

Participatory Evaluation, Social Inclusion, Older Adults, Lessons Learned, Methodology.

Citation

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Introduction

In Ecuador, evaluation processes have always been a challenge, since institutionalising evaluation has not been easy due to a lack of political support and knowledge; as a result, the approach taken to evaluation often depends on whichever authorities happen to be in office.

This chapter gives an account of the participatory process followed within the framework of the National Planning Secretariat (SNP) —through its Undersecretariat for Evaluation and its Directorate for Territorial Evaluation— to design a participatory evaluation (PE) of the Socialisation and Encounter Spaces for Older Adults (ESE), an intervention run by Ecuador's Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES). Thanks to the support of the SNP's authorities, the first participatory evaluation driven from within the public sector in the country was launched, focused on assessing this initiative aimed at older persons living in conditions of poverty, extreme poverty and vulnerability.

The design of this participatory evaluation proved to be a process of great learning that was not free of difficulties and fears. Reflecting from practice on inclusive social evaluation entails considering the methodological, conceptual and policy context aspects of evaluation, but —above all— the central place occupied by the human factor in making it possible to produce this design in just six weeks. This account is also a gesture of gratitude to everyone on the team who contributed with commitment and dedication to the design of this PE —a design that required the participating older adults to invest time and effort in contributing their perspective on the key features the evaluation should have—. For the staff of the Ecuadorian public bodies, it was a period of heavy workload and uncertainty, owing to the transition to a new national government. Even so, many of them did not hesitate to devote even their holiday time to completing the design, with no certainty that they would remain in their posts afterwards.

The authors of this chapter are the facilitator of the process and the Undersecretary for Evaluation of Ecuador's governing body for evaluation, and we were always certain (as was the rest of the team) that we had been called upon to work for the wellbeing of the older population. For this reason, the proposed participatory evaluation of the Socialisation and Encounter Spaces for Older Adults became, in itself, an exercise in inclusion, respect and appreciation for that population living in poverty and vulnerability, which is not usually taken into account in the design and evaluation of public policy.

This journey through the design process of the PE began with the effort it took the team of Ecuador's National Planning Secretariat (SNP), together with the Focelac+ project,[72] to secure the support of the authorities and

[72] Strengthening a Culture of Evaluation and Learning in Latin America with a Global Outlook, a project implemented by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) and Costa Rica's Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy (Mideplan).

the willingness of a policy body prepared to commit to this work. We discuss this in the first section of the chapter, set against a brief background on the National Evaluation System in Ecuador.

The second section sets out the working approach and the perspective that we sought to bring to the design of this participatory evaluation, which formed the for its initial steps. By presenting the main moments of the PE design in sequence, we weave in reflections and lessons learned while also acknowledging the uncertainties and challenges we faced.

The third section explains, in broad terms, the methodology of the initial workshop to define the foundations of the PE design and the reflections that arose from this first decisive moment. Building on this reflection, the fourth section presents the phase of constructing the evaluation instruments, and the fifth section then covers the drafting of the final document and its corresponding dissemination.

The sixth section outlines the challenges that lie ahead in order to bring this PE to fruition once the formulation stage has been completed. Finally, the seventh section summarises the main lessons interwoven throughout the chapter.

We have reconstructed the experience of designing this PE —which was carried out during 2024— in the hope that it may prove useful within the reflective processes to which this book invites us. There are many of us who share the intention of making evaluation processes effective instruments for social inclusion, the empowerment of the most vulnerable sectors and social change.

Background

A study conducted in 2022 on the institutionalisation of evaluation in the Americas (Arévalo Gross & Cumandá Montesdeoca, 2022) states that Ecuador has no widespread evaluation culture that closes the cycle of planning, monitoring and evaluation; as a result, evaluation findings are frequently not taken into account when new public interventions are formulated. Nor are evaluations used in public debate; they are simply used for accountability purposes, as administrative justification for the use of resources. In addition, information is often lost when authorities change, and it is not available in a form accessible to a broad public.

Moreover, the country's political environment has led over the past decade to multiple changes in the governing body for evaluation[73] that affect the continuity of capacity building efforts in evaluation (both individual and organisational) within state and government entities, and has additionally entailed a high turnover of staff.

Against this backdrop, the challenges for evaluation in Ecuador are considerable, both in terms of publicsector action and in terms of public deliberation aimed at positioning evaluation as a key management tool

[73] In 2019 the National Secretariat for Planning and Development (Senplades) became the Technical Planning Secretariat ("Planifica Ecuador"), and subsequently, in 2021, the National Planning Secretariat (SNP) was created. The SNP is currently headed by a National Secretary with the rank of Minister of State. It held this rank in the past as well, but one of the reforms reduced the size and the capacity for action of the country's governing body for evaluation.

for good governance and for achieving the country's development goals. Within this framework, promoting a participatory evaluation from within the public-sector was quite a challenge for the Undersecretariat of Evaluation of the SNP, whose mission is:

> to lead the processes of evaluating national, territorial, sectoral and institutional investment and planning instruments and to build technical capacities within State institutions on matters relating to evaluation, with the aim of providing inputs to enhance transparency and improve the application of public policy. (Secretaría Nacional de Planificación de Ecuador, n.d., p. 18)

The support of the Focelac+ project was decisive and is connected with work that has been ongoing since 2015, with DEval's support, to promote evaluation capacity strengthening in Ecuador. In this specific case, economic support was provided for two staff members of the SNP to take part in a diploma course on participatory evaluation in Mexico, the facilitator who would support the entire design of the participatory evaluation was contracted, and guidance was provided throughout the entire process.

The first steps in defining the initiative to be evaluated were taken in early 2023. This involved approaches to six different public entities to explore the possibilities of taking it forward. It was not easy, since many institutions still hold a mistaken view of evaluation and regard it as synonymous with audit or financial control. Moreover, the most common evaluations in the country, and those with the greatest political backing, are impact evaluations.

In the end, the Ministry for Economic and Social Inclusion expressed interest and availability through its Socialisation and Encounter Spaces programme, which promotes active and healthy ageing among older persons living in conditions of poverty, extreme poverty and vulnerability. The programme runs recreational, social and occupational therapy activities intended to foster socialisation, autonomy, organisation and entertainment, promoting coexistence, participation, solidarity and older adults' relationship with their social environment. Working in group sessions of around 25 older persons, the Socialisation and Encounter Spaces thus constitute a way of promoting the wellbeing of independent older persons and those with mild dependence —that is, those who do not require help from others to get around and to carry out their basic and instrumental activities of daily living—.

Table 1 shows the scope defined for this participatory evaluation, whose implementation was planned for 2024 —that is, just a few months after the end of the methodological design stage—.

Object of study	Unit of study	Timeframe	Geographical scope	Criteria
Gerontological care service in the Socialisation and Encounter Spaces	Three care units representing different forms of administration: directly by the Ministry, under agreement with an NGO, and under agreement with a decentralised authority	2019-2023 period	Three care units in two provinces. For the quantitative analyses, data were taken from all the care units in the two zones where the pilot units are located	Relevance Effectiveness Efficiency Sustainability Coherence

Table 1. *Boundaries and scope of this participatory evaluation.*
Source: prepared by the authors.

The objective of the PE was set in terms of improving the service, taking the three care units as a pilot reference. The object of study is therefore broad and is not confined solely to the cases that would serve as a reference. Likewise, the aim was to ensure that the three forms of administration of the service were represented.

Working approach and first step in developing the design

The design of this PE had an additional purpose: the aim was for the evaluation team to become acquainted with both the theory and the practice of this type of evaluation. Hence one of the key planned activities was a face-to-face workshop delivered by the EvalParticipativa initiative, to be attended mainly by people from the institutions connected with the intervention to be evaluated, although additional places were also made available for other entities present in Ecuador, with the aim of strengthening evaluation capacities within the institutional environment.

One of the distinctive hallmarks of PE is placing people at the centre and including the target population in the evaluation team. In the case of the older population this takes on even greater importance as an expression of their rights, given that social prejudices about their capabilities are so frequent. As Nussbaum and Levmore (2017) put it:

> Finally, one of the most baneful of all stereotypes about aging people is that they have no agency […] To rob aging people of agency and choice in the way one describes them is to dehumanize and objectify in a particularly insulting manner. (p. 25)

It follows, then, that their active, conscious and committed participation in the PE of the Socialisation and Encounter Spaces was an affirmative action in terms of recognising their rights and their potential.

It was challenging to provide sufficient information to the older persons who would form part of the team so that they could take part in the activities. Up to that point, it was not known whether it would be possible to have people with a sufficient level of literacy or whether they would need additional support.

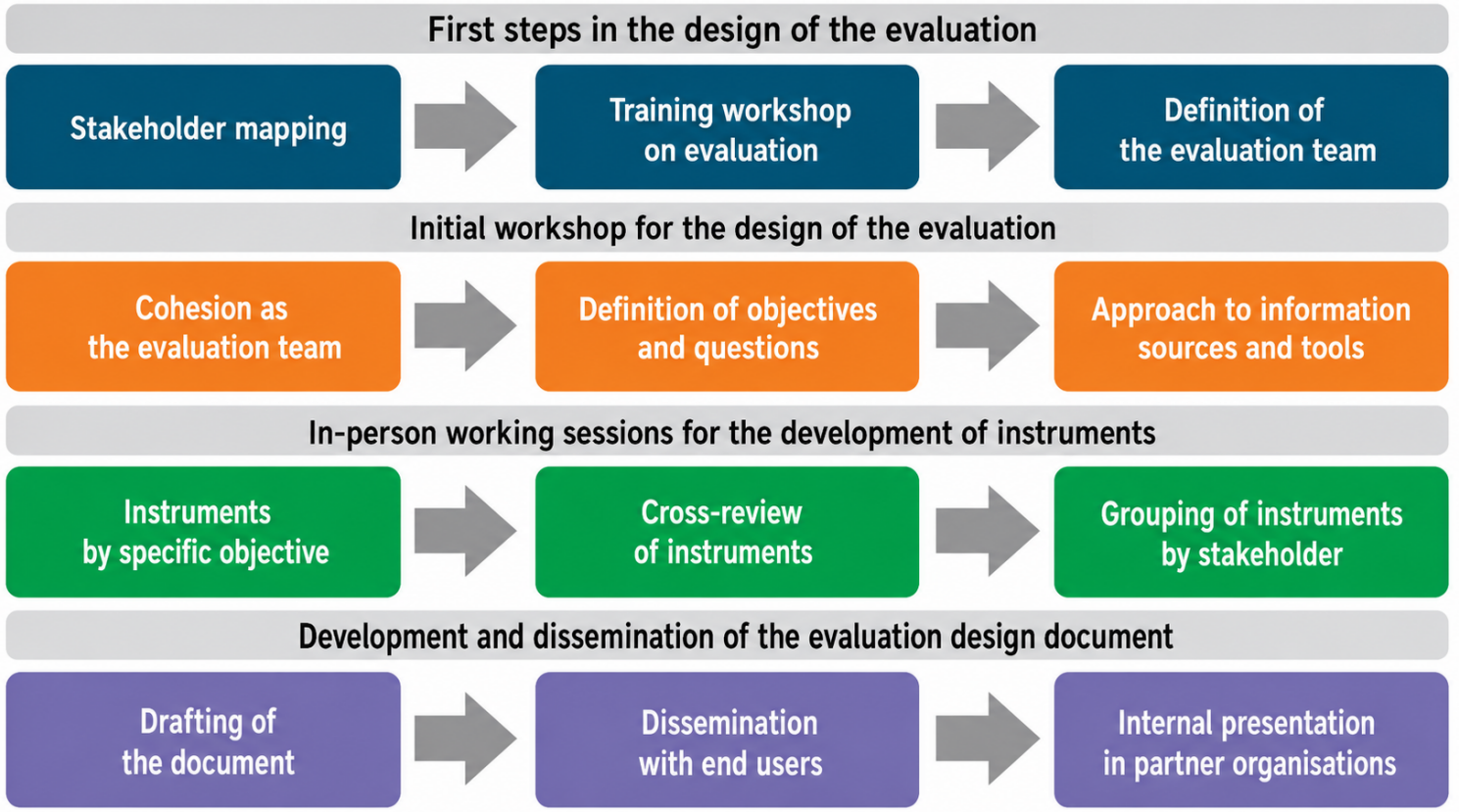
The work plan was drawn up based on the principles set out in the Evaluation Standards for Latin America and the Caribbean (ReLAC, 2021) and the guidelines of the Sowing and Harvesting handbook (Tapella et al., 2021). In addition, the lessons learned from Focelac+ in facilitating multistakeholder evaluation processes were incorporated, in the sense of having two types of teams responsible for the evaluation: one involved in more direct, day-to-day management, and a broader group including relevant stakeholders, among them those promoting the evaluation, academia and representatives of civil society.

It was envisaged that, throughout the PE design process, care would be taken to ensure a high level of involvement of the various stakeholders in decision-making on the strategic aspects of an evaluation, so as to guarantee that they were not mere instruments or passive informants but were genuinely empowered throughout the process and that their participation was active and conscious.

This was essential given the diversity, the inequalities and the power asymmetries among the various stakeholders who would interact within the evaluation team: public officials, people from academia and civil society, older adults benefiting from the programme, and professionals working directly in their care. As explained below, forming the team is a first step before beginning the design of the evaluation, since all stakeholders take part in the central decisions about what to evaluate, how and for what purpose.

Consequently, it was necessary to create spaces for awareness-raising with the stakeholders other than the older persons, in order to demonstrate the importance of a more horizontal way of working in which both power and decisions about the evaluation would be shared with the people for whom the service is intended. The aim was to make the advantages and the challenges of participatory evaluations tangible for all interested parties.

Bearing this approach in mind, each of the following blocks of work was developed:



The first steps of the design work presented major challenges because they took place entirely online. This meant connecting people located in three different countries: Ecuador, Costa Rica (the seat of the Focelac+ project) and Colombia, the country of residence of the facilitator contracted by Focelac+, whose role would include training the evaluation team so that it became familiar with the theory and practice of the participatory evaluation approach, as well as facilitating and supporting the planning of the chosen participatory evaluation. In addition, the EvalParticipativa team, which would be in charge of the participatory evaluation training workshop, was based in Argentina.

The facilitator joined the meetings between Focelac+ and the SNP once it had been established that the intervention to be evaluated would be one run by the MIES. In this particular case, one advantage was her prior knowledge of Ecuador's National Evaluation System. Otherwise, it would have taken her more time to become adequately informed about the evaluation context in Ecuador.

In our experience, we consider it essential that the facilitator should not only have knowledge of the theoretical and methodological aspects of evaluation, but should also know and understand the particular context of the country. This is also why it was important to study carefully the relevant information about the Ministry's policy guidelines on programmes for older adults and, in particular, about the Socialisation and Encounter Spaces. Only after this did the facilitator put forward the proposed work plan for the PE design, since this exercise is understood as a garment that must be tailormade to respond appropriately to the particular challenges that each participatory evaluation entails.

Mapping the stakeholders involved in the evaluation to be designed

Within the programming or design phase of a PE, the first stage concerns preparing and forming the evaluation team. To this end, an essential action was the mapping of the stakeholders involved in the evaluation and the definition of the entities that would form part of the evaluation team and of the broader group (the individuals would be defined later).

The stakeholder mapping began with a brainstorming session on potential institutions to involve in the evaluation, considering their role or mandate, their influence on the programme and on the policy environment, and the potential use they would make of the evaluation. On this basis, priority was given to those stakeholders that might form part of the extended evaluation group.

Subsequently, from this list, the key stakeholders were analysed in order to form the evaluation team —that is, the one that would be more directly involved in its design and implementation—. To this end, the possibilities of involving various types of stakeholders were analysed, taking into account their potential interest and availability. Likewise, the essential characteristics that the delegated representatives should have were defined, in order to formally extend the invitation to take part in the PE process.

This exercise faced several complexities:

- it had to be done online;
- there was, as yet, no team designated as such by the Secretariat or by the Ministry, so it was unclear who was going to take part in the exercise;
- the methodology had initially been designed for a participatory exercise involving at least six people;
- in the end, only one person from each of the entities was able to take part —that is, two people—.

These circumstances left us with several lessons. The first is that the mapping can be done using collaborative working tools such as digital whiteboards —in this case Google Jamboard was used— but it requires the participants to have a detailed knowledge of the environment of the intervention to be evaluated. A multistakeholder perspective is always enriching and lies at the very heart of this type of stakeholder mapping; otherwise, it ends up looking more like an interview. Had time allowed, it would have been advisable to postpone the stakeholder mapping until a larger number of participants were available.

It had also been intended to disseminate the results of the mapping more widely with the relevant bodies of the Secretariat and the Ministry, but it was not possible to carry out this exercise with the rigour originally envisaged, as the day-to-day pressures within each of the institutions prevented it. So, simply as things went along, the mapping was presented to a few people and the decisions on the invitation to the PE training workshop were taken. Nevertheless, we believe that on future occasions it would be valuable to be able to analyse the stakeholder mapping more carefully.

PE training workshop

Strategically, it had been decided to run a course/workshop with EvalParticipativa to provide conceptual and methodological guidelines on PE, drawing on practical evidence. This would serve as the prelude to the start of the PE design, seeking to bring to a common level the knowledge of the institutions identified in the stakeholder mapping that would form part of the broader group and the evaluation team.

During the operational planning of the workshop, a question arose about the best way to involve the older persons who were going to be part of the evaluation team. Having them attend five consecutive days of work sessions (first the training, and then the last two days to begin designing the evaluation) seemed excessive for them, as they are not used to this kind of exercise. Furthermore, they might have felt excluded from certain discussions, given that the other participants had experience in project management.

Consequently, it was decided that the older adults, and the people who work with them in the Socialisation and Encounter Spaces —known as facilitators— would not attend the training workshop, but would join for the final two days, when the PE design formally began. Experience showed that this decision was a sound one. Since the other people from the institutions already had the key notions about PE, the following days could focus on explaining, in simple terms, the central elements that the older persons needed to bear in mind as part of the evaluation team. In other words, the more technical part was already clear to everyone else, and the central objective was cohesion as a team, in line with one of the principles of participatory evaluation: that all people should join the evaluation process actively and consciously, as subjects of rights (Tapella et al., 2021).

Defining the evaluation team

As mentioned above, the stakeholder mapping concluded with the prioritisation of the entities that would form part of both the evaluation team and the broader group. The participation of the following was decided: public entities, academia, civil society organisations and, of course, the population for whom the service is intended and the entities in charge.

Once the institutions had been identified, formal communications were sent to them from the SNP as the governing body for evaluation in Ecuador. The letters therefore had a dual character: on the one hand persuasive, in explaining the importance of being part of the process —which would be a pioneering initiative in PE from within the public sector in the country— but, on the other hand, they made clear the authority with which they were being called upon (in the case of the public entities).

The composition of the evaluation team underwent an unforeseen expansion, as a result of the commitment and interest shown by the representatives of three entities that took part in the PE training workshop and that had been expected to be only in the broader group. Thus, the Ministry of Public Health, the Pontifical Catholic University of Ecuador and the National Council for Intergenerational Equality joined the design work in full. As a result, the evaluation team came to be made up of these three entities, the representatives of the user population (six in total), the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion and the National Planning Secretariat.

The representatives of the older population were all women, as will be explained later.

Reflections and lessons from forming the evaluation team

It is important to be flexible in defining the evaluation team, since the stakeholder mapping allows for a first approximation, but there are many other human factors at play that can turn into opportunities. Thus, for example, in our case, having conducted the PE workshop revealed the genuine interest of the people from three entities (initially considered only for the broader group and not for the evaluation team), which led us to decide to invite them to take an active part in the PE design. In addition, the judgement and background of two of them —being geriatricians— proved strategic, since the team did not include anyone else with that specific training.

Another important aspect in forming the evaluation team concerned the integration of the representatives of the older population. Although the selection process did not proceed as originally planned, it was important to visit them directly at their meeting places before beginning the joint work.

To explain the reasons why the selection could not be carried out as planned (by means of a participatory exercise), it is important to go back to the time when the stakeholder mapping was done. At that point, the people from the Secretariat and the Ministry were only just getting to know one another, and a dynamic

of joint work had not yet been established. The consultant, for her part, did not personally know any of the people with whom she was going to work. Most of the meetings were held online.

It is sometimes easy to forget that starting a new process of interinstitutional work takes time. It is not just a matter of formalities, but of establishing relationships of trust that allow for greater fluidity in communication and decision-making. In keeping with the spirit of this being participatory and inclusive work, it had been thought that, in a mutual familiarisation activity, the service users at the three centres would democratically propose those they wished to delegate to be part of the team, and that the judgement of the people who work there and of the Ministry would also be drawn upon in taking the final decision. However, what happened was that the Socialisation and Encounter Spaces had already gone ahead and chosen two representatives for each centre, and the Ministry communicated this to the Secretariat.

Consequently, it was already a decision taken, and the result was six women, although a mixed composition of the team would have been interesting. Nonetheless, the visit made to the care centres was very important as a first point of contact for building trust with the older women who would be part of the evaluation team. From that moment on, even sharing a dance became essential for getting close to them, since it is one of their favourite activities. In a way, this marked a milestone at which it became clear to us as a team that it was important to keep pace with them so that we could all dance to the same rhythm.

Initial workshop for designing the participatory evaluation

This was, without any doubt, the decisive phase in the design of the evaluation and the greatest challenge for the facilitator. The great challenge was to create the conditions for horizontal work within the evaluation team, seeking cohesion as a group and a common goal: to achieve a good PE design that would help improve the service for the older women, and not focus solely on the three cases selected as a pilot.

In other words, the challenges were not only methodological —having relevant objectives and pertinent evaluation questions— but also reaching them with the involvement of the whole team, which had a heterogeneous composition. The aim was for no one to be left behind: that we could all keep step so that the results would genuinely be the fruit of joint work, with each person contributing from their own position and experience, so that the different perspectives were valued. At the same time, the aim was to overcome any institutional disagreements that might arise.

With these challenges on our shoulders, the methodological guide was designed for the two days of the workshop in which the backbone of the evaluation would be defined. It was essential to reach agreement within that time on the content and meaning of the evaluation objectives, the guiding questions and an outline of what the information sources and the tools for obtaining it might be. Owing to the budget

constraints of the consultancy supporting the design, only two trips by the facilitator were envisaged, each lasting five days, for in-person work. It was therefore essential to finish the workshop with these outputs, since afterwards, working online, it would no longer be possible to count on the participation of all the stakeholders. The second trip was to work on designing the evaluation instruments in person.

Four assumptions underpinned the methodological proposal for the workshop:

1. Working with the human factors to achieve genuine cohesion as a team was essential, and for this the symbolic elements had to carry decisive weight. Each activity was conceived not only in terms of its methodological aspects but also in terms of what it might mean symbolically for the participants, especially the older women.
2. Using simple language and analogies to explain the central but complex matters that needed to be defined in the design of the evaluation. This would help ensure that the older women (with little formal education) understood what was being done and why.
3. Working inductively to define the evaluation objectives and questions, focusing on what is to be evaluated in a participatory way and for what purpose: the starting point would not be the evaluation criteria.
4. Prioritising that everyone on the evaluation team had clear ideas about what the backbone of the evaluation would be. The formulation of the evaluation objectives and questions in technical language would be completed afterwards. It was not a matter of drafting it all together, but it would be ensured that the essence was preserved because it had been a collective agreement. The objectives would be presented in two forms: in simple language and in technical language.

To explain how these basic assumptions, on which the workshop would be run, were gradually fleshed out, it is important to present the key moments and some of the activities that were defined for the work of those two days.

- **The preliminary phase:** this involved providing context on PE work to the senior managers of the Secretariat and the Ministry, and to the older women and their companions. The aim was to raise awareness among the managers regarding the importance of sharing decisions about the evaluation with the members of the evaluation team, including the older women, in pursuit of horizontality. It also aimed to design the methodology for communicating the key notions of PE to the older women in a clear and simple way.
- **Introduction of participants and team building:** the objective of this moment was to facilitate everyone's integration, bearing in mind that some people had been working together for the previous three days and others were only just joining, with the aim of ensuring that the older women felt warmly welcomed and valued.

- **Participation begins at home — the cohesion of the evaluation team:** the aim was to anchor the notion of participation in an experiential exercise, from each person's perspective, taking into account their different roles and therefore different viewpoints. Diversity enriches the exercise of participatory evaluation, so it was hoped that the team being formed would truly feel this way; to that end, it was important to listen to people from their own place/position in relation to the service to be evaluated and to come to understand the other person's point of view.
- **Contextualisation on the object of the evaluation:** this moment aimed to bring together the different views on the Socialisation and Encounter Spaces, clarifying any doubts about them and delimiting the object of evaluation as centred on the service as a whole and not on the three care units where it would be piloted.
- **Defining the essential elements of the evaluation objectives and their guiding questions:** work focused on what we wanted to investigate and for what purpose (use of the evidence/information) before going into the detail of the evaluation questions; as reaching agreements on the what and the why of the evaluation makes is easier to prioritise and no time is lost defining evaluation questions in relation to objectives that are ultimately not prioritised.
- **Approaching the information sources to address the evaluation questions and the types of tools to be used:** the aim was to provide simple answers to questions such as: where might the information to answer this question be found? who has the answer? and how might the information be gathered?

Reflections and lessons from the initial PE design workshop

1. **Symbolic elements foster conditions for horizontality in the relationships within the evaluation team, despite the diversity of stakeholders and their power asymmetries.**

One of the central concerns in designing the methodology for the workshop was to create spaces that promoted horizontality within the evaluation team, which was meeting in full for the first time at that moment. Hence, the first activity for introducing the participants was thought through carefully to address our specific challenges. This led us to devising some simple but powerful symbols to convey that initial message.

It was important that the older women and their companions should feel welcome and included in the group from the very first moment. A personalised welcome was also devised: one of the longer standing people in the group introduced themselves and welcomed one of the newcomers, handing her the grey scarf and a jigsaw piece. This identified us as a team and made it possible, at the end, to reflect on the work we would be doing together, in which each person had something to contribute from their own uniqueness. The jigsaw pieces were of different colours but fitted together.

This activity, simple in appearance, had a greater effect on the older women than we had anticipated when we designed it. They expressed this in their evaluation of the session. It meant a recognition of their worth as persons and of the importance of their participation. It also made clear that it was neither necessary nor, indeed, appropriate to keep referring to hierarchies and titles.

Another of the initial exercises that had been designed to foster this team spirit on a more human level involved identifying, at a personal level, the fundamental aspects that would make each person feel truly included and taken into account in the PE design process. It was relevant to know this, since it lies at the very heart of PE that people should be genuinely valued for their diversity of knowledge and experience.

2. **Recognising the importance of having professionals specialising in the specific subject being evaluated does not detract from the importance of a diverse evaluation team, once a good level of horizontality in decision-making has been achieved.**

Having two geriatricians on the evaluation team was decisive. They helped to interpret —with professional precision— the needs identified by the rest of the team (including the older women) regarding the aspects that needed to be evaluated in order to have sufficient information for making decisions that would help improve the care service for the older population.

Participatory evaluation is sometimes confused with an evaluation carried out by the service users. Here the aim was to ensure that the different evaluation topics prioritised by the team were always taken into account, regardless of whether they were proposed by the service users or by specialised professionals. In other words, every effort was made to ensure that everyone on the team could explain sufficiently, and in a way that was comprehensible to all, the reasons why they considered it important to include a given aspect to be evaluated. Hence the importance of having both subject specialists on the team, as well as the intended recipients of the service.

3. **Using analogies is helpful for expressing complex ideas in simple language. Defining them takes time, given the need to find the best way to do so clearly without losing rigour.**

Previous PE experiences had shown that a frequent challenge is to convey clearly to the population taking part in the evaluation team —especially in the case of older women— that their role is as evaluators taking part from the design stage, not as key informants in an evaluation that is being implemented. It was essential to make these two aspects clear, since it is not usual for them to be called upon for purposes such as this and, therefore, for them it meant taking on a new role.

It is for this reason that, at the start of the workshop, analogies were used so that they would understand the point of evaluating something in order to improve

it, and how to frame the major issues concerning what to evaluate and why. In this way, by giving examples and asking questions, the facilitator made sure that they had understood the purpose of the work that the team would undertake over the following two days.

Technical language can often mask matters that are not fully understood in their most practical sense. Moreover, this initial approach set a tone for communication that sought to leave no one out of the matters under discussion. That is, even technical topics in gerontology or public policy needed to be explained clearly. Simple language does not necessarily mean a loss of rigour, and it does facilitate communication.

The choice of a methodological tool, of the language to be used or of the way of steering the design of a PE is not devoid of an ethical and philosophical stance on the significance of the participation of communities —generally marginalised ones— in these exercises. It is necessary to recognise the diversity of interests among the participating institutional stakeholders and the importance of genuinely listening to the voice of those representing the communities, so that they may have a say in the decisions taken within the evaluation team. This is also why the use of simple language is not merely a matter of form, but a communicative commitment that recognises the importance of debate on equal terms, which entails respect for people's ability to understand the topics under discussion.

4. **Providing information, both quantitative and qualitative, to give context to the interventions to be evaluated allows the evaluation team to have common reference points drawn from diverse experiences.**

One of the exercises on the morning of the first day of the workshop was precisely to share how the Socialisation and Encounter Spaces were seen from different perspectives. This was the key moment for understanding the viewpoint of the women using the services, of the people who work with the older adults, of the Ministry as the body responsible for the programme and thus, of each of the institutions that formed part of the team and had its own motivations and interests regarding the PE. Its purpose was to achieve as broad an understanding as possible of the perspectives of the different members of the team, without entering into discussions about the needs and difficulties in delivering the service.

We received a pleasant surprise several weeks later regarding the importance of this activity. The second time we met as a team, Estrellita, one of the older women, stood up with great confidence and explained to one of the authorities of the National Planning Secretariat why the PE we were designing was important, taking out her notebook, in which she had taken step-by-step notes during the workshop. She cited the exact number of Socialisation and Encounter Spaces that there were in Ecuador, explained why this PE was important and said that she had told her peers that this work was not only for their benefit but for

the whole country, because the aim was to improve the service. This, which was entirely spontaneous, filled us with joy and demonstrated that making those quantitative data known to the whole team also enabled the empowerment of the older women.

5. The decision to take an inductive approach to defining the objectives of the evaluation being designed had methodological reasons: to foster dialogue grounded in practice.

In the methodology of the initial PE design workshop, the proposal was not to begin with the evaluation criteria, but rather with defining what to evaluate and for what purpose as the basic structure of the objectives, which entails an approach to the use expected of the results. The reason for this was the value of the diverse experiences within the evaluation team and the need to engage in depth with those experiences without the bias of technical jargon, which can also prove exclusionary. That is, explaining what evaluation criteria are and beginning by defining them would have been too abstract for the service users and would not really have added value. On the contrary, it would somewhat have broken the flexibility afforded by approaching, more freely, an understanding of the stakeholders' perspective from their own particular experience, in terms of what to evaluate and why.

When we speak of experiences, we are not referring only to subjectivity or to the emotional perception of an intervention. Experience encompasses in itself the knowledge and expertise of the field of the intervention (in this case, gerontological care for the older population); the understanding of the needs that are identified; and the vision of the changes required. Thus, the aim was to draw out not only the lived experience of the women using the service, but also the professional experience of those who accompany them, of the geriatricians, of the people responsible for public policy in Ecuador and of each member of the evaluation team, with a view to defining a PE framework that would help deliver a service well suited to the older population.

Bringing different forms of knowledge about reality into dialogue, on the basis of diverse experiences, does not mean that technical knowledge and local or traditional knowledge come into conflict. What matters is that joint work is placed at the service of contextualised action, in order to take advantage of the opportunities of the environment with a view to resolving specific problems. In this sense, PE plays a strategic role in achieving a broad understanding of the reality on which an intervention or service acts, and in fostering empowerment for its transformation.

Guaranteeing the participation of service users in the design of a PE involves precisely those same mechanisms that are mentioned in connection with social innovation networks: that it should be an opportunity for empowerment and that it should genuinely contribute to defining central aspects in terms of their needs, so that the evidence the evaluation yields is socially useful.

None of this argument means that, in a PE, it is not possible to define evaluation criteria first and to derive the questions from them. Each case is unique and, if it has been determined in advance that the evaluation should focus only on certain specific criteria, then that is how it should be done; but it would be necessary to explain sufficiently the reasons why it should focus on those criteria, and thus se the boundaries, so as to know what terrain one is moving in and not raise matters that cannot be addressed in the PE.

6. The essence of participatory work is that the backbone, or the substantive definitions, should genuinely be built on the contributions of everyone involved.

In the case of designing a PE, it is essential that these agreements concern the object of the evaluation, its objectives and the evaluation questions. Defining this general structure of the PE was the expected output of the initial design workshop: this was no small challenge, precisely because what mattered was not only having the structure, but how it was arrived at —with the active and conscious participation of the whole evaluation team—. And this in a context in which most of the people were not familiar with evaluation matters.

To achieve this, various activities were designed that always included highly visual elements in order to gradually assemble what this structure would be. Likewise, at each step, ways of presenting and validating what was being defined were established, so that all participants could become familiar with one another's work, make their contributions and, in the end, group together similar ideas in order to prioritise the central topics.

One of the lessons left by this whole process is that it is better to have shorter working sessions that are close together in time. In this way, greater depth is achieved as there is less fatigue, and neither the track of our progress nor the momentum is lost.

Throughout the initial PE design exercise, some sessions of differentiated work were arranged for the older women and for the institutional representatives. This was done because it is important to bear in mind in which aspects it is essential for the whole evaluation team to take part —as these involve substantive decisions— and in which it is not necessary, and the particular expertise or knowledge of some members of the team is required instead.

The way of communicating to different stakeholders the central aspects of the PE that was being defined was a challenge not limited to the older women in their communities. A fundamental aspect of preserving the essence of the PE while ensuring it reaches decision-makers who will utilise the evaluation findings is precisely the language used to communicate the evaluation objectives and their entire technical structure.

Generally, it is necessary to use both technical language and simple language that allows the communities

using the services to genuinely understand what is going to be done, the reasons for it and the usefulness it may have. If only one of the two registers is used, the possibility of reaching a strategic group of stakeholders effectively will be lost. One example of how both types of language can be used is that of the specific objectives of this PE. Their final formulation was reviewed by the whole evaluation team to confirm that all the aspects collectively prioritised during the initial workshop had been retained.

In technical language, specific objective: *to determine the contribution of the socio-educational projects to active and healthy ageing in accordance with the comprehensive individual gerontological assessment*.

In simple language: *what do we want to find out? How much do the activities they take part in help each person to have an active and healthy life?*

One of the lessons learned from this experience was the importance of involving the institutional communications teams at key moments of the PE design from the outset, and not merely for the purpose of reporting. Although this had not been envisaged in the methodology designed for the initial workshop, it was incorporated as things went along, at the suggestion of the National Planning Secretariat.

This point is essential, since it fosters the understanding and commitment of the communications staff to the process as a whole, especially with a view to the use of the PE results. Their involvement meant taking part in some of the group exercises and at strategic moments in the plenary sessions, enabling them to interact with the evaluation team and make questions and contributions. They analysed, from a communications standpoint, the importance of this process within the field of public policy evaluation in Ecuador, and they regard it as a point of reference for positioning it in various settings with strategic stakeholders.

On future occasions, it would be advisable to explicitly consider bringing in the communications teams of the main institutions involved in the PE being designed.

The purpose of the initial workshop was achieved once a consensus had been reached within the evaluation team on the content and prioritisation of the aspects to be considered in the PE objectives and their associated evaluation questions. Likewise, an initial outline was established of potential information sources and tools for gathering it.

The workshop left not only outputs in terms of the content of the PE design: it also left a cohesive evaluation team with a deep commitment to ensuring that suitable care can be provided to older persons through the use of the evidence the PE yields.

There is no doubt that the human factor was decisive in achieving the intended results. Work such as this does not depend solely on the technical capabilities of the participants, nor on their knowledge and experience of the subject in question. All of that is insufficient if the team does not manage to work as harmoniously and horizontally as possible.

The closing of the workshop bore this out. Many feelings and deeply moving expressions surfaced about what the workshop had meant for the participants. The women in particular (not only the older women) highlighted how it had been a way of reaffirming their worth. For some female officials, getting their bosses to accept the time they devoted to the workshop amounted to a test of strength in terms of power struggles in order to assert the importance of what was to be worked on. The older women, for their part, expressed emphatically that they had felt valued, recognised and deeply happy to be *useful*.

All of this leads to the conclusion that the process of designing a PE has unforeseen results connected with a more human dimension that is as important as the technical aspects.

Designing the evaluation instruments

With the good results of the initial PE design workshop and the certainty of having an evaluation team united around a single purpose, we embarked on the following phases of the PE design, which involved both online and in-person work. The tasks were divided mainly between the Secretariat and the Ministry as the entities responsible for the process and, only afterwards, at the in-person session to design the instruments, did the whole evaluation team meet again.

The second in-person meeting of the whole evaluation team was a week-long workshop to design the evaluation instruments. Beforehand, work had already been done online to identify the most appropriate information sources and tools for gathering the information. In this workshop the older women worked specifically on the qualitative instruments that would be applied in the communities (interviews and games). They did so guided by some of the professionals on the evaluation team.

The other members of the evaluation team focused on designing the other instruments. Methodologically, it was decided that the work would proceed in the following order:

1. Defining instruments for each of the specific objectives, taking into account their associated evaluation questions.
2. Grouping the instruments by type of stakeholder (for example: Ministry authorities, zonal analysts, experts, community leaders).
3. Institutional instruments already available (for example, nutritional assessment, gerontological assessment).

The distribution into working groups for designing the instruments was determined on the basis of the specific training and experience of each member of the evaluation team. However, crosschecks were always carried out in order to gain a broader view and to add or remove whatever was necessary. This was a long and rigorous piece of work that involved significant learning

for the team, primarily in combining qualitative and quantitative methods. It was truly rewarding to observe the respect and interest with which doubts about one method or another were exchanged, according to each person's experience and knowledge.

Organising and refining the instruments was a subsequent task carried out by a smaller team, but during that week of in-person work substantial progress was made in defining the instruments.

Reflections and lessons from designing the evaluation instruments

Rigour is important in preserving the meaning of the agreements reached collectively regarding the evaluation questions, since it is easy to distort it when defining the evaluation instruments.

For this reason, the work done at the initial PE design workshop was always kept as a point of reference, so that it was possible to go back and check the exact way in which the ideas had originally been expressed on the posters. Likewise, work was based on matrices in which the objectives and questions were rigorously listed, in order to know what each instrument is intended to account for. In this way, everything was duly tied together, with a precise nomenclature that made it possible to trace which objective and evaluation question each instrument responds to.

Another of the challenges of this phase of work concerned designing instruments for gathering information that appropriately combined qualitative and quantitative methods, while also making the best possible use of the available institutional information.

Ensuring that the findings of a PE are actually used in the field of public policy requires bearing in mind the type of information needed and the purpose of it. PE focuses on the benefit it may represent for the communities to which an intervention is directed, and improving the programme or service is a means to that end.

Drafting the dissemination document

The final stage of the PE design was the drafting of a document that would gather the results of the collective work and enable different stakeholders to understand the importance of carrying out the evaluation. This was strategic, bearing in mind that a few weeks later the new government team of the newly elected president would take office, and it was very likely that the authorities and technical staff who were already involved in the PE design process would not remain in their posts.

The core content of the PE design was disseminated to the population using the service at the three units selected as a pilot. In this activity, the older women

on the evaluation team played the leading role, accompanied by the other members of the team.

Dissemination within the public entities could only be done directly by the members of the evaluation team with their managers and the relevant authorities, given that at the end of the year Ecuador was in the phase of transition and handover to the new government, and conditions were not in place to hold a dissemination event.

Reflections and lessons from drafting the document

Throughout the entire process in finalising the objectives and questions, as well as in defining the evaluation instruments and drafting the final document, the work done at the initial design workshop was always kept as a point of reference, so that it was possible to go back and check the exact way in which the ideas had been expressed.

The facilitator took on the responsibility of ensuring that this was so, drawing on methodological tools for the purpose, but also constantly recalling that precision in language is fundamental to preserving the meaning of what was agreed. That is, when drafting in technical terms, taking rigorous care not to introduce matters of particular interest (whether personal or institutional). This oversight role is easier for an external person acting as facilitator.

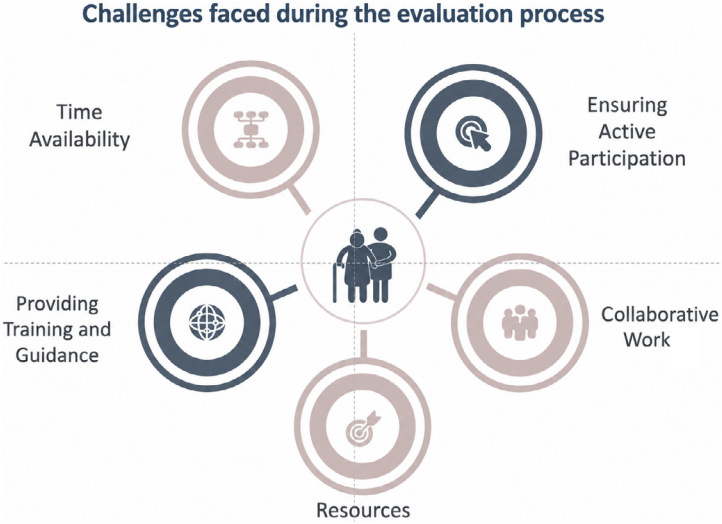
Frequently, in this type of exercise, the people responsible for drafting the text may end up altering matters over which there had been lengthy discussions in order to reach a precise consensus. The final drafting is not merely a technical matter: it is, above all, an ethical responsibility to preserve the polyphony of voices that form part of the PE, since there is no point in having a good design workshop that is truly participatory if, in the end, the document does not respect the agreements reached.

The challenges that lie ahead

The completion of the PE design was a fundamental achievement in demonstrating the importance of this type of evaluation in Ecuador and the potential that exists to make use of its findings for the benefit of the population using services defined within the framework of public policy.

It is important to stress that, in many countries — including Ecuador— the mistake is made of establishing public services for citizens without considering the needs of the service users as expressed by the users themselves. This can be remedied through evaluation, since evaluation processes make it possible to detect this kind of gap, generate improvements for the benefit of citizens and strengthen the capacities of the teams in the subject evaluated.

A significant challenge in constructing the design was the time availability of the people who make up the evaluation team, most of them public officials with multiple duties to fulfil besides the participatory evaluation. Ensuring active participation has undoubtedly been the greatest of the challenges, since this goes hand in hand with the collaborative work of all individuals and with resources — not only human but also financial — and it will continue to be so on the road that lies ahead.



A key factor is the flexibility and capacity for adaptation that the members of the evaluation team must have in order to:

- face the situations that arise;
- bring together the diversity of stakeholders and their different points of view;
- complement the proposals that emerge; and
- foster and enhance the involvement of the various authorities and technical staff, as a key factor alongside the commitment and the political and technical backing of the initiative.

Special attention should be given to the empowerment of the evaluation team, particularly among the direct beneficiaries of the service, in an exercise that involves capturing all the voices in the evaluation design, setting aside titles and positions, and allowing us to get to know one another as people and as human beings.

Once the PE design had been completed, the next challenge was to create favourable conditions for carrying out the evaluation the following year, with a new national government in place. Hence there were challenges such as:

- Securing the interest of the new authorities in moving forward with the evaluation and their willingness to consider the recommendations arising from it, as an opportunity to make use of evidence-based information.
- Maintaining the interest of everyone taking part in this PE, both in the evaluation team and in the broader group. Likewise, achieving an appropriate coordination and a common level of understanding with the new people who join, as a result of the changes of public officials under the new government.
- Finalising the design of the instruments for information-gathering directly with the user population, as this involves creating thinking games and recreational activities; and piloting them.

- Continuing with a *learning-by-doing* approach in the process of strengthening capacities within the entities involved in the PE. This also involves preparing for the application of the data-collection instruments and the processing and analysis of the data. Likewise, defining clearly how the older persons will take part in this phase of the work, in accordance with their potential and characteristics.
- Continuing to promote interest in PE within the National Evaluation System, so that it can be replicated in other public interventions.

Despite the magnitude of these challenges, the PE design process provided the certainty of being able to count on people and entities genuinely committed to making it a reality, and that was a fundamental starting point for beginning the implementation phase of the evaluation with good prospects.

Summary of lessons learned

The challenge that remains is to implement the evaluation designed in a participatory way —something that has involved a great deal of technical and human work, which we regard as merely the beginning of a path of improvement for other public interventions through participatory evaluation—. To this end, it seems important to us to summarise and group together our reflections and lessons learned in the course of developing the design of this PE.

- The composition and selection of the members of the evaluation team is fundamental to a good design. Ideally, it is best to have not only the direct knowledge of those who use the service (depending on the intervention), but also people who are involved in its operation and in the definition of strategies and policy directions, as well as professionals specialising in the subject in question.
- Recognising the importance of having professionals who specialise in the specific subject being evaluated does not detract from the importance of a diverse composition of the evaluation team when a good level of horizontality in decision-making has been achieved.
- Symbolic elements create the conditions for horizontality in the relationships within the evaluation team, despite the diversity of stakeholders and their power asymmetries.
- Providing information, both quantitative and qualitative, to give context to the interventions to be evaluated allows the evaluation team to have common reference points drawn from diverse experiences.
- Levelling knowledge about PE must take into account the particularities of the different stakeholders. Participation does not mean that everyone is involved in the same activities at all times, but rather that they understand the process and have the opportunity to contribute from their own experience, taking part in the central decisions.
- A PE is not necessarily only qualitative; indeed, it is advisable for it to combine quantitative aspects

too. Nor should it be confused with an evaluation carried out by the user population. Its participatory character refers to including different types of stakeholders with the power to make decisions over its central aspects. It is therefore not just a matter of listening to the voice of the communities or the voice of the institutions: it is like a choir, where what matters is that there is harmony in the whole, even if at times some solos need to be heard and the accompanying instruments are varied.

- The decision to take an inductive approach to defining the objectives of the evaluation being designed had methodological reasons: to foster a dialogue grounded in practice. The essence of participatory work is that the backbone, or the substantive definitions, should genuinely be built on the contributions of everyone involved and that a consensus should be reached. In the case of designing a PE, it is essential that these agreements concern the object of the evaluation, its objectives and the evaluation questions. Working in a participatory way does not mean that everyone must work together all the time, but rather that they are taken into account in the central decisions, that the agreements reached are respected, and that information is communicated in a way that is comprehensible to all.
- It is advisable to explicitly consider bringing in the communications teams of the main institutions involved in the PE being designed, for the sake of more effective communication within the entities and of external visibility.
- Using analogies is helpful for expressing complex ideas in simple language. Defining them takes time, given the need to find the best option for doing so clearly without compromising rigour.
- The human factor was decisive in achieving the intended results. Work such as this does not depend solely on the technical capabilities of the participants, nor on their knowledge and experience of the subject in question. All of that is insufficient if the team does not manage to work as harmoniously and horizontally as possible. But achieving this does not depend only on "technical" aspects: it is essential that there be empathy and human closeness, since at the essence of the participatory approach lies an ethical commitment and a vision of a more inclusive and equitable society.
- The process of designing a PE has unforeseen results connected with a more human dimension that is as important as the technical aspects.

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Chapter 11

Lessons from the Practice of Inclusive Rigour in Evaluating a Peace Initiative in Colombia

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Abstract

In this chapter, we present a participatory evaluation experience of a peace initiative in Colombia, utilizing the Inclusive Rigour framework. This initiative compared the implementation of Systemic Action Research (SAR) with a capacity-building process conducted with three Territorial Councils for Peace, Reconciliation, and Coexistence. Systemic Action Research is, in itself, a process of generating collective knowledge and learning; therefore, its evaluation ended up being configured as an evaluative learning process within another collective action-learning process. The evaluation was a participatory process centered on learning, with an iterative design that included adapted components of the systematization of experiences and outcome harvesting. Although it initially began oriented by theories and inquiries from external actors and peace literature (thus initially following a theory-based evaluation approach), it evolved toward a transformative evaluation process. This experience illustrates how genuine participation enriches both the quality and utility of the evaluation while highlighting its inherent challenges and tensions. Evaluating from Inclusive Rigour framework requires constant and open dialogues that translate flexibility, sensitivity, and a commitment to social transformation into collaborative designs, analyses, and adaptations that harmonize diverse interests. We invite readers to reimagine evaluation as a space for collective construction and continuous learning to navigate the complexities of these processes.

Keywords

Inclusive Rigour, Participation, Evaluation, Learning, Systemic.

Citation

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Introduction

Peacebuilding interventions and their evaluations take place in dynamic and potentially volatile contexts, marked by complex relationships involving many people in different roles. These contexts do not follow stable trajectories and often experience unpredictable changes in their dynamics, patterns, and structural conditions. In addition, peacebuilding is intrinsically political work, shaped by factors across local, national, and global levels, which makes it difficult to identify, define, or measure impact and the contribution of actions and organisations.

As a result, the multi-causal pathways through which peacebuilding interventions generate outcomes are emergent and highly relational. This means most attempts to measure predefined results are ineffective, or they do not capture the valuable unplanned or emerging transformations taking place. Peacebuilding programmes need to interact with diverse people and organisations in the system, which means that their evaluations bring forms of engagement embedded in power dynamics. That is why we must intentionally design, deploy, and orient evaluations in accordance with relational logics aligned with peacebuilding itself, thereby facilitating the navigation of those relationships.

In this chapter we present a participatory evaluation experience of a peacebuilding initiative developed in Colombia. The peace initiative evaluated was a pilot comparing the implementation of Systemic Action Research (SAR) with a capacity-building process, carried out in the department of Cauca, Colombia, with three Territorial Councils for Peace, Reconciliation and Coexistence. Since Systemic Action Research is inherently a collective knowledge-generation and learning process, its evaluation ultimately becomes an evaluative learning process embedded within another collective action-learning process.

The evaluation was a participatory, learning-centred process with an iterative design. It included components adapted from the systematisation of experiences and outcome harvesting. Although the evaluation initially drew on peace literature and external actors' questions (therefore initially aligned with theory-based evaluation), it shifted towards becoming a transformative evaluation process.

In addition to pointing out the key milestones of the participatory evaluation, we seek to highlight the insights gained from of the participatory evaluation and share what we learned using the Inclusive Rigour framework. In in doing so, we invite more people from Latin America and the Caribbean to join the collaborative conversation maintained by the group now called the Inclusive Rigour Co-Lab.

We consider our Latin American context a fertile and crucial ground for the framework's continued adaptation, and we believe the framework has the potential to help promote an evaluation culture with participation at the center —not only for ethical, political, and practical reasons, but also because participation is central to an expanded understanding of rigour—.

Brief context of peace and participation in Colombia

Colombia has a history of internal armed conflict that is usually traced back to the 1960s, with the emergence of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), but which can more broadly be traced back to the early years of national foundation (Sánchez, 2007; LeGrand, 2016). The signing and ratification in 2016 of the Final Peace Agreement to end the conflict and build a stable and lasting peace between the Colombian government and the FARC was a milestone in the country's history, as well as in the global history of negotiated peace agreements of armed conflicts.

That Peace Agreement defined peace in a positive sense, as the consolidation of relationships between people, groups, and institutions in which citizen participation is fundamental—not only in consultation and planning processes, but also in their implementation and follow-up. In line with this, Colombia has pursued a peacebuilding approach that gives an important role to participation and inclusion. To pursue the necessary shift in how different actors relate to one another, numerous mechanisms and spaces for citizen participation have been promoted, adjusted, and repositioned.

One of the renewed bodies was the Territorial Councils for Peace, Reconciliation and Coexistence (hereafter the Peace Councils). These formal spaces for citizen participation are relevant because they were the focus of the initiative whose evaluation we describe in this document. Although the Councils have existed in the country since 1998, it was only in 2017 (in the context of the 2016 Peace Agreement) that they were backed by presidential directives. At that point, mayors and governors were tasked with creating and promoting them and setting aside resources for their functioning, so that they could fulfil their purpose: to 'promote the achievement and maintenance of peace, and facilitate harmonious collaboration among State entities and institutions […] in order to achieve social relationships that ensure a permanent, comprehensive peace' (Decree, Law 885 of 2017).

It is also important to highlight that, alongside Colombia's deeply rooted pro-participation discourse and actions, there is a tension with the limited effectiveness of existing spaces for participation. This has led to fatigue among social leaders and civil movements, and even to indifference among many citizens regarding possibilities for influence or involvement in change, since these participation processes often end up being more formal than transformative (Tovar, 2019). The Territorial Councils for Peace, Reconciliation and Coexistence, as formal participation bodies, have not escaped this reality: at municipal level, the vast majority play a secondary role in territorial peacebuilding, have no funding for their operation, and are dependent on the will of local governments and/or the presence of international cooperation support (PARES, 2023).

The initiative to evaluate: *Co-Inspira*

Against this backdrop, two national government bodies —the Office of the High Commissioner for Peace (responsible for supporting and strengthening the Councils) and the Agency for Territorial Renewal (responsible for facilitating implementation of Territorial Development Plans)— sought to work together to strengthen the Territorial Councils for Peace, Reconciliation and Coexistence so they could fulfil their mission under the Peace Agreement's implementation, with support from international cooperation (Management Systems International, which administered USAID).

Adapt Peacebuilding, a non-profit organisation that had been working in the country for more than five years using systemic methodologies, proposed a pilot project to work with the Councils and compare two methodologies: one focused on capacity development (dialogue and planning) and another, new in Colombia: Systemic Action Research (SAR), a form of Participatory Action Research (Burns, 2007). Humanity United, a private non-profit organisation, co-financed the process, and supported the project's learning component. Named Co-Inspira by its participants, the pilot was carried out in two phases, one for each methodology.

The first phase took place in three Peace Councils, corresponding to the municipalities of Tumaco in the department of Nariño, Cáceres in Antioquia, and El Tambo in Cauca. It consisted of implementing a more 'traditional' capacity-strengthening approach: training in dialogue and accompanying workshops to participatorily co-create the Councils' action plans.

The second phase consisted of continuing the work in only one of the three Peace Councils, in El Tambo, where a Systemic Action Research (SAR) process was implemented. SAR is a methodology that generates multi-causal understandings of the existing dynamics in the system one wishes to transform, starting from the life stories of the community or communities to which the co-researchers belong From there, the communities and co-researchers co-create action plans that are carried out through iterative action learning cycles. (Burns, 2007; Burns, Howard, and Ospina 2021; Gray and Burns, 2021). This was the first implementation of the methodology in Colombia and the third in the global peacebuilding context (Gray and Burns, 2021; Hicks, et al., 2024).

Although the pilot led to the continuation of an initiative that is still under implementation today, this text focuses only on the evaluation experience of the pilot (with its two phases). The evaluation should therefore be understood as a comparative process of two different peacebuilding approaches centred on the Peace Councils. In doing so, it is important to remember that one of them —SAR— is itself a participatory process of generating local collective knowledge, led by participants (known as co-researchers).

In Co-Inspira, the people initially convened for the first phase were all those who were part of the Peace

Councils in the three municipalities. Once the SAR approach was explained in El Tambo, one of the first decisions in participatory planning was that the space would be open: co-researchers could invite anyone, and anyone could join, provided they agreed to contribute to progress rather than restart or undo what had already been built. They also agreed that the knowledge generated would be freely accessible and usable, as long as it could be shared in a way that did not put those involved at risk.

The SAR began from a genuine question of the co-researchers, in this case: how peace is built in their territory. To answer it, they collected life stories from community members (with as wide a range of roles as possible) and analysed them to generate multi-causal loops. When connected, these loops produced a map that shows the relational patterns of how the system works—the peacebuilding system in the territory—based on those stories. Figure 1 shows the map generated by the co-researchers in El Tambo, while Figure 2 presents, by way of example, one of the mapped dynamics.

Once the co-researchers connected the circular dynamics (loops) and created the map showing how peace is built in El Tambo —what builds or inhibits peace in their territory— they analysed the map in terms of opportunities for change and 'frozen' dynamics, and prioritised the opportunities that mattered most to them using criteria they chose, around their initial question.

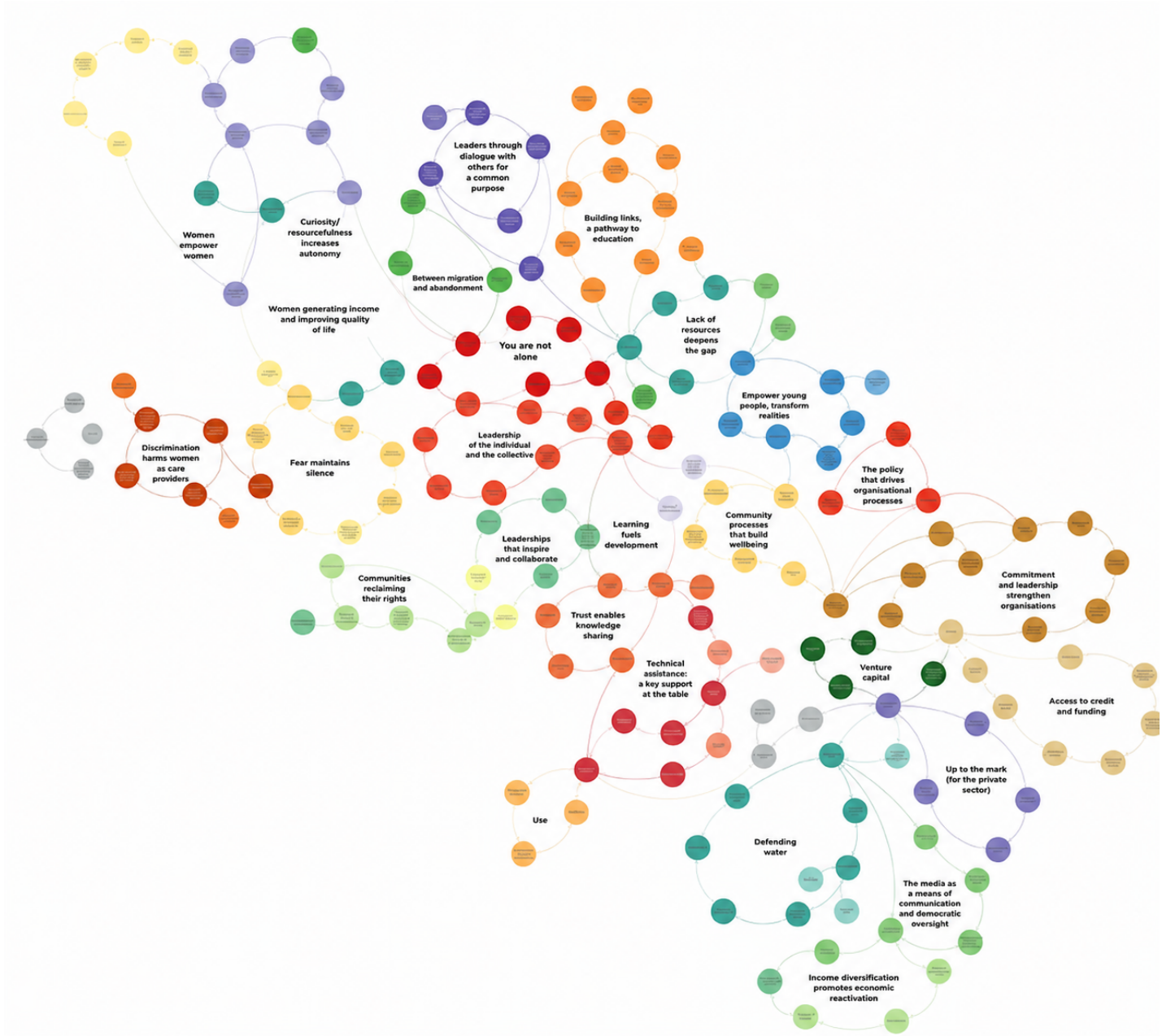


Figure 1. *Complete map: How is peace built in our municipality? (Co-Inspira, 2021)*

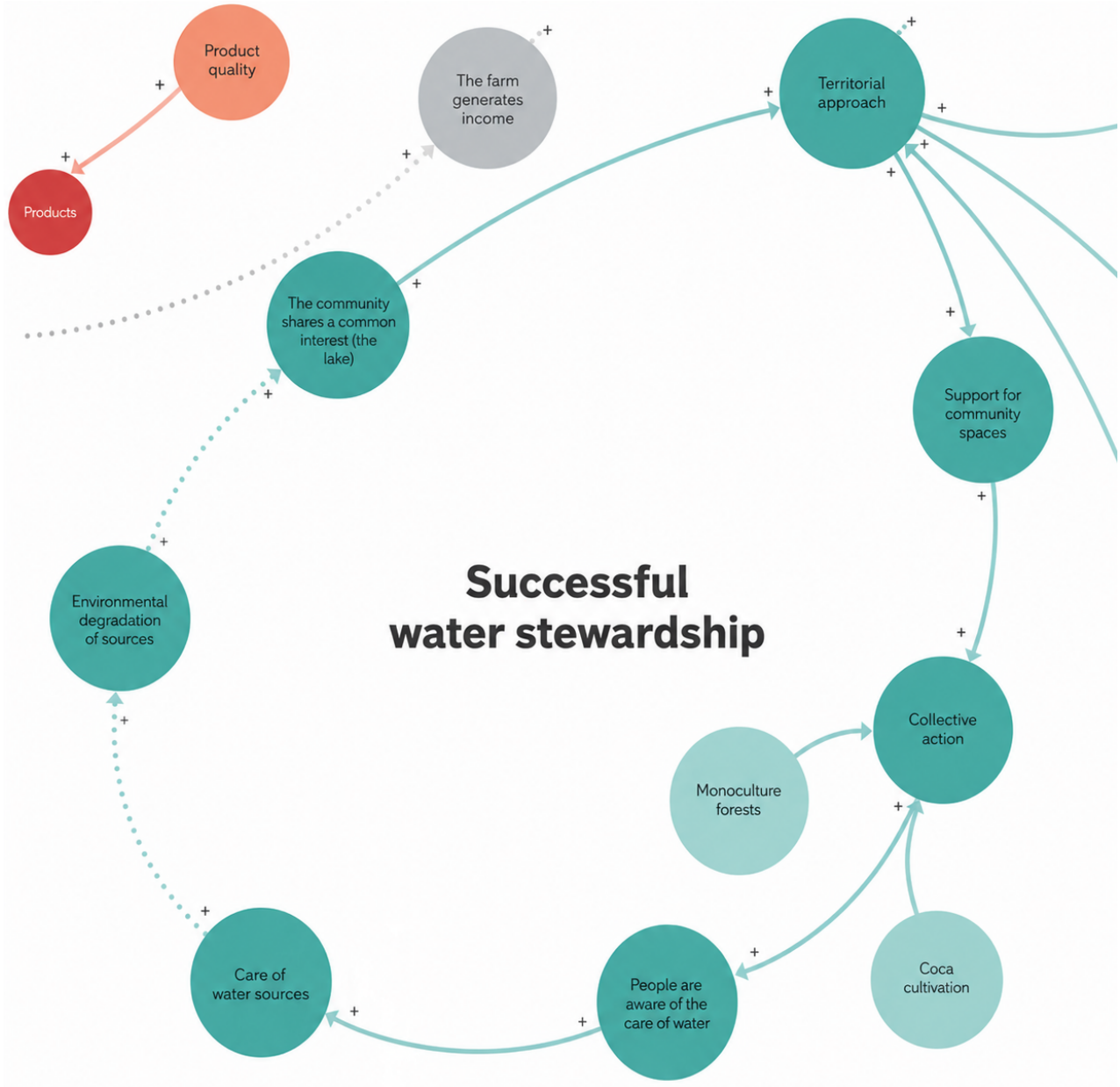


Figure 2. *Dynamic: "Successful Water Defense Dynamic (Co-Inspira, 2021)*

Afterwards, drawing on the collective knowledge generated, the co-researchers organised themselves into action learning circles around some of the opportunities identified. In those circles, they created theories of change to develop actions towards the transformations each group selected. They then began Action Learning cycles, including budget decisions and periodic adaptations of their theories of change.

Phase 2 of the pilot resulted in three action learning circles focused on protecting water and the environment; women's empowerment; and promoting youth leadership.

The evaluation process

The evaluation of the pilot sought to answer how and to what extent the use of SAR within a local peace council contributed to creating collective and relational agency with the potential to transform power relations in the territory. This was approached through comparison of the two methodologies, while also collecting lessons learned from the pilot experience for working with Peace Councils and strengthening them.

As a result, the evaluation —focused on learning— became an 'oxymoron' of two use needs: one informed by literature (with an explicit theory), seeking to learn about the scope and limitations of SAR compared with more common approaches; and another without an explicit theoretical foundation, aiming to learn from local experience. Both converged on the question of how to contribute more effectively to peacebuilding from the grassroots, making clear that what counted as 'effective' should be defined by the community.

The evaluation consisted of three main activities: a baseline, a process of systematisation of experiences, and an adapted (lighter) version of outcome harvesting. A timeline is provided to help situate the process in time.

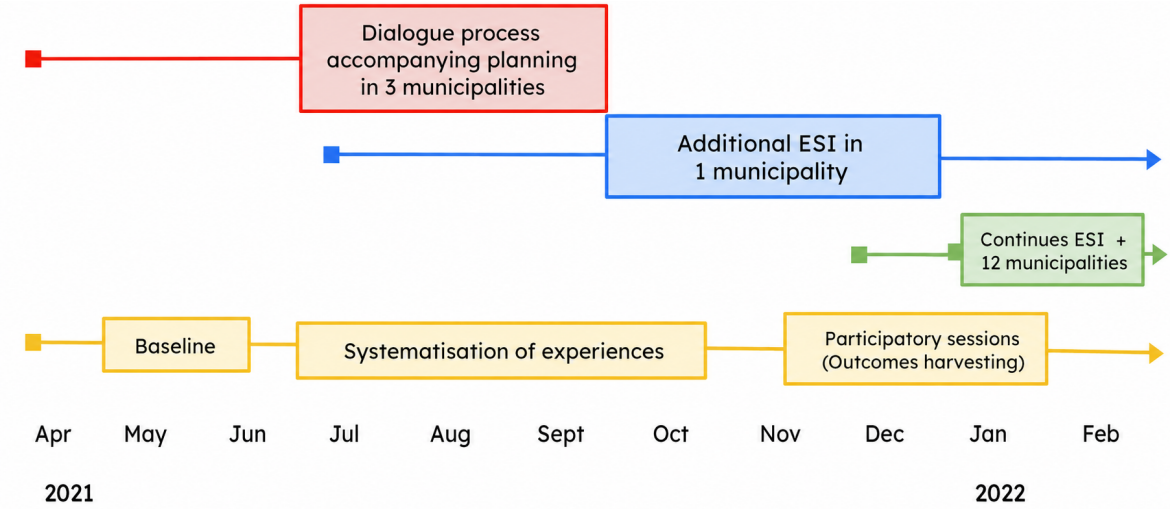


Figure 3. *Co-Inspira timeline*

Perspectives and initial questions

The overall proposal for the evaluation component of the Co-Inspira pilot was developed before implementation began. The pilot was possible thanks to a shared interest in learning about peacebuilding methodologies and approaches in the context of Peace Agreement implementation, held by the two national government agencies, the designer-implementer (Adapt Peacebuilding), and Humanity United as a co-funder.

Adapt Peacebuilding and Humanity United's learning interests focused on peace initiatives in the Peace Agreement implementation context and on differences between methodological approaches (SAR vs capacity strengthening). This led to the evaluation's initial hypotheses grounded in peacebuilding literature and organised around two key concepts:

- the weaving, establishment and value of relationships (drawing mainly on J. P. Lederach), and
- power and agency (drawing mainly on R. McGinty, R. McGee and S. Lukes).

In line with these interests, causal pathways were proposed in advance to test across the two approaches, and an evaluation process was designed that could review and adjust the hypotheses of change while evaluating, making visible and understanding results. These pathways drew on relevant sociological and

peace literature and on prior experience implementing SAR processes in Myanmar (Gray & Burns, 2021).

Initial Causal Hypothesis

- Under favourable conditions for participation, dialogue, and accompaniment, these processes will support the institutionalisation of Municipal Peace Councils and contribute to the achievement of outcomes associated with everyday peace and the implementation of the Peace Agreement. Invisible power and hidden power will undermine the favourable conditions for participation required for the institutionalisation of Municipal Peace Councils and will hinder progress towards implementation of the Agreement and everyday peace.
- In the absence of everyday peace and progress in implementing the Peace Agreement, citizens will demand spaces through which to pursue the desired socio-political changes.
- Systemic Action Research (SAR) will help to expand power among project participants, thereby supporting the favourable conditions for participation required for the institutionalisation of Peace Councils and contributing to everyday peace and the implementation of the Peace Agreement.
- SAR will also support the systemic integration of peacebuilding actors, leading to the favourable conditions for participation necessary for the institutionalisation of Peace Councils and, in turn, contributing to the implementation of the Peace Agreement and to everyday peace.

In parallel, the government organizations and the other funder were interested in systematizing the experiences to learn about the capacity building of the Peace Councils and the role that dialogue could play in such strengthening. These interests led to the incorporation of a systematization of experiences design into the proposal, aimed at identifying lessons learned and recommendations for working with the three Peace Councils. This design featured the local facilitators—of the dialogue, planning, and SAR processes—as the protagonists of the meta-reflection and analysis that would give meaning to the lived experiences during implementation. Furthermore, this analysis would be enriched by the actions of the evaluation process that had a oriented toward questions of a more theoretical or methodological nature.

The systematisation drew on monitoring information and deliberately created spaces for reflection in order to generate lessons learned from the process, organised around challenges, solutions, and recommendations for work with the Peace Councils.

Initial Theory of Change, which guided the learning focus of the systematization

- If dialogue, planning, and relational capacities are strengthened within the Peace Councils, then their agendas will be strengthened and/or enhanced.

In other words, Adapt Peacebuilding's initial pilot design included an evaluation-systematisation component that responded to the external parties' learning interests, following —at least at the start— the more top-down way evaluations are usually designed. It had a practical spirit, but not one oriented by participation for transformation.

Roles and adaptations

At the start of the evaluation process, the evaluation team included:

- a **coordinator** (who also coordinated the pilot),
- an **external adviser** outside the territory (part of Adapt), and
- a **systematization leader** who, while independent of the implementation team, participated in the evaluation design and was responsible for monitoring tools and systematisation; facilitated reflective conversation spaces; and supported surveys and semi-structured interviews that formed the baseline.

The person leading the systematisation guided the analysis of those actions considered most relevant to the learning interests related to work with the Peace Councils, and supported the drafting of the initial documents on findings and recommendations, developed in coherence with the systematisation process. As an individual who was *independent* of the implementation and facilitation of the initiative's spaces, this person involved both the local and national teams in spaces for information generation and reflective analysis of the systematisation. In addition, this role enabled a fresh perspective on the day-to-day experiences reported by the field-based team.

The local facilitation team also co-facilitated the evaluation spaces held with the co-researchers and supported the drafting process of the initial findings and recommendations documents. This team was trained both in the SAR methodology and in the general principles of the evaluation that was carried out, as well as in the use of the evaluation tools.

The co-researchers played a central role in the participatory planning of Phase 1. Dedicated spaces were created for them —local participant leaders and Peace Council members— to decide what they wanted to be trained in and how, to make a wide range of operational decisions, and to define agendas, invitees, frequency of meetings, and related aspects.

They also played a central role in Phase 2 of the SAR process, during which they acted as community researchers. In this role, they collectively defined the research question, the boundaries and scope of the process, carried out the analysis (of the map), and led the design, implementation, and learning from the actions of the action learning circles, among other activities. All of these roles required participants to put their curiosity into practice, to engage in horizontal conversations, and to develop—through learning by doing—a range of skills, including those related to the generation of life stories, among others.

Because the co-researchers already had such an active role in the initiative itself, it was challenging to add another layer of work by asking them to lead the evaluation design. In other words, inviting them to take on an active role from the evaluation design phase would have saturated their time, which was already fully devoted to the activities of the initiative.

Moreover, this could also have been confusing, given that local participants had already generated and engaged with questions related to their own learning interests concerning the traditional capacity-building approach, the mapping process, and the action-research circles. As such, introducing an additional request related to the design of the evaluation and its guiding questions could have been overwhelming, or even perceived as redundant.

Given the SAR methodology and the context described the effort to evaluate this initiative posed an additional challenge beyond the usual peacebuilding challenges (such as moving beyond linear logic, including diverse perspectives, or measuring predefined outcomes in complex contexts). This evaluation had to put into practice a participatory, learning-focused evaluation of a process that was itself one of transformative knowledge production: a kind of meta-evaluation.

Finally, the co-researchers and other community members participated in evaluation spaces that were used iteratively to understand and adjust the causal hypotheses. Time was dedicated to presenting the evaluation and supporting shared understanding through critical and reflective conversations, where it was possible to question hypotheses, revisit even implicit assumptions behind the creation of the Peace Councils under the Peace Agreement and examine those underlying the pilot activity design proposals.

The co-researchers also participated in moments of analysis of the results that they themselves had proposed. However, only those who were part of the SAR process also played an active role in drafting the initial findings and recommendations documents. This was mainly due to the timing of the initiative, which concluded earlier in the municipalities without SAR, as shown in the timeline. This condition did not, however, mean that the co-researchers from the three municipalities were not accompanied in the use of the learnings. In all three cases, specific spaces were created to define the usefulness of these learnings in relation to the forthcoming actions of the Peace Council and of the SAR process, according to each context.

Bricolage, implementation and adaptations

Navigating the tensions among different theories of change, and articulating them, was necessary to ensure meaningful inclusion of participants so that power could be redistributed and an evaluation system could function from the bottom up and across horizontal levels.

The evaluation design therefore incorporated baseline information gathered through a form and semi-structured interviews at the start of the project. This helped understand perceptions of the three Peace Councils among external municipal actors, municipal councillors (both those who would and would not participate), and national government staff whose work related to the Peace Councils. The tools were initially informed by the causal hypotheses described above.

During implementation, facilitators kept logs and records of activities, and held reflective spaces guided by systematisation tools.

Finally, to address questions linked to the causal hypotheses, the team proposed an outcome harvesting process in a 'light' version. To make the design suitable for the context, they developed a bricolage —iteratively adapting methods and tools such as semi-structured interviews, surveys, joint and individual reflection formats, observation formats, exercises to identify outcomes, assign significance and contribution, and backwards causal tracing— all within the logics of systematisation and outcome harvesting. This helped reconcile differences among distinct learning interests.

This bricolage also made it easier for the evaluation process to remain open to adaptations and to respond to different (though aligned) interests. In this way, it sought to address the question: how and to what extent using SAR with local councillors contributed to creating collective and relational agency with the potential to transform power relations in the territory; and at the same time to gather lessons learned during implementation for strengthening the Peace Councils.

During implementation, dedicated spaces were maintained in which the evaluation team reviewed the causal hypotheses and adjusted them over time. This anticipation —or willingness to remain engaged in an emergent design process— was partly enabled by the assumptions underpinning the project's initial design: a stance that recognised the complexity inherent in peacebuilding, as well as the corresponding need for a systemic approach.

The characteristics of the initiative itself invited a reflexive evaluation design, one that assumed it would not be possible to define outcomes in advance, given that it would be the participants themselves who would co-create their direction, conceptual framework, and coherently guide the purpose of the actions.

The following section explains in concrete terms how this methodological adaptation unfolded.

The iterative adaptation of the initial hypotheses began early on, at the start of the pilot phase, when only the capacity-strengthening methodology focused on dialogue was being implemented. This was based on the assumption that participants from local governments would take part in the activities in their capacity as Peace Council members.

However, following the initial sessions and participatory planning, public officials and institutional representatives no longer participated as peers. Instead, they assumed particular roles. In some cases, they withdrew altogether; in others, they attended without engaging as active and horizontal participants; and in others, they sought to control the agenda of the spaces.

During one of the systematisation's reflective sessions, alongside the analysis of the baseline and the monitoring of participation, it became evident that the hypothesis stating that *SAR will support the systemic integration of peacebuilding actors, leading to favourable conditions for participation necessary for the institutionalisation of Peace Councils, and thereby contributing to the implementation of the Peace Agreement and to everyday peace* could not be tested.

This was because integration was not occurring even at the most incipient level, within the spaces that had originally been envisaged.

With this situation identified, the team proceeded to review the assumption that the SAR methodology in El Tambo would contribute to the relational reconfiguration of power dynamics. As a result, four research questions were formulated, which better integrated and focused the learning interest and made explicit the role of power dynamics in the process:

1. How do vertical relationships emerge in the work of peace initiatives?
2. How do power dynamics manifest in relationships between institutions, citizens, communities, elites, and other actors?
3. Which forms of power need to be transformed, and how do they change? (invisible power, hidden power, visible power, knowledge, violence/intimidation, governmental power, power over, and power with)
4. What are the characteristics of peacebuilding spaces that are genuinely transformative?

Subsequently, these questions began to be addressed through the exploration of causal pathways that, by the end of the pilot phase, replaced the initial causal hypotheses. This led to a rethinking of the role of institutionalisation and integration as they had been originally conceived, towards an approach that ultimately took the following form:

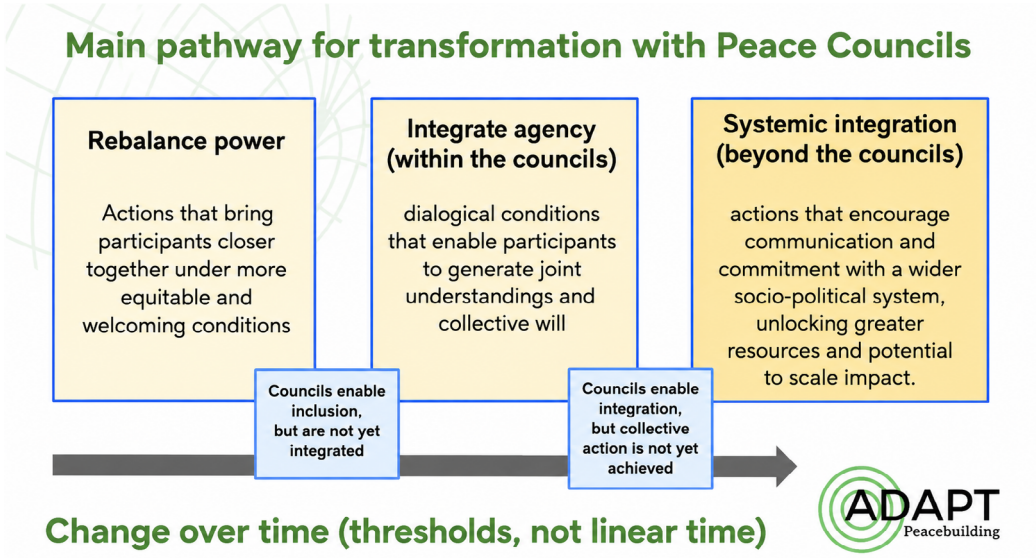


Figure 4. *Image from internal Project presentation (Gray & Báez-Silva, 2022*

At this stage of reflection, the design of the evaluation process was further refined. Initially, only an adapted version of the outcome harvesting methodology had been proposed —lighter than the full, manual-based version—. However, when the discussion on inclusion and horizontal participation of the co-researchers was brought into the process, we turned to a methodological bricolage that would allow us to share the initial hypotheses with them.

These hypotheses did not translate into specific, predefined results; rather, they had provided a general orientation for the actions and for the work of the evaluation team.

For this reason, at the final stage of the pilot we designed a learning space that was as horizontal as possible. While we presented the main causal hypotheses of the initiative being evaluated, we did so by opening up a space for horizontal dialogue. Within this space, we discussed the assumptions underlying the process and even revisited the theories through which, by law, an institutional body such as the Peace Councils is created within the framework of the Peace Agreement (2016). In this way, together with the co-researchers, we opened a dialogue space around peacebuilding —globally, in their territory, in their life histories, and in their everyday lives (including their roles as Peace Council members)—.

Making the underlying assumptions explicit —and engaging in dialogue about them— enabled participants to situate themselves in relation to peacebuilding theories and to reflect critically on them. Following this exploration of the main hypotheses, we facilitated a space to propose and understand the outcomes identified by the co-researchers themselves. These outcomes were documented in writing, reviewed and prioritised collectively, and finally assessed in terms of their significance for territorial peacebuilding.

Based on what had been agreed, a causal tracing exercise was facilitated to work backwards and explain which actions, conditions, and/or situations had made each outcome possible. Finally, the co-researchers scored the degree to which the project had contributed to the occurrence of each of the identified outcomes, followed by a further dialogue space to explore these scores collaboratively. In this space, those of us facilitating did not hold a monopoly over the questions; rather, meaning was co-constructed among peers, as participants compared perspectives, reflected together, and engaged in shared inquiry.

The co-researchers therefore reflected on the very theories on which, for example, the creation of the Peace Councils had been founded (a hypothesis that predates the project itself but is directly related to the hypothesis on institutionalisation), as well as on other power dynamics. This reflection generated moments in which their understanding of the local context was expanded, along with its national and global connections.

In these reflective conversations, they put forward their own interpretations of their position— as leaders, as citizens, and as Peace Council members—within the broader ecosystem. They were critical of the

hypotheses and became aware of their own power and role in generating change.

For example, they recognised what they themselves had done to enable a different kind of relationship between the Peace Council and the mayor's office. This was reflected in concrete changes: the mayor now attended meetings from beginning to end; remained present without checking his phone or leaving the room; asked questions; assigned specific tasks to members of his team in response to proposals made by the Peace Council; and, in one meeting, explicitly stated that he "now understood what the Peace Council wanted to do, could see a clear path forward, and could imagine concrete actions to support them".

The opportunity to learn about the why and the purpose behind the evaluation component facilitated a deeper understanding of the initiative itself —particularly of the SAR approach— and helped create a space of trust. This, in turn, enabled the identification of significant changes of many different kinds, especially at the personal level, likely as a result of participants seeing their voices and perspectives valued within the broader initiative. Several co-researchers, who were also Peace Council members, explicitly mentioned this, and it was recorded as such.

At this stage, as the initiative has continued to consolidate a subsequent SAR process beyond the pilot's first cycle, the Theories of Change developed within the action learning circles—emerging from collective local knowledge and grounded in life histories—have evolved according to their own logic and pace. In some cases, this evolution has led them to move away from the initial hypotheses embedded in the initiative's design, and even from some of the assumptions that underpin the use of a methodology such as SAR within the peacebuilding field.

This autonomy inherent to SAR approaches has added complexity to the challenge of the evaluation process. The evaluation is not only tasked with articulating the different learning dimensions of the initiative—which at times are disjointed (for example, the Theories of Change emerging from the action–learning circles compared to those of the overall project)—but it must also navigate the tensions between them as they move away from the initial shared frame of interest. More specifically, some circles, drawing on locally co-constructed knowledge, have chosen not to include actions oriented towards institutionalisation, and even the role of the Peace Council itself has evolved over the course of the process. Meanwhile, for the funder's initial interests and for the implementing foundation's external team (working outside the territory), this objective —as well as the role of the Peace Council— continues to be central to the purpose and justification of the initiative.

In the face of these tensions, the iterative adaptation of the evaluation process seeks to respond in a way that not only enables learning and adaptation (in practice) across the different dimensions of the initiative, but also allows these dimensions to enter into dialogue and mutually enrich one another. Otherwise, the gap in understandings of the initiative itself would persist between, on the one hand, the local implementing team and the co-researchers, and on the other,

the external implementation team and the funder (Humanity United).

Consequently, the adaptations aimed at fostering more horizontal involvement of co-researchers and local facilitators in the design of the evaluation, as well as the creation of reflective spaces around the explicit expectations and interests of the different parties, have been ways of responding to this challenge. These adaptations have also made it possible to introduce adjustments to the development of the initiative itself, particularly in terms of communications.

It is also worth noting that, throughout this process, the value and potential of the enabling environment became evident —that is, how the different actors involved (funders, Peace Council members, the implementation team, and the community) interact in relation to the team's relational and technical skill set—. On the one hand, the intention to adopt a participatory design for the evaluation process itself required considerable work of interpretation or translation across different domains: the technical language of evaluation, the theories and prior findings, the historical account of adjustments made, and the interests of the local team and participating community members. On the other hand, this challenge was compounded by the need to make reflections and learnings accessible across multiple perspectives, particularly in light of interests that, at least on the surface, appeared to diverge.

Use and its challenges

At the time of the initial design, it seemed that the bricolage approach and the participation of people in diverse roles in defining the evaluation focus would guarantee use and impact. However, the government institutions involved changed representatives during implementation, and as a result the final products, findings and recommendations were not considered relevant—following the path of many traditional evaluations: being filed away as proof of good delivery, without influencing future design.

The evaluation was not used by the national government institutions mainly because the two professionals who had originally managed the alliance and were genuinely interested in the process resigned during implementation. New staff were assigned to supervise, focusing on 'proper' closure: they received the products and, despite efforts to share learning and raise visibility, their management was limited to signing off deliverables.

This situation highlighted the importance of the enabling environment, particularly in relation to institutional dynamics, and at the same time underscored the value of genuine accompaniment at the moment of evaluation use with the different actors involved at various points in the process. This implies the need for strategies that enable meaningful engagement with these actors, aligned with their possibilities and interests.

At the same time, while the design of accompaniment strategies for use is essential throughout the lifecycle of the initiative, the challenge of their feasibility also emerges. In the specific case of Co-Inspira, the initiative relied on a small team carrying out multiple tasks in parallel. This likely influenced the fact that a more explicit and adaptive use component was not designed for governmental entities, and that —given the SAR methodology— the focus of accompaniment for use was placed primarily on those participating as co-researchers.

In light of the tensions described in the previous section, the need to establish points of common ground and convergence among the interests of the different parties involved emerges as a question not only for analysis and methodological bricolage, but also for the use component of the evaluation. If evaluation use succeeds in building bridges of mutual understanding across different perspectives, it can enable decision-making for future initiatives and local actions that is informed by more complex understandings of the peacebuilding system, as well as foster mutual recognition among actors who are often perceived as occupying positions so distant that they appear, at times, to be opposing.

Despite this limitation —which could well open up an entire reflection on evaluation use and the multiple variables that influence it within the public sphere— we would like to highlight that the evaluation did have an impact in other spaces. For example, as understandings generated through the evaluation evolved, they were used to inform decision-making at different levels of both the initiative and its evaluation:

- the causal hypotheses were repeatedly reviewed, gradually simplified, and refined;
- the initial evaluation design —originally shaped by the curiosities of external actors— was revisited, giving way to a process that involved local teams and their learning interests, as well as the co-researchers, in the design; and
- reflective spaces were created with Humanity United (the donor) to explore, through an iterative and dialogic process, their learning interests.

Likewise, in another instance of evaluation use, the initial findings from the pilot evaluation led to specific adjustments by the Peace Council members to the actions they had planned as a Council. In the municipality of El Tambo, the findings also resulted in adjustments to the actions of the action learning circles. In addition, the analysis conversations helped to strengthen a shared perspective and the participants' perceived sense of agency.

The evaluation findings were also used to inform the design of the initiative's third phase, through sessions held with co-researchers, the local team, and the implementing organisation's team, in which space was intentionally created to reflect on the findings and the corresponding next steps.

For example, in relation to the institutionalisation hypotheses, difficult conversations emerged around whether the focus of the next SAR phase should be

on influencing the implementation of the El Tambo Peace Council's Action Plan, and whether this space was—or was not—the appropriate one through which to activate the Theories of Change developed by the action-research circles, given the power and non-power dynamics surrounding the Council, as well as other structural conditions shaping its function.

One such condition was that 80% of the Peace Council members who participated in the process reached the maximum period permitted for representing their communities before the start of the second phase, making their exit from this space imminent.

The findings were also shared with Humanity United (the funder, with a learning focus on peacebuilding methodologies within the framework of the Peace Agreement) and with selected interested individuals from local governments. In addition to sharing the written reports, progress meetings were held, along with a final virtual meeting designed to facilitate uptake through a more dialogical and non-hierarchical accountability approach.

Thus, while the meetings and presentations with national-level actors did not yield visible effects from the perspective of the implementation team, in the case of Humanity United the exchanges helped keep open a space for reflection. These conversations connected the understandings generated through Co-Inspira with SAR processes in other parts of the world and continue to keep the door open to reflection and learning—sustaining the curiosity and shared interest that motivated the parties from the outset.

In contrast to the lack of impact that the final, technical, rigorous, and well-written findings had on national government institutions, the simple act of democratising the evaluation —drawing on a process of methodological bricolage— ensured the use and relevance of the evaluation component in other spaces. For example, for decision making and adaptation of the initiative itself, the action-research circles plans, the Peace Council activities, and in the mental models of co-researchers who used and shared their new collective understandings in other participative spaces. In doing so, it transformed the evaluation itself into a valuable (and transformative) space, with influence and change-making potential comparable to that of any other initiative activity. This was possible because, in coherence with its methodological principles, the evaluation process upheld the spirit of participation, dialogue, and the collective construction of knowledge.

Lessons learned

In closing, we share our main reflections on the process, highlighting lessons learned about the challenges and strengths that emerged in the Co-Inspira evaluation. We structure the reflection using the domains of the Inclusive Rigour Framework: participation and inclusion; Use and bricolage; within an enabling environment.

First and foremost, we would like to highlight the distinctive nature of this initiative that —by using SAR as its methodological approach— meant it constituted an uncommon evaluation context, given that the process being evaluated inherently required a level of transformative participation on the part of those involved. In this sense, the experience we share illustrates how an effort was made to embed a participatory evaluation process within an already participatory initiative, where certain conditions for genuine participation were already in place. Even so, it reveals the challenges that arise when navigating differing levels of participation among diverse actors throughout the process.

Participation and inclusion

Although the evaluation began as theory-oriented, the way it unfolded illustrates the importance of seriously opening evaluation spaces to participation by actors who are not usually involved. This is not guided by inclusion for its own sake (regardless of how and why), but by intentionality: why, how and when do we broaden participation.

We observe this because, within the evaluation, a decision could well have been taken to involve all co-researchers at every stage of the process, including from the design phase onward. Such a choice would, in all likelihood, have generated competition for the co-researchers' time —a resource already heavily committed, given that they were simultaneously engaged in a learning process designed and carried out by themselves—. Conversely, another possible decision would have been not to broaden their participation in the evaluation, but instead to limit it to an informant role, keeping the spaces for hypothesis analysis and discussion exclusively within the technical evaluation team.

Instead, the Co-Inspira evaluation addressed the question: to what extent do different people participate (at what level) and for what purpose? This made it possible to review roles and involve co-researchers in key moments such as reviewing theories. That, in turn, led to theory adaptation and learning both from the implementation perspective and from local participants, expanding understandings of how the peace system works beyond a purely territorial lens.

In other words, although the co-researchers were not involved in the design phase—and the evaluation initially drew on a theoretically grounded approach—it was through their participation in the analysis, reflecting on what was being investigated, that it became possible to adapt the hypothesis to local realities. These theoretical adaptations contributed to the overall quality of the evaluation, strengthening its rigour, and in doing so provided a clear example of how to move beyond viewing participation and rigour as being in tension or in a dichotomous relationship. Instead, this process allowed both criteria to work together towards a shared horizon.

This lesson learned reinforces the invitation put forward by the Inclusive Rigour framework to recognise

that participation in evaluation is not at odds with quality, but is instead essential to strengthening it. Participation enables emergent learning to surface—such as adjustments to theories—and also makes it possible for relevant and unforeseen forms of use to emerge. One such example was the learning process experienced by the co-researchers regarding the logics through which peacebuilding policies are designed.

Another concrete example of this lesson learned was reflected in how the intentional question of how, why, and at what points participation should be expanded was taken up during the design of the evaluation for the continuation of the SAR initiative beyond the pilot phase, which is still under implementation. This reconsideration of the question was carried out through a participatory process, in response to a gap that had emerged between the donor's expectations for the initiative and those of the co-researchers.

As a result, dialogic spaces were held around the evaluation design, which involved bringing in people from new perspectives into the process of shaping the evaluation questions. This, in turn, also led to the formation of an explicitly more diverse evaluation team.

That said, this expansion of participation in what constituted the second part of the evaluation presented here does not mean that we consider greater participation to always be inherently preferable. Rather, we see participation as something that is always desirable when guided by a dialogical and diverse process that intentionally explores its hows, whys, and whens.

When we ask questions about the quality of participation, what we wish to emphasise is that such quality is shaped by the reflective, collective, and intentional consideration of different forms of participation. This may be because those choices aim to open up spaces of inclusion as broadly as possible, because they respond to existing constraints, or because —given the characteristics of a particular initiative— certain roles or modes of participation are more appropriate or relevant than others.

In summary, the lesson is about designing different forms of participation in a way that links moments and perspectives —not because we simply 'like' participation, but because this enables transformation of theories and initiatives and helps strengthen change by understanding it—.

Bricolage

Methodologies are the tools we use to answer practical questions about how participation happens. In design, we combine methods so voices can be heard for useful ends. The Co-Inspira evaluation shows that it is possible to develop a bricolage of methods not out of convenience, but because an intentional design process leads us to the question of use as the guide for design decisions.

An example of this articulation between the question of intentional participation, the response given when addressing methodological choices, and the way a

focus on use in turn guides the selection and adaptation of methods can be seen in how outcome harvesting was adapted in the Co-Inspira evaluation. Specifically, during the collective spaces for identifying changes, an additional and relevant space was introduced in which the underlying theories were explicitly addressed with the co-researchers (from the three municipalities). This created a horizontal reflection on those theories, resulting in a participatory analysis that made their adjustment possible.

In the pilot evaluation, we can observe that what guided the design questions was a commitment to participatory, use-oriented learning, with a focus on the people who are the protagonists of change. The approach was not limited to following the initial evaluation questions alone (which already reflect a form of use), nor to pursuing participation for its own sake. Rather, it involved remaining in a continual process of listening to emerging voices as they arose, precisely to ensure that the evaluation would be useful to them.

Intentionally maintaining the articulation between use, methods, and who is involved —through iterative methodological bricolage— proved to be key to achieving a rigorous participatory evaluation. In the case of SAR, it could not be taken for granted that evaluation questions and uses were the same, nor that they would remain aligned as the SAR process unfolded. This iterative design process also enabled participation to actively shape the evaluation itself, as well as the development of the initiative as a whole.

Making this iterative learning-driven adaptation loop effective ultimately generated a gap —or divergence— between the understandings held by different groups of people involved in the process. This, in turn, required navigating a series of tensions among diverse perspectives and positioned the evaluation in an interpreter/mediator role. We explore this unexpected effect in greater detail as the third lesson learned, in the following section.

Use and enabling environment

This evaluation experience shows that, in terms of use by the national actors involved from the start of the pilot, there was no success. Those actors were involved in different ways, but the two representatives resigned before the pilot ended, leading to discontinuity in their understanding. Together with a change in national government, this resulted in both entities' indifference towards the pilot and its results.

It therefore seems unproductive to ask whether, from a technical participatory-evaluation standpoint, it would have been possible to deploy other forms of engagement with those actors in order to enhance evaluation use, given the evident structural features of governmental institutional dynamics. What does prove useful, however, is to refocus the question of learning about use on Humanity United —an actor that remains actively involved in the initiative— and to examine how the evaluation was used from their perspective.

Through the Co-Inspira evaluation, learnings emerged that were evident to those involved in the local and national teams, but not to the donor. These learnings led to adaptations in the initiative that were not clearly reflected in the design documents and ultimately resulted in a gap in how the process was understood by the implementing team on the one hand, and by the donor on the other. This gap only became apparent at the moment of the initiative's third-year renewal, and it was only resolved through dialogue in which a member of the evaluation team was re-integrated into the process.

When we therefore turn our attention to evaluation use, the environmental dimension comes to the fore —specifically the communication and facilitation skills required to navigate the adaptations that occur when evaluation learning is put into use within an initiative—. In other words, using evaluation learning in real time to adapt an initiative requires the deployment of ongoing communication mechanisms with those who are not part of the day-to-day process, so that different actors can remain in dialogue and reach points of convergence regarding what is taking place.

Otherwise, the very strength of a participatory, use-oriented evaluation–learning process may end up opening a gap in how different actors understand what is happening. This can generate tensions, potentially damage relationships, and even lead to harm if such divergences result in processes being abruptly closed or in one of the parties feeling excluded or unrecognised.

Participatory evaluation in complex contexts where initiatives are adaptive requires incorporating governance mechanisms that enable iterative and open communication, at the same pace at which learning is generated and put to use. Otherwise, even within a participatory initiative, there is a risk of ending up with one group that is learning in real time and continuously reframing its understanding of the process, while other individuals or groups remain anchored in different perspectives, simply because the process is evolving without being visible to them.

When this risk materialises —as was the case with Co-Inspira— it prevents the learning cycle from being fully closed: the cycle that begins by bringing theory into practice, continues through adapting practice, but fails to return those adaptations back into theory in order to sustain the conversation from that renewed point of understanding.

We are therefore left with questions regarding the role of members of the evaluation team within these processes of communication and governance that involve navigating tensions, as this role requires a particular position of power—not only to facilitate dialogue, but also to enable the reaching of shared agreements despite existing tensions. In this context, the political dimension of evaluation becomes tangible, along with its responsibility within processes of transformation. This also brings to the fore the need for a deeper reflection on the power positions and relational capacities of evaluation teams, if they are to achieve influence, enable mediation, and ultimately support the participatory use of learning.

What kinds of alliances and/or structures are needed for evaluation to hold the degree of power required to be meaningfully included in governance? To what extent does having evaluation team members who are not 100% involved in implementation facilitate these conversations and help navigate them? And how closely should the evaluation team be involved in the initiative in order to be both able—and willing—to take on a role that goes beyond design, implementation, and analysis?

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Chapter 12

Strengthening Evaluation Capacities

EvalParticipativa's Strategy, Achievements and Challenges

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Abstract

This chapter examines the experience of the EvalParticipativa initiative in building capacities for evaluation with social participation. After describing its intervention 'model', based on a hybrid format that combines a community of 'practice' and 'learning', the discussion focuses on the dialogical and participatory adult-education methodology adopted. To this end, it characterises the participating population, the objectives and content, the design of teaching tools, and the format and types of training sessions. By way of lessons learned, the chapter highlights the importance of professional training as a mechanism for adopting participatory approaches that ensure the methodological rigour required for evaluation in different Latin American contexts.

Keywords

Capacity development, Participatory evaluation, Methodological rigour, Latin America.

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Introduction

Since its creation, the Community of Practice and Learning in Participatory Evaluation for Latin America and the Caribbean (EvalParticipativa) has sought to strengthen the inclusive involvement of civil society in evaluation processes. To this end, it has defined three main strategic objectives:

- to strengthen and consolidate the community of practice and learning around participatory evaluation in the region;
- to facilitate the dissemination and institutionalisation of this evaluation approach through the development of written and audiovisual materials on participatory evaluation experiences and lessons learned;
- to promote training processes on participatory evaluation through courses for facilitators, seminars and in-person and virtual forums with representatives of civil society organisations in the region, the public and private sectors and academia, as well as the creation of opportunities for academic certification of training in this field.

The initiative emerged as the corollary of a series of participatory evaluations carried out in Costa Rica, Chile and Ecuador, in which those of us who make up the team of the Research Programme on Employment, Environment and Society (PETAS, www.petas-unsj.org) at the National University of San Juan (UNSJ) had taken part as external consultants. These participatory evaluation projects had as their starting point and common denominator the need to strengthen evaluation capacities and to develop social participation mechanisms adapted to the local context and aimed at ensuring the greatest possible involvement of the multiple stakeholders connected, in each case, with the programmes and projects under evaluation. All of these experiences followed a similar process, which included:

- forming an evaluation team;
- running a training workshop on this approach (which was new to most participants);
- collectively reconstructing the theory of change of the intervention;
- designing an evaluation matrix;
- facilitating the entire evaluation process, from formulating the questions and objectives through to producing findings and recommendations and providing support for the communication and use of the results.

Upon reviewing those experiences, we realised that prior training and the support provided to members of the evaluation team had been decisive for their success, particularly with regard to the participants' active involvement.

Together with the team of the Focelac+ project (Strengthening a Culture of Evaluation and Learning in Latin America with a Global Outlook), run by the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval), we became aware of the gap that existed in the region regarding

capacity development for this type of evaluation. It was on this basis that, jointly with DEval, we designed EvalParticipativa in 2019. Its strategy aimed, on the one hand, to create a space for recovering and sharing the practices that, in isolation and largely unknown, had been developing in Latin America; and, on the other, to develop a strategy capable of capitalising on lessons learned and building new knowledge on the subject, from and for our own countries.

In this chapter we share our experience and learning around strengthening capacities for participatory evaluation. Following this introduction, we characterise EvalParticipativa's intervention model, based on a hybrid format of community of practice and learning. Here we highlight the community's objectives and the set of tools created to support these processes. In the following section we outline the most relevant features of the capacity building approach adopted, centred on a dialogical and participatory adult education methodology. To this end, we characterise the participating population, the aims and content, and the format of the training strategy, noting both the actions carried out and the pending tasks. By way of lessons learned, the final section opens up a reflection on the importance of professional training as a mechanism for adopting participatory approaches to evaluation in different Latin American contexts. We believe that the openness to participation that different institutions are able to offer for conducting inclusive evaluations depends both on political decisions and on the development of capacities that ensure the methodological rigour required of such evaluation experiences.

EvalParticipativa: a community of practice and learning

This initiative arose as a response to the question of how to achieve greater participation and a more central role for the diverse social actors in the evaluation of the programmes or projects that affect or involve them. As we have noted, we felt that there was a theoretical and instrumental deficit in many of the participatory evaluation experiences carried out in the region. Moreover, we did not know what the conditions were, nor the mechanisms that facilitate or obstruct effective citizen participation in evaluation processes. It was necessary to shed light on these issues in order to overcome the weaknesses of a good number of the participatory evaluations we had been involved in.

Among other questions, we asked ourselves whether there were evaluation experiences, developed in Latin America and the Caribbean, that would allow us to understand the aspects that make the difference in an evaluation in terms of real and effective social participation. At the same time, we wanted to explore the possible contributions of participatory and collaborative approaches to conventional evaluations. It was on the basis of these questions that we saw it as relevant and fitting to create a collective space for dialogue and the exchange of knowledge on the subject, which would allow us, on the one hand, to reflect and learn from the different experiences developed in the region and, on the other, to extend the reach of this type of evaluation by sharing methods and tools.

Convinced of the importance of horizontal and collective learning, we considered developing a community of practice and learning on participatory evaluation: that is, a meeting space in which to share the theoretical knowledge developed in different contexts while capitalising on Latin America's local practice and knowledge through the exchange and collective reflection on various approaches and methodologies. Thus, in contrast to a conventional training programme, EvalParticipativa was established as a meeting point between peers with a shared interest in deepening their knowledge of the subject and sharing experiences through different forms of interaction: training sessions, gatherings and tool fairs, webinars, publications, and the design of guides and teaching instruments, among others. By 'peers' we mean all those who, in one way or another, become involved in an evaluation process: evaluators, decision-makers who commission an evaluation, those who implement interventions, international cooperation agencies, and civil society organisations that are users of programmes and projects, among others. Our aim was that, through a space for face-to-face and/or virtual interaction, those interested in the field of participatory evaluation would reflect in order to improve their practice, support one another in their efforts, and jointly build products (methodologies and tools) that help to professionalise the practice of participatory evaluation.

In this way, the community-of-practice-and-learning format enabled us to bring together a social group with an interest in the subject, within which it was possible to develop specialised knowledge by sharing spaces for reflection on each specific experience and professional practice. We aimed for this space to serve as a platform for the social and collective construction of knowledge about participatory evaluation, without the need for the figure of an 'expert'. We also incorporated capacity development sessions which feature dialogue-based and horizontal learning processes in which we addressed conceptual issues and methodologies on the subject.

On the basis of these premises, EvalParticipativa was designed as an initiative capable of:

- building and sharing theoretical and practical knowledge drawn from experiences developed in different countries, by highlighting the broad range of existing tools as well as the opportunity to develop new ones;
- supporting and accompanying projects, programmes or interventions whose methodological axis is a participatory approach in any of its variants and at any level;
- developing skills for participatory evaluation in both the public sector and civil society organisations;
- providing training on these topics, exchanging experiences and documenting good practices that enable lessons to be shared and new initiatives to be encouraged;
- strengthening alliances between and within regions, institutions and diverse organisations, including academia and evaluation training programmes;
- fostering the creation of the conditions needed

for participatory evaluation processes to become a regular practice in the region; that is, raising the awareness of main social actors, encouraging participants, and demonstrating the benefits of and the need to institutionalise this type of evaluation in order to strengthen the democratic relations of our societies.

The main meeting space was the website www.evalparticipativa.net, which is also receives feedback from via the social networks LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram. The creation of the website had the dual purpose of establishing the community of practice on the basis of broad communication and connection among the different stakeholders linked to the subject; and of developing capacity building activities (virtual forums and workshops) by offering specialised bibliography, teaching material and tools, as well as creating a repository of significant experiences and learning on the subject.

Simply to give a sense of the community's growth, it is worth noting that, as of September 2024, EvalParticipativa has more than four thousand people subscribed to the website, and more than 800 have taken part directly in some capacity development activity run by our team. In the few years since it emerged, EvalParticipativa has brought together all those with experience and interest in participatory evaluation in the region. Through a horizontal and generous exchange among its members, significant progress has been made towards the proposed objectives. Its open-door community format, established as a meeting place, has fostered its members' desire to share among peers in order to learn more and improve our practice.

The platform has four main sections:

1. **EvalParticipativa News.** This is the most dynamic and visible section of the website. In it we publish, every three weeks, signed pieces —a kind of thinking aloud on topics related to participatory evaluation—. In the form of brief accounts or articles, we have published reflections and experiences by the community's different members, addressing conceptual, methodological and technical issues and linking the field of evaluation and participation with crosscutting themes such as human rights, democracy, the gender perspective, climate change and other current topics. This section has also served to publicise postgraduate training opportunities, gatherings and conferences, as well as the publication of specific articles and other materials on the subject.
2. **Digital library.** It contains publications of use to those wishing to carry out evaluations with social participation, and is the most complete bank of publications on the subject in the region. A broad range of publications on the community's topics of interest — from scientific journals and outreach books to manuals and tool guides — are available in this section. Its first subsection offers more than 50 manuals for participatory evaluation, which gather conceptual and methodological considerations on this evaluation approach and related topics. These are publications that deal mainly with the 'what'

and the 'how' of participatory and collaborative approaches in evaluation. Another subsection is devoted to sharing specific guides containing tools or instruments to facilitate participatory processes. Some were designed exclusively for participatory evaluations; others were designed for other types of activities (diagnosis, planning, popular education, key stakeholder mapping and socio-organisational support), but can be recreated or adapted for evaluation processes. Finally, the third subsection of the library houses a series of dossiers entitled *Thinking Together About Participatory Evaluation*. Here we gather the diversity of cases and reflective articles that have been published on our web platform, which attest to the richness and plurality of evaluation practices with social participation in the region, with occasional contributions from colleagues from other contexts. It is from these original materials that we created the dossiers, seeking to share what has been learned through an easily accessible publication that brings those contributions together, organising them into four main parts: public policy and civil society; conceptual perspectives; meaningful learning; and operational approaches and tools. The dossiers seek to express our commitment to adding voices and experiences around participatory evaluation in the region, serving as a resource for reference and discussion for public institutions, foundations, NGOs and young evaluators, as well as study and reflection material for postgraduate training with a participatory spirit.

3. **Resources.** This is perhaps the most complete and most visited section of the website. With six subsections, it seeks to share teaching instruments, audiovisual material and tools produced by the members of the EvalParticipativa community. One of these tabs offers a training set in whiteboard-animation format, which is designed to accompany and illustrate the *Sowing and Harvesting handbook*. It includes five short videos, one for each of the manual's core chapters. Narrated as an illustrated story, the central content of each chapter unfolds and develops on a whiteboard, constituting a tool for self-learning and virtual training in participatory evaluation. Another of the website's most consulted resources is the subsection devoted to the *Sowing and Harvesting documentary series*, which accompanies the participatory evaluation handbook of the same name. Its five episodes, based on experiences from Mexico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Colombia and Chile, aim to illustrate the lessons learned from monitoring and participatory evaluation practices developed by different organisations in Latin America. To this end, we have selected emblematic, outstanding cases from the region, which present different nuances, levels, processes and tools of participation. In the documentary series it is the experiences —through the voices of their protagonists— that speak about participatory evaluation, generating interest in going deeper and learning more about this type of evaluation. More than a hundred people have taken part directly or indirectly in this documentary, sharing their experience on camera or else providing

information, supplying contacts or helping to organise the field trips. During our visits to each country, we interviewed both direct beneficiaries of the various interventions and the technical teams in charge of the programmes and projects. Together with officials, policymakers and the people who facilitated these evaluations, they reflected on the processes and learning generated by their evaluation experiences from different contexts and realities, describing their achievements and difficulties. This documentary series has proved to be a very useful teaching resource in all the capacity development activities, both face-to-face and virtual, that we have promoted through the community.

The voices of those who lead participatory evaluation in the region also have their place in EvalParticipativa. Through a series of short testimonial videos, this subsection shares testimonies from the members of our community of practice and learning. It is a free space for them to express their ideas, suggestions, examples and lessons learned from evaluation with social participation, which have been used in different training sessions —especially those delivered remotely— as conceptual and methodological support for developing the topics of each workshop, seminar or course. Two other subsections express the value of collective and community-based construction: participatory evaluation experiences and meaningful learning. The gathers experiences documented by EvalParticipativa, presented as examples of emblematic cases of this type of evaluation. It details the implementation, the methodologies used, the lessons learned and the successes, as well as the difficulties and future challenges. The second includes first-person accounts by colleagues who have facilitated participatory evaluations in the region, sharing lessons that emerged from that practice. This subsection emphasises voices from the field, knowledge derived from practice, those many journeys, the stumbles and also the joys of having made it possible, the mistakes, limitations and unresolved difficulties. Here, through brief accounts, the community's meaningful learning is reflected as a way of capitalising on and sharing that learning so as to put it at the service of new and better experiences.

The final subsection among the website's resources is our toolbox. In this subsection we document participatory techniques created by members of the EvalParticipativa community, which have been used in different contexts, with different groups of social actors and for varied evaluation purposes. These are shared by means of a technical sheet, which provides a brief introduction to the context in which the tool was conceived and used, its purpose and intended audience, the method and/or instructions for using it, the format and necessary materials, and the learning and suggestions regarding its use and possible adaptations. Alongside the technical sheet, a short documentary is included in which the authors present and illustrate the use of the tool.

Participatory evaluation faces, among others, the challenge of creating real spaces for participation

in which multiple stakeholders can play a genuinely leading role in the evaluation agenda. This is why this subsection was created, offering — from systematised experience — tools suited to each social and cultural context in which evaluation is carried out. The tools documented can be used for different purposes: analysing reality, facilitating communication, building collective viewpoints, stimulating creativity or facilitating decision-making, reducing the predominance of some so as to give space to the voice of the shyer. The EvalParticipativa toolbox is, without doubt, one of the most innovative tools in the community.

4. **Virtual forum:** this space aims to sustain and exemplify a culture of participation among its members by encouraging a broader conversation. The forums were developed mainly through an email list, in combination with webinars to open and/or close each of them. The topics the forums have addressed were the following:

- Participatory evaluation experiences in Latin America
- Participatory evaluation in times of COVID-19: Possible or wishful thinking?
- Participatory evaluation and rigour within the framework of transformative evaluation
- Postgraduate training in evaluation in Latin America
- Towards an inclusive perspective: gender and participation in evaluation.

Strengthening evaluation capacities: EvalParticipativa's strategy

EvalParticipativa's capacity development strategy has taken as its central focus the issue of participation and the leading role of the various social actors in the evaluation of the programmes or projects that affect and/or involve them. Topics such as reconstructing a programme's theory of change, or conceptual issues regarding evaluation such as design and sampling, and the development of specific tools for collecting and analysing data, among others, are addressed by giving a central place to the participatory component; that is, to aspects such as the identification and mapping of key stakeholders, the participatory development of evaluation questions, the collective construction of findings, and the sharing of results and recommendations. In other words, the strategy has been designed to be delivered in a participatory manner, in both its face-to-face and its virtual modes.

Participants

The capacity development activities have been aimed at a diverse group of participants, namely:

- participatory evaluation facilitators who had already developed some kind of experience in the region;

- leaders or representatives of social organisations (civil society) who form part of the target population of programmes and projects;
- researchers, lecturers and extension staff at universities and research centres linked to the field of monitoring and evaluation;
- independent evaluators or consultants interested in this evaluation approach;
- monitoring and evaluation leaders in programmes and projects driven by the public sector;
- officials and decision-makers from the public sector responsible for state programmes and projects;
- evaluation leaders in nongovernmental organisations, civil associations for social promotion and other entities of the so-called third sector; and
- young and emerging evaluators with an interest in this type of evaluation.

Of these groups of participants, the majority had experience in project management and some knowledge of evaluation, but were unfamiliar with the participatory evaluation approach, its scope and its purpose. The capacity development workshops offered a basic, introductory conceptual and methodological framework on this approach, adapting and recreating the content and the format according to the needs of each participating group, their previous experience in evaluation and their expectations. Figure 1 shows the percentage of participants in each group. Evaluation leaders from the public sector and NGOs — individuals with direct roles in programme and project evaluation — on the one hand, and young and emerging evaluators, with little experience but considerable motivation for the subject on the other, together account for 60% of EvalParticipativa's target population. With the exception of the group researchers and extension staff from universities in the region, who have shown great interest both in postgraduate training on these topics and in its application, accounting for 14% of participants, the other groups have been of similar importance in terms of the number of recipients of our training efforts.

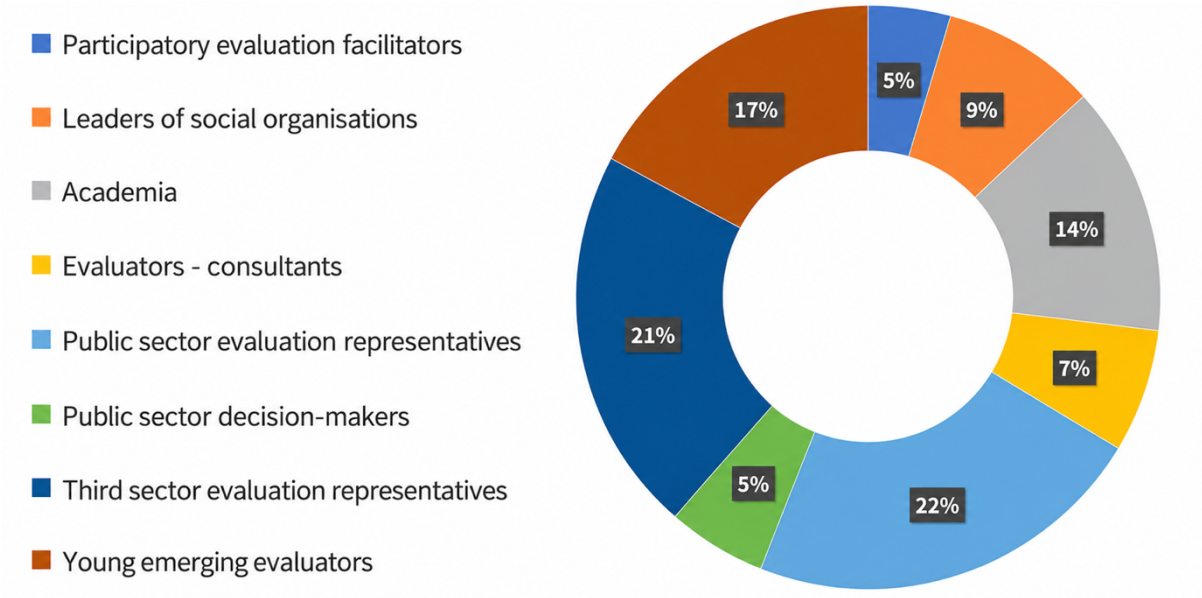


Figure 1. *Participants by profile, expressed as a percentage of the total (2019–2024)*

Objectives and core content

In general terms, the training offered by EvalParticipativa has sought to familiarise participants with a set of basic conceptual and methodological guidelines on participatory evaluation. Although there have been variations depending on the group and the institutional context, in general terms the aim was that, by the end of each training session, participants:

- had developed knowledge, skills and competence regarding the objectives, steps and stages involved in applying a participatory evaluation methodology;
- possessed the basic notions needed to apply the methodology and to facilitate a participatory evaluation process; and
- were in a position to share the knowledge acquired within their own interest group.

In terms of content, we have worked with a framework of four thematic modules, to be developed in different ways depending on the case (face-to-face or virtual), the duration (1 day or 4 days) and the characteristics of the group (grassroots organisations, evaluation technicians or professionals, officials responsible for programmes and projects). The first module is geared towards

introducing the topics of evaluation and participation, focusing on the 'what' of participatory evaluation —that is, conceptual aspects, background and nuances of a participatory evaluation, its principles and implications, as well as the analysis of concrete experiences—. The second module concentrates on the 'how' of participatory evaluation, developing methodological aspects and introducing the process and its steps, the design of the evaluation matrix and the construction of indicators in a participatory context. The third module develops the function of facilitation in a participatory evaluation, reflecting on the role of the external agent responsible for forming the evaluation team and supporting the process. The fourth module focuses on the tools and techniques for participatory evaluation. This module analyses the scope and limitations of the tools, clarifies the criteria for their selection, and constructs a classification according to the format and purpose of the techniques to be used.

Between 2019 and 2024, EvalParticipativa trained 818 people across 30 countries, in both face-to-face and virtual settings. Figure 2 presents the distribution of capacity development activities by country, according to the number of participants. The greatest concentration of participants is in Ecuador and Colombia, priority countries for the bilateral cooperation of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the body that funds DEval's Focelac+ project, the main partner of the EvalParticipativa initiative. Capacity development activities have also been conducted in other countries not prioritised by the BMZ, which were funded by local counterparts or other international organisations, representing 60% of the training delivered. Although Europe, Africa and Asia were not part of the target population identified initially, participants from these regions were also reached by EvalParticipativa's training. Spain accounts for a significant group of participants, as a result of postgraduate training developed jointly with various universities and organisations in that country (the University of Seville, Loyola University, the University of Barcelona and the Andalusian Institute of Public Administration). Other participants from outside Latin America took part as beneficiaries in international training events to which EvalParticipativa was invited, such as the International Program for Development Evaluation Training (IPDET, Switzerland) and training offered within the framework of the National Evaluation Capacities international conference of the United Nations Development Programme.

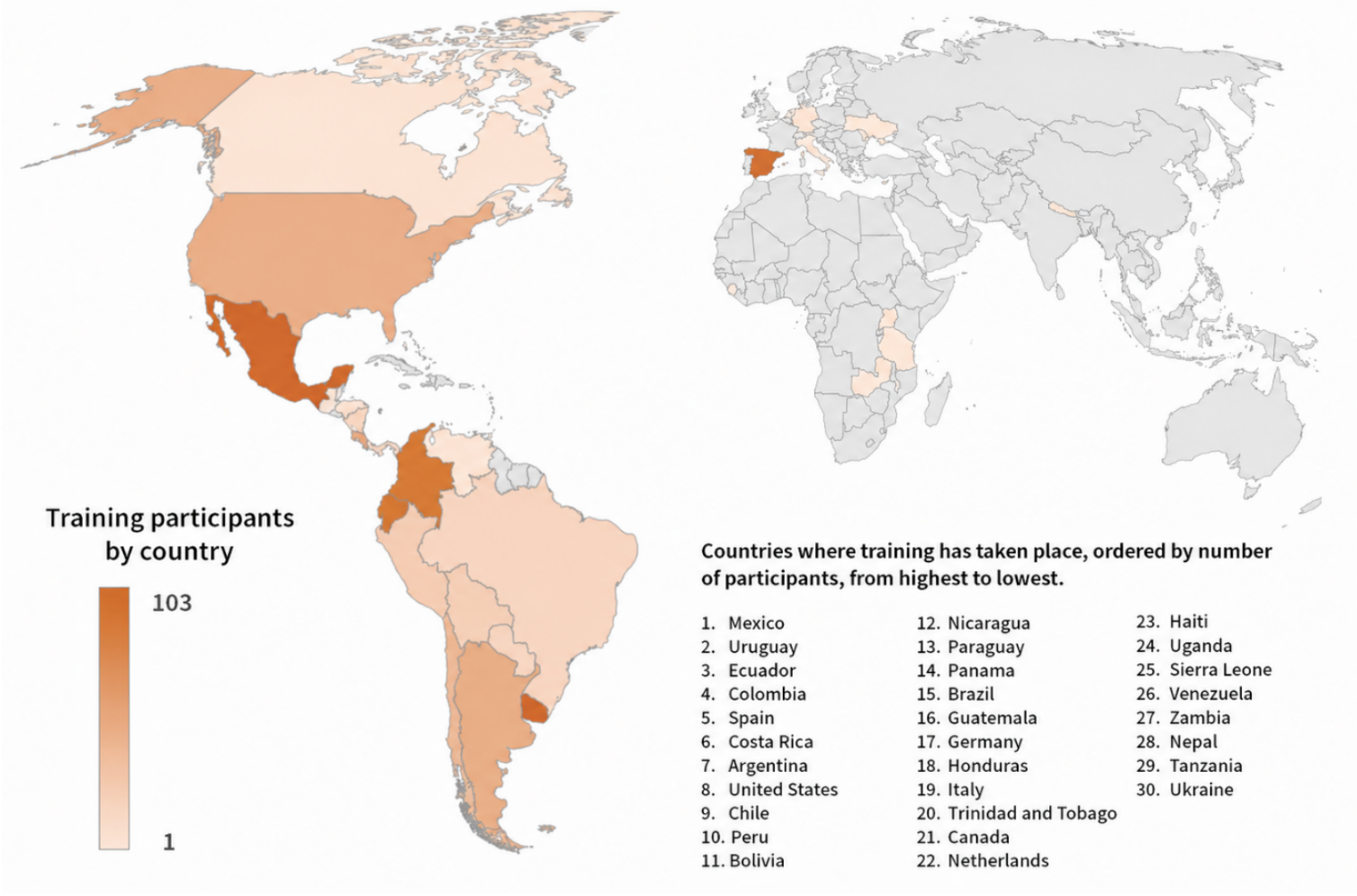


Figure 2. *Distribution of EvalParticipativa's capacity development activities by country, according to the number of participants*

Format of the training process

The capacity development strategy adopted an approach known as in-service capacity strengthening: training activities focused on developing skills, knowledge and use of tools among professionals linked to the field of evaluation. The strategy was aimed especially at leaders of social and community organisations who form part of the target population of programmes and projects, young professionals with a vocation for working on these topics, and officials or decision-makers, both from the public sector and from NGOs, foundations and other organisations of the so-called third sector.

The capacity strengthening strategy has mainly comprised workshops and training courses, face-to-face and virtual, which we focus on in the following paragraphs. It has also included virtual forums, materialised in the form of online conferences or seminars aimed at people who are already connected with the subject. These forums are offered as a mechanism for continuous training, knowledge updating, skills development and the introduction of new tools for participatory evaluation. In addition, introductory talks have been held, intended to provide young and emerging evaluators with the basic information, guidance and tools needed to understand and begin to take part in an evaluation project with social participation.

The training methodology adopted a workshop-based format, a dynamic and participatory approach centred on active interaction and the cocreation of knowledge among participants. In each workshop, the aim was for participants to be the protagonists of their own learning, encouraging active participation, joint reflection and the exchange of experiences. Through group, experiential, graphic and written techniques, we have sought to create an environment in which participants learn from one another, drawing on the diversity of knowledge, their own practice and the contribution of the facilitators. The instruments designed by EvalParticipativa (available on the website) —such as the *Sowing and Harvesting handbook*, the whiteboard-animation training set, the documentary series with cases from five countries, the testimonial videos of leading figures on the subject, and the toolbox— have been used to support these capacity building processes.

In keeping with the seven principles of participatory evaluation (Tapella et al., 2021), the training workshops have been based on the notion of the collective construction of knowledge. This implies, on the one hand, starting by valuing and integrating into the training process the participants' wealth of previous experiences, recognising their accumulated knowledge and using it as the basis for new learning. On the other hand, it suggests recognising that knowledge is built through dialogue and critical reflection, with facilitators acting as enablers of the process — guides able to encourage participants to develop their own ideas and solutions. Likewise, the training sought to give prominence to the local context, adapting content and activities to the specific needs and characteristics of each group of participants. We tried to ensure that

what was learned in each training workshop was pertinent, relevant and applicable to the work and social environment, addressing the real problems or situations that participants face when adopting the approach and facilitating its practical application.

As Figure 1 shows, the diversity of participants in the training sessions has been remarkable, so we have tried to ensure that the workshops have a flexible structure that enables them to adapt to group dynamics and emerging interests, adjusting content and methods as the workshop evolves and adopting, as appropriate, different techniques and tools (group dynamics, roleplay, case studies, debates and teamwork, among others). Likewise, we have alternated between virtual and face-to-face training, with different durations and types of participation, as Figure 3 illustrates. The COVID-19 pandemic forced us into virtual delivery, a mode we have maintained —mainly for cost reasons— to the present day. There is no doubt that face-to-face workshops, lasting 1 to 2 days or 3 to 5 days, are the ones that yield the best results in terms of the experience and adoption of new capacities. Virtual sessions, although they have the advantage of greater coverage in terms of the number of participants and regional distribution, are limited in their thematic reach to a basic or introductory level of training.

All the capacity development opportunities have included an interim or final evaluation, which has made it possible to adjust the design from one workshop to the next, improve the activities, rethink the content and recreate the tools used. Participants have also been able to self-assess their progress and reflect on their learning, thereby promoting autonomy and critical thinking.

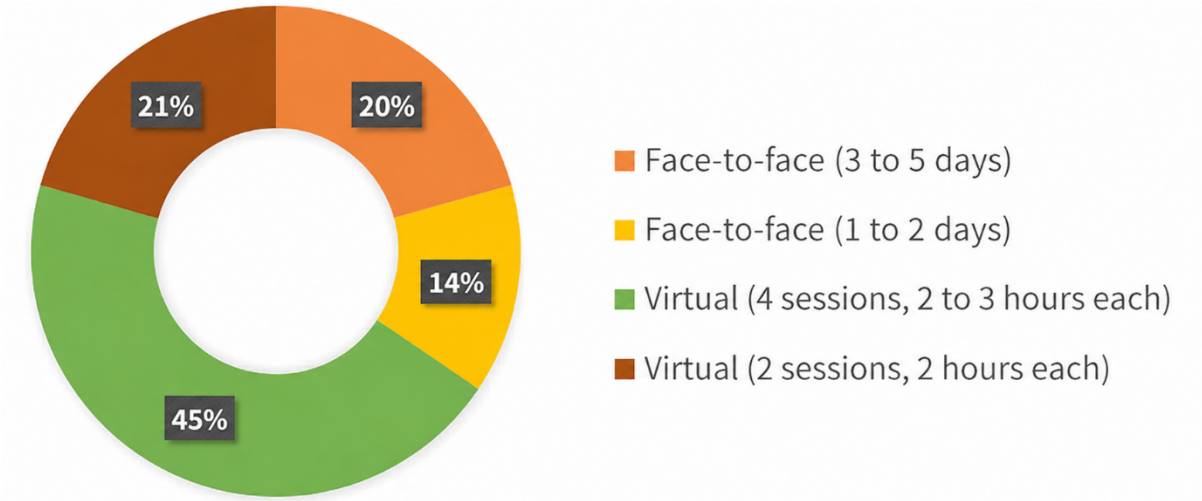


Figure 3. *Training modalities, by contact hours and type of participation*

Training of trainers in participatory evaluation: unfinished business

For six years the EvalParticipativa team has been delivering participatory evaluation training in the region. The growth of the community, the wide acceptance of our proposal and a social and political context that demands evaluations that are participatory and sensitive to the needs of civil society meant that we were unable to meet all the requests for training. Faced with this unmet demand, we decided to design the project for training trainers in participatory evaluation. This project has not yet been implemented, mainly because of a lack of resources among the institutional counterparts to which the potential group of participants in what would be the programme's first edition belong.

The training-of-trainers in evaluation course seeks to train instructors or facilitators in the methodologies and techniques needed to teach others how to carry out participatory evaluations. The idea is that this group, having completed specific training and certification, should be able to replicate these training sessions in their own countries, thereby expanding the reach of the capacity development strategy.

The intention is that those who already have knowledge of evaluation methodologies with social participation, and knowledge of the context of each of their countries, should learn to design and facilitate training sessions for others, focusing on how to convey the evaluation approach we work with and make it their own. By working with professionals familiar with each of the cultural, social and organisational contexts in which they operate, greater adoption of the methodologies and tools is expected.

This training course will be accompanied by a teaching guide, which includes, for each specific topic, a series of practical activities and case studies in which participants can simulate the application of methodologies and tools. As with other training offered by EvalParticipativa, this course emphasises the importance of conducting evaluations in an ethical and culturally sensitive manner, respecting participants' local perspectives and knowledge. With the aim of professionalising the field of participatory evaluation, this project seeks to certify this training as a postgraduate qualification (a diploma course or specialisation), in order to validate participants' competence as trainers in participatory evaluation.

Lessons learned and future challenges

Many lessons emerge from EvalParticipativa's six-year experience. The diversity of training activities carried out, as well as the implementation of the teaching tools designed for strengthening capacities in participatory evaluation, allows us to highlight some lessons learned while also being aware of future challenges.

The opportunity to participate and the capacity to do so

As in any evaluation, a participatory approach should serve to learn, readjust and act by taking corrective measures to obtain better results; adding or removing activities, or simply changing the organisation's strategy. In other words, evaluation should serve to provide new and different knowledge for the development of policies and programmes. But just as important as the above is that a participatory evaluation should be capable of strengthening organisations so that they have greater control over their own development. And this is what we have observed across the great diversity of experiences documented by EvalParticipativa. Participatory evaluation also functions as a tool for improving the capacity of various stakeholders to reflect, analyse and propose solutions from their multiple perspectives.

The practice of accompanying evaluations, as well as developing capacities, has allowed us to appreciate two dynamics that are at play in ensuring the success — in terms of methodological and technical rigour — of an evaluation: the opportunity to participate and the capacity to participate. The first is determined by the institutional and political will of whoever designs and conducts an evaluation to create real spaces for participation; the second is determined mainly by the attitudes and skills that the various stakeholders connected with the evaluation process have developed, whether through their own experience or through formal training such as that which we have developed at EvalParticipativa.

It has long been argued that, in order to achieve an adequate level of participation in an evaluation, it is a necessary and sufficient condition for the institution, programme or project to open up opportunities and channels for participation. That is, that the representatives of the different levels of the programme under evaluation should have a genuine willingness to undertake an evaluation of this nature, provide the resources needed for this type of process, and be open to listening to and adopting the recommendations that emerge from the evaluation. But we have learned that, in order to ensure an evaluation is relevant and useful for decision-making, it is necessary to initiate a process of competence development that gives the evaluation a truly participatory character, while also ensuring the quality and methodological rigour of the process.

Thus, capacity strengthening in participatory evaluation plays a decisive role in achieving, in concrete practice, a series of quality indicators, namely:

- suitability of the participation to the nature and experience of different stakeholders;
- proper handling of the wide range of tools that exist today;
- understanding that not everything depends on the tools but on the participatory commitment of those who facilitate the process, which is expressed in tolerance of error, the willingness to explain things again, and the readiness to revisit agreements and redesign the work plan;

- gaining clarity about the role of the facilitator, which involves motivating without pushing, reflecting with the group of stakeholders without predetermining conclusions, contributing ideas without imposing one's own, and asking questions without suggesting the answers; and
- having acquired the technical capacity to compensate for the participating groups' lack of experience with timely advice, so as to ensure that the participatory evaluation meets the standards of quality and methodological rigour required of any evaluation.

During these six years of EvalParticipativa we have learned that developing skills for participatory evaluation —in the public sector as well as in civil society organisations and the community of professionals— is decisive. For various entities, especially in the public sector, capacity development is a necessary condition for participatory evaluation processes to become a regular practice. The various training opportunities have made possible not only the acquisition and development of technical skills, but also the raising of awareness among the main actors in the evaluation ecosystem regarding the benefits of social participation and the need to institutionalise this practice across the different evaluation processes in the region.

Evaluating the training

Evaluating the results of a programme to strengthen professional capacities for participatory evaluation requires a comprehensive approach that considers various aspects to ensure that the intervention has met its objectives and contributed to developing the expected competences. We have been able to evaluate the quality of the training, identifying areas for improvement and documenting lessons learned such as those we present in this chapter. However, assessing the capacity to influence new practices and the institutionalisation of this type of evaluation is a challenge for the future.

Each capacity development instance run by EvalParticipativa, in any of its formats, has had a final evaluation. This has generally addressed four aspects, namely:

- content (relevance, timeliness, applicability);
- methodology (the learning process, the tools shared, timing);
- coordination (facilitation of the teaching-learning process, teaching experience and ability, and a vocation and aptitude for teaching); and
- participation (people's involvement in the process and their commitment to the work before, during and after each training workshop).

The satisfaction surveys conducted to gauge the participants' perceptions of the programme's usefulness and effectiveness are encouraging, and the comparison between initial expectations and the results obtained is very positive. At the same time, the qualitative assessment of the training has consistently highlighted three positive aspects: the training programme is relevant and up to date; the methodology used is effective, with particular emphasis on learning

based on problem-solving, case studies and hands-on workshops; and the development of content was flexible and adapted to the needs and circumstances of each context and organisation. Likewise, it has been expressed that the training stimulated active participation throughout the entire process, which fostered a high level of commitment among participants during the programme.

Participants state having acquired a wide and varied range of competences; nevertheless, it has been difficult to assess their capacity to apply in real world contexts what they learned. It remains an outstanding task being able to measure whether there was an observable improvement in participants' professional performance after completing the training programme —especially in the case of training courses that form part of postgraduate programmes (diploma courses or specialisations)—. Evaluating whether participants have contributed more effectively to their participatory evaluation teams or projects following their participation in the programme is an issue to be tackled in the future. Similarly, it will be important to analyse the multiplier effect, once the training-of-trainers course has been implemented, by examining the extent to which participants are able to transfer or share what they have learned with colleagues in different settings and organisations.

EvalParticipativa's contribution to evaluation capacity development

We maintain, along with the entire evaluation community, that the openness to participation that different institutions are able to offer in order to conduct inclusive evaluations is conditioned by the respective political decisions that enable them. At the same time, we believe it is essential to insist on, commit to and work towards developing evaluation capacities that ensure the methodological rigour required of evaluation experiences involving social participation.

Although the supply of postgraduate courses in evaluation in the region has grown, their distribution and quality are uneven, with most concentrated in national capitals. When EvalParticipativa was born in early 2019, there were 10 master's programmes and 24 diplomas or specialist courses in Latin America, geared towards specialisation in theories and methods in the field of evaluation, with application in different areas of the social sector (education, health, rural development and social policy, among others) (Ghiano, 2021). Other training opportunities in evaluation were offered by international organisations such as CLEARLAC, the InterAmerican Development Bank, the World Bank and the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES), to which can be added the Foceval and Focelac projects (supported by DEval), as well as the evaluation capacity development activities led by the evaluation networks in the region (Peroni & Rodríguez Bilella, 2021).

For a significant proportion of young and emerging evaluators in Latin America, the cost of training courses represents a key impediment (Arévalo, 2016). This obstacle was effectively overcome in the training experiences generated by EvalParticipativa, since most carried no enrolment fee for participants, while also offering priority, free-of-charge places for interested individuals in general and for trainee evaluators in particular.

One lesson learned from these developments was the recognition that, since EvalParticipativa's training was oriented towards more practical forms or styles than those implemented by more formalised programmes, there was a risk of neglecting the development of theoretical capacity in the evaluation field as regards its participatory component, thereby undermining the academic strengthening of evaluation as a discipline. To address this, we adopted an explicit strategy of coordination and joint work with various postgraduate evaluation programmes in the region, developed a forum with several of them, and decided to publish this book as a relevant input for advanced training in evaluation.

Along these same lines, an immediate challenge we face is to advance in the capacity development initiatives in a more explicit and considered way so as to address the matters relating to the methodological rigour of participatory evaluations. That is, to clarify the link between the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions that guide it, making it possible to see the contrasts, coincidences and distances with respect to other evaluation approaches. Recognising the strongly interpretative character of participatory evaluation, delving deeper into the rigour of these evaluations will surely entail giving greater space to the content and practices of feminist, gender and human rights approaches, ethics in evaluation practice, as well as qualitative methodologies of social research.

The famous saying attributed to Benjamin Franklin, "Tell me and I forget, teach me and I may remember, involve me and I learn", neatly captures the spirit of the training aimed at strengthening capacities for evaluation with social participation that we have undertaken at EvalParticipativa. Our community has been a space for gathering and collective learning among representatives of public-sector and civil society organisations, academia and the NGOs, among others. All that has been achieved has been possible thanks to our joint effort, to challenges turned into reality, and to hopes for the construction of a more just and inclusive Latin American society where, one day, no one will be left behind.

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Chapter 13

Foceval and Focelac

Ten Years of Cooperation for Capacity Development in Participatory Evaluation in the Region

Andrea Meneses Rojas

Abstract

Over the course of a decade, the cooperation between the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval) and the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy of Costa Rica (Mideplan), through the Foceval and Focelac projects funded by the BMZ, sought to strengthen evaluation capacities in Latin America and the Caribbean, promoting informed decision-making. This chapter reviews the actions undertaken in the field of participatory evaluation in the region. The first section addresses the purpose of the projects, showing the relevance of participation and its inclusion in the cooperation strategy. The second part details the journey, highlighting key experiences and principal milestones, framed within a systemic approach that contributed to developing individual and institutional capacities and fostering an enabling environment in this area. The third section reflects on the lessons learned and challenges faced in accompanying entities and in training activities, it also explores the opportunities offered by participatory approaches in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Finally, the fourth section sets out the next steps, highlighting the importance of South-South-North synergies for fostering inclusive evaluations and contributing to effective public management and the achievement of the SDGs.

Keywords

Evaluation, Participation, Participatory Evaluation, International Cooperation, Inclusive Evaluation, Capacity Development, Public Policy.

Citation

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Introduction

Over ten years, the cooperation between the German Institute for Development Evaluation (DEval)[74] and the Ministry of National Planning and Economic Policy of Costa Rica (Mideplan) was sustained through two projects —Foceval and Focelac— funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), with the shared objective of strengthening evaluation capacities in Latin America and the Caribbean and contributing to evidence-based decision-making.

This chapter offers a general overview of the actions carried out over ten years of cooperation in the field of participatory evaluation in the Latin American region. The first section describes the purpose of these projects and how the interest in participatory evaluation emerged. It accounts for how participation became a key management mechanism within the cooperation projects, linking different sectors and entities, and how it was established as a line of action in the cooperation strategy.

The second part of the chapter summarises the progress made, highlighting the experiences developed and the main milestones that have contributed to the strengthening of capacities in participatory evaluation in the region, within the framework of the systemic cooperation approach promoted by DEval. This approach, among other aspects, promoted actions aimed for impact on three levels: individual capacities, institutional capacities, and the creation of an enabling environment.

The third section addresses the most significant lessons learned and challenges arising from the accompaniment of entities and organisations, as well as from training activities and the various actions generated. It also shares reflections on the opportunities offered by participatory approaches in the context of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the challenges facing the region in its complex political and social contexts.

Finally, the fourth section outlines the next steps in the cooperation and explores the potential of creating and exchanging South-South-North synergies for capacity development in more inclusive evaluations — fundamental to contributing to good public governance and the achievement of the SDGs—.

[74] An institution dedicated to the independent and scientific evaluation of development cooperation projects and programmes funded by the German government. Founded in 2012 and headquartered in Bonn, its mission is to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of development aid through rigorous evaluations and the promotion of good practices in international cooperation. For more information, visit: *https://www.deval.org/*.

Participation in Evaluation Processes: A Sustained Interest

In July 2014, DEval and Mideplan launched the second phase[75] of the Foceval project (Promotion of Evaluation Capacities). After two years of implementation, a third phase of equal duration was approved. In 2019, upon the conclusion of Foceval, a new project was implemented, Focelac (Strengthening Evaluation Capacities in Latin America), which was developed in two phases over four years. Between 2023 and 2024, a new stage called Focelac+ was carried out, focused on promoting a culture of evaluation and learning in Latin America with a global outlook.

The table below summarises the different phases of the projects over time and their main objectives.

Name	Period	Objective
Foceval (Phase 2)	**July 2014–2016**	To promote the training, institutionalisation and regionalisation of evaluation for political decision-making. Particularly in Costa Rica and other LAC countries.
Foceval (Phase 3)	**2016–2018**	
Focelac (Phase 1)	**2019–2020**	To develop evaluation capacities to promote the use of evaluation and decision-making centred on the context of the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the SDGs in LAC.
Focelac (Phase 2)	**2021–2022**	
Focelac+	**2023–2024**	To promote a culture of evaluation and learning in Latin America with a global outlook that strengthens good governance as a prerequisite for fulfilling the 2030 Agenda.

***Table 1**. Projects implemented by DEval and Mideplan to contribute to evaluation capacity development. Source: Author's own elaboration.*

From the outset of the second phase of the Foceval project, participation was positioned as a central axis in two ways: first, as an internal management mechanism for cooperation with its partners and counterparts; and second, as a constant interest in the evaluative reflection of the actors actively involved in the project. The organisational management of Foceval was characterised by the participation of diverse actors in Costa Rica in the operational processes of decision-

[75] The first phase of the intervention (2011–June 2014) was managed by the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ).

making related to the project's implementation. Specifically, these decisions were taken jointly between the strategic partners (DEval and Mideplan) and various entities in a space known as the Coordination Group. This group, made up of representatives from the public sector, academia, and civil society in Costa Rica, was where the proposal emerged to incorporate the themes of evaluation and participation as a line of action in this new phase of the project.

Later, this form of organisation, sustained by the participation of diverse sectors, was consolidated with the creation of a national multistakeholder evaluation platform in Costa Rica —comprising the public sector, academia, evaluation networks, international cooperation bodies, and civil society organisations— and a regional multistakeholder evaluation platform, made up of a diversity of actors interested in evaluation. Through these platforms, cooperation among the various actors was fostered to strengthen the practice of evaluation in public institutions; capacities in innovative evaluation topics were strengthened; links were established between evaluation and civil society participation; and mutual support was promoted through specialised networks and the exchange of Costa Rica's experiences and achievements in evaluation with other countries in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region.

This interest in participation is not coincidental, if we briefly consider the prominence that citizen participation has had in the Latin American region and specifically in the Costa Rica's governance history. In the Latin American context, the link between participation and evaluation stems from a rich tradition in the field of social research, characterised by at least three currents of knowledge: popular education, participatory action research, and systematisation of experiences, all of which reflect the participatory dimension from a liberating and transformative perspective on reality (Tapella *et al.*, 2022, p. 48). In all three currents cited, knowledge is constructed collectively and there is a shared commitment to inclusion and empowerment for social change.

In the specific case of Costa Rica, since the abolition of the army in 1948, resources have been concentrated on human development and the creation of robust democratic institutions. The Political Constitution of 1949, as well as subsequent reforms, have promoted a political system based on the active participation of citizens, guaranteeing rights such as freedom of expression, access to information, and the right to political participation. Within this democratic tradition, the active involvement of citizens in political processes and decision-making has been commonplace, through national and municipal mechanisms such as referendums, popular consultations, public hearings, community development councils, participatory budgeting, forums, roundtables discussions, and others.

The coordination group for the second phase of the Foceval project was a diverse group that reflected this tradition, comprising not only public entities or those related to evaluative and academic work, but also organisations and entities that safeguard people's rights. Among these, the roles of the Office of the Ombudsperson (Defensoría de los Habitantes, DHR)

and the Cititzen's Oversight Network (Red de Control Ciudadano) were particularly notable.

The Office of the Ombudsperson of Costa Rica is an independent public institution, created in 1992 under Law No. 7,319, whose main objective is the defence and protection of the rights and guarantees of the country's inhabitants. Its mission is to ensure that people can exercise their rights fully and to supervise the proper functioning of public institutions. This entity promotes transparency and accountability in public administration, in addition to fostering respect for human rights. Hence its involvement as an actor within the Foceval project's coordination group.

For its part, the Citizens' Oversight Network was a space that emerged from the coming together of a group of social organisations interested in public policies in 2004, with the aim of monitoring the proposals of the Costa Rican government. This network served as a platform that promoted social mobilisation for political advocacy, the oversight of public policies, and the exercise of active participation, thereby strengthening democracy.

Both entities were fundamental in incorporating into Foceval's activity plan aspects such as an interest in reflection, practice, and theoretical production on the active participation of diverse actors in evaluation processes.

For Foceval's main partners (DEval and Mideplan), the subject also represented both an interest and a challenge. On the one hand, for Mideplan this association between participation and evaluation was not new, since it is one of the objectives established in the National Planning System, which seeks to foster greater citizen participation in addressing economic and social processes and to promote transparency and accountability, ensuring that policies and projects reflect the priorities and aspirations of Costa Rican society. This applies to both the planning as well as the monitoring and evaluation of interventions; however, in the latter area it was still an emerging theme. For DEval, reflecting on the active participation of diverse actors in evaluations —beyond merely consultive levels— represented a valuable opportunity for learning and deepening both the theoretical and practical dimensions of evaluation methodologies.

Following this initial call to incorporate actions on the subject, this line of action was not only maintained but consolidated. In the subsequent years of implementation of the Focelac and Focelac+ projects, participation in evaluation was a fundamental pillar of the cooperation framed within the actions undertaken to address the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda from an evaluative standpoint. Specifically, the focus has been on actions centred on thinking about the importance of context, leaving no one behind, and opening participation to all actors — principles that inspire the Agenda.

Thus, through the interest arising from dialogue among the diverse actors involved in the cooperation, and linked to the global call to fulfil the 2030 Agenda to promote more inclusive evaluation processes, many of the actions undertaken over the last decade have

been oriented. Some of the strategies implemented, as we shall see below, have been the research into and strengthening of participatory approaches that seek not only to evaluate in a more inclusive, fair, and rigorous manner, but also to generate processes of learning and continuous improvement that promote equitable and sustainable development.

The Path Travelled: Accompanied Experiences and Cooperation Milestones

The Foceval and Focelac projects, in their different phases, have been characterised by applying, to varying degrees[76] and depending on the country, a systemic approach model for promoting capacity building in evaluation (Klier *et al.*, 2022). One part of this approach consists of fostering the development of evaluation capacities at three levels: individual capacities, institutional capacities, and generating actions to create or promote an enabling environment. This approach takes into account the interrelations and complexity of evaluation systems in the different countries.

At the level of impact to develop individual capacities, training programmes, workshops, and courses were offered for diverse actors from public and non-public entities. In the development of institutional capacities, close work was carried out with public institutions and other entities on the development and exchange of experiences; technical advisory support and accompaniment were provided to promote the development of national evaluation systems. Actions were also undertaken to promote an enabling environment for the evaluation ecosystem, such as political awareness raising, the fostering of institutionalisation through support for the creation of regulations, policies, guidelines, and standards. Actions were promoted for the creation of multistakeholder platforms and alliances between entities from diverse sectors, at national and regional levels, and for the generation of knowledge in evaluation through publications, manuals, guides, and other means.

This approach has been applied in several countries in the region, adapted to the specific contexts and needs of each. This has made it possible to contribute to progress in the institutionalisation of evaluation and in the promotion of an evaluation culture, according to the evaluation report carried out in 2023, which focused on evaluating DEval's Evaluation Capacity Development work (Korswagen & Williams, 2023).

Recognising the importance of this comprehensive approach, which considers the interrelation of the three levels of impact, various activities have been developed in the thematic axis of evaluation and participation. In broad terms, the Foceval and Focelac

[76] The Foceval project (July 2014–2018) implemented the systemic approach fully in Costa Rica and partially in other countries.

projects have carried out the following actions in this area:

1. Delivering courses, training sessions, and workshops on evaluation and participation for diverse audiences (public officials, staff of civil society organisations and NGOs, members of evaluation networks, evaluation professionals, evaluation managers, academia, and others).
2. Accompanying and advising public entities and organisations in the implementation of participatory evaluations using a learning-by-doing approach, in which groups of stakeholders are involved from the planning stage of the evaluation. In these experiences, public entities or intervention implementers evaluate jointly with the target population and local actors. This promotes the development of evaluation capacities through direct experience, enabling participants to acquire knowledge and skills while evaluating, and also produces situated (contextualised) learning and knowledge.
3. Cocreating a regional community of practice and learning to develop reflections, methodologies, and tools that contribute to professionalising the field of participatory evaluation.
4. Supporting theoretical production and research on the participatory approach, based on the experiences and training delivered, as well as on cooperation with academic actors in the region who have specialised in the subject.
5. Fostering exchange among actors in the ecosystem and participation in congresses and events, both local and global, to share experiences and reflections, and thereby contribute to building a community committed to the subject.

Table 2 summarises the principal milestones resulting from the actions mentioned above, through the Foceval and Focelac projects, in the area of participation and evaluation.

Year	Milestone	Entities involved
2015	Meeting of social organisations on participatory evaluation and workshop on the subject for civil society organisations, San José, Costa Rica.	Mideplan / Office of the Ombudsperson
2016-2017	Participatory Evaluation of Cancer Prevention and Care Services in Valle de la Estrella, Limón, Costa Rica.	Mideplan / Costa Rican Social Security Fund / Office of the Ombudsperson
2018	Participatory design of projects by the Deutsche Welle Akademie (DWA) in various LAC countries (Guatemala, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia) in Antigua, Guatemala.	Deutsche Welle Akademie (DWA) / UN Women / Mideplan
2018	Participatory evaluations of the Working Groups initiative by the organisation TECHO, in Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Mexico.	TECHO
2018	Participatory evaluation of interventions under the Servicio País programme, run by the Foundation for Overcoming Poverty, Chile.	Servicio País Programme
2019	The EvalParticipativa initiative is launched: the Community of Practice and Learning in Participatory Evaluation for Latin America and the Caribbean.	Research Programme on Employment, Environment and Society (PETAS-UNSJ) / DEval, through the Focelac project
2019	First Gathering of Participatory Evaluation Experiences for the region of Latin America and the Caribbean in Quito, Ecuador.	EvalParticipativa
2021	Publication of the "Sowing and Harvesting" handbook, a publication aimed at the region, which presents a series of proposals and reflections on the inclusion of civil society in the field of evaluation.	EvalParticipativa
2019-2021	Participatory evaluation of public policy supporting transport for older adults, students and people with disabilities, Jalisco, Mexico.	Evalúa Jalisco / Secretariat of Planning and Citizen Participation / Government of Jalisco.
2019–2021	Evaluation with participation of Programme for the Promotion of the Autonomy of Persons with Disabilities.	Mideplan / National Council of Persons with Disabilities (Conapdis) Costa Rica.
2023–2024	Participatory evaluation of gerontological care in Socialisation and Meeting Spaces (ESE), Ecuador.	National Planning Secretariat (SNP), Ecuador / Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES), Ecuador

Table 2. *Milestones of the Foceval and Focelac projects in the area of evaluation and participation*
Source: Author's own elaboration

The first steps along this path were taken in 2015, when a series of activities was launched to explore the link between social participation and evaluation. To this end, a working group was formed comprising representatives of Foceval, the Office of the Ombudsperson, and Mideplan, in Costa Rica. Three activities were carried out: a meeting with civil society organisations interested in citizen-led evaluation exercises, an intensive workshop on participatory evaluation for this sector, and an open call to those organisations —once trained— to submit participatory evaluation proposals, with the selected proposal receiving support from the Foceval project.

The selected intervention was the proposal put forward by the Health Boards[77] of the Huetar Caribe region to carry out a participatory evaluation of the Cancer Prevention and Care services in Valle de la Estrella, Limón, Costa Rica. This initiative[78] began in 2016 and concluded in 2017, and was notable for being a pioneering effort in the country and for integrating the target population of the intervention into the evaluation team. This team was made up of representatives of the Health Boards, medical staff of the intervention being evaluated, a local facilitator and an expert facilitator, all of whom were contracted by the Foceval project, which had the support of Mideplan and the Office of the Ombudsperson.

This evaluation not only enabled all the participating entities and actors to develop capacities, it also prompted and promoted discussion on the importance of incorporating active participation into public sector evaluation processes led by the governing body, Mideplan, by highlighting the potential for learning, uptake, and transformation that the approach offers. In retrospect, it can be said that this first experience also served as the catalyst for two fundamental achievements for the entity:

- The creation of a National Evaluation Policy, in which participation was included as one of its principles and thematic axes, whose planning process began in 2018 with the broad participation of diverse national actors.
- The development of a Guide to Evaluation with Participation, a methodological instrument that currently forms part of the manuals guiding the entity's evaluation work. This instrument was key to guiding the second participatory experience undertaken by Mideplan in 2019; both milestones achieved with the support of the cooperation.

In 2018, three processes were supported that were fundamental to gaining experience in applying the participatory approach with social organisations and putting methodologies and lessons into practice. The first two focused on supporting the TECHO organisation and the Servicio País programme of Chile in the design and implementation of participatory evaluation

[77] The Juntas de Salud are citizen participation bodies established to supervise and collaborate in the management of health services; they are made up of community representatives and their main objective is to improve the quality and efficiency of the health services provided by the Costa Rican Social Security Fund.

[78] For more information, visit: *https://evalparticipativa.net/en/resources/meaningful-lessons/the-valle-de-la-estrella-case-study-a-participatory-evaluation-from-the-beginning-to-the-end/*

processes within their respective organisations. To this end, an intensive training was held in Chile, attended by representatives of TECHO from different countries to learn more about the approach and plan their evaluations, as well as staff from the Servicio País programme.

These processes were facilitated by an expert consultant and by a member of the Foceval project's technical team. In addition, to accompany these experiences, young and emerging evaluators (EJE) were contracted; they in turn received training and supported the cases developed at the local level.

In the case of TECHO, five participatory evaluations were carried out in five countries in the region, with virtual and in-person support from the facilitators and the EJE. One of these experiences resulted in the participatory evaluation of the Working Table of the Santa Teresa settlement in Chile, presented in this book in Chapter 3.

In the case of the Servicio País programme, the training and support resulted in the improvement of its own participatory evaluation intervention model, an experience presented in Chapter 4, which describes the participatory evaluation in the municipality of Putaendo in Chile.

The third process, carried out in 2018, was the partnership established with the Deutsche Welle Akademie (DWA).[79] As part of the synergies achieved with the DWA, a training workshop was held with its counterparts from different countries in the region. This workshop took place in Antigua, Guatemala, and resulted in the participatory design of the evaluation of various projects implemented in LAC. This space was also facilitated in collaboration with other bodies, including Mideplan and UN Women, within the framework of the Foceval project. State actors representing the Secretariat for Planning and Programming of the Presidency (Segeplan) of Guatemala also participated in this training session. A further training space on the approach for the DWA was also held in Bonn, Germany.

In 2019, building on the collaborative experiences and fruitful exchanges that had taken place in previous years, the cooperation agreement was formalised between the Focelac project and the Research Programme on Employment, Environment and Society (PETAS) of the National University of San Juan (Argentina) to create the EvalParticipativa initiative —a community of practice and learning around participatory evaluation—. EvalParticipativa promotes a space for interaction, both virtual and in person, where interested people, organisations, and entities can reflect on their evaluative practice, improve it, support one another, and jointly develop methodologies and tools that contribute to professionalising the field of participatory evaluation.

From this initiative, multiple actions have been implemented to achieve the proposed objectives. Two interlinked milestones stand out:

[79] The international media development division of Deutsche Welle (DW), Germany's international broadcaster. DWA specialises in the education and training of media professionals. Its mission is to promote free and independent journalism and to support the development of sustainable and democratic media.

- In 2019, the First Gathering of Participatory Evaluation Experiences for the region of Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Quito, Ecuador, with the aim of sharing emblematic cases, identifying common success factors and methodological challenges, and building shared learning around facilitation processes.
- In 2021, drawing on the reflections and contributions from the Quito gathering, as well as from prior experiences—both of the project and of PETAS—and the body of knowledge on the subject, the *Sowing & Harvesting handbook*[80] (Tapella *et al.,* 2022) was produced: a publication aimed at the region which presents a series of proposals and reflections on the inclusion of civil society in the field of evaluation.

EvalParticipativa and the cooperation project have also created important synergies to foster the inclusion of the participatory evaluation subject within academic training structures. Support has been provided for regional training programmes that integrate participatory evaluation as a central thematic axis in their content, or even as their main theme. Incorporating this subject into academic training in evaluation enriches learning by providing practical and theoretical tools for conducting more inclusive evaluations, and contributes to the training of professionals increasingly capable of supporting them.

In parallel, as part of the drive from public entities to address the subject, Evalúa Jalisco and Mideplan, with the support of Focelac, initiated coordinated actions for the design and implementation of two participatory evaluations. Both experiences have been presented by their protagonists in the corresponding chapters of this book (7 and 9). For this binational process, the project provided technical support and contracted an expert in the subject, responsible for facilitating and implementing the capacity development component in both countries.

Finally, in 2023 and 2024, the Focelac+ project provided support to the National Planning Secretariat of Ecuador in the implementation of its first participatory evaluation. The lessons learned and challenges from previous experiences proved fundamental to this accompaniment. Assistance was provided in the design and implementation stages of the participatory evaluation of the Socialisation and Meeting Spaces (ESE) service, an experience detailed in Chapter 10.

Lessons Learned and Challenges along the Way

The cooperation project's accompaniment of all these initiatives has yielded a series of meaningful lessons and challenges. Over the last decade, the public institutions responsible for evaluation with which collaboration has taken place have made significant progress in establishing mechanisms for the active

[80] The handbook is available in English at: *https://evalparticipativa.net/en/resources/participatory-evaluation-guides-and-manuals/sowing-and-harvest/*

participation of diverse actors in evaluation processes. These advances reflect a joint effort to diversify and enrich perspectives, recognising the importance of involving a broader range of participants in order to obtain more inclusive evaluations.

Despite the above, an important lesson learned —evident in the journey undertaken and also captured in the Sowing & Harvesting handbook (2022)— is that the active and conscious participation of the parties involved[81] depends both on the real opportunity to participate (which includes the political will to share informed decision-making and the conditions to guarantee participation) and on the capacity to do so (reflected in the attitudes, skills, conditions, and contexts of the actors).

With regard to the real opportunity, one of the greatest challenges lies in the conviction and political will to share or cede control and, therefore, decision-making. This principle is fundamental to achieving active and empowered participation by the diverse groups of actors. For this reason, it has been crucial for the cooperation to promote good participatory evaluation experiences —such as the accompaniments presented in this book— that demonstrate how power can be transferred from within institutions, highlighting the possibilities and benefits of other voices also participating in decisions about what is being evaluated, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and representative public management.

[81] People who implement the intervention, the target population, organised civil society, entities allied to the intervention, donors, and other actors.

This political will is tied to a genuine conviction in these participatory approaches, both at the political and technical levels. In this regard, another key lesson learned has been the importance of supporting awareness-raising and training mechanisms at the level of senior officials, middle managers, and technical staff, in order to promote —beyond mere discourse— that decision-making power over what is evaluated, how it is evaluated, and how evaluations are used should be shared with other parties involved, who can directly influence such actions.

This also implies the need to provide training, through participatory evaluation capacity-building activities, on other epistemic approaches that value intersubjectivity, methodological adaptability, and cultural relevance —approaches that encourage the recognition and appreciation of other forms of knowledge beyond formal knowledge, such as local, experiential, situated, and contextual knowledge—. This will make it possible to move beyond viewing the participatory approach as merely a technical matter and to recognise its potential as a political tool for social transformation.

In this regard, the efforts mentioned above over the last decade have been highly relevant —particularly, the cooperation with multiple stakeholders (including public entities, academia, evaluation networks, and social organisations) to create spaces for reflection, promote political advocacy, and incorporate the approach into the region's training offerings—. These efforts have also included the delivery of training and the creation of manuals, tools, teaching guides, and other knowledge products.

The practical experiences described also demonstrate that carrying out a participatory evaluation implies, from the outset, analysing and assessing the levels of participation possible at the different stages of the evaluation process, according to the context and the particular characteristics of those involved. One of the greatest challenges when looking back, in relation to desired participation and possible participation (Tapella et al., 2022:71), concerns the institutional constraints with regarding public resources, which hinder the investment of time and funds in processes that sustain active participation beyond consultive levels. Such resources also guarantee certain optimal conditions for enabling population groups to participate in a sustained manner.

In this regard, another barrier is the recurring absence of political and legal frameworks that include adequate regulations for the effective involvement of actors in the activities inherent to a participatory evaluation. For example: permits and travel allowances to transport people, funding to remunerate the work of other populations in evaluation teams, and resources in general to guarantee inclusive conditions for vulnerable groups or those with disabilities, among others.

As already noted, it is necessary not only to ensure that actors have the opportunity to participate, but also the skill set to do so. And this involves creating spaces for meaningful learning through capacity development. If we wish to foster the empowerment of stakeholders so that they can be agents of their own development, it is necessary to plan and design sufficient training spaces along the evaluation pathway. On some occasions, entities respond to political and institutional deadlines that are often not well suited to processes of this type, which is therefore a relevant factor to bear in mind.

Another key lesson learned from the practical experiences is the fundamental role played by evaluation professionals in facilitating participatory evaluations, to promote and balance the real opportunity for participation by the diverse groups of actors and the capacities needed to carry it out. Whether this function is taken on by external individuals or by the managers of the entities, their approach must be:

- to promote learning and capacity development so that quality evaluations are carried out;
- to ensure the active participation of all the groups involved, especially those historically excluded; and
- to encourage the inclusion of ethical, gender, and human rights considerations throughout the process.

In summary, a participatory evaluation requires a person or team to accompany and guide the process with a technical perspective that is sensitive to gender and to the cultural context in which it takes place.

When thinking about evaluation practice in our region, it is difficult to overlook political volatility, which can disrupt both initiatives and the continuity of evaluation processes, and interfere with the awareness-raising processes needed to broaden the participation and accountability of civil society. In these complex contexts of instability, the use of and feasibility of

establishing mechanisms for active participation in evaluations is a significant challenge.

Within the framework of the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs, participatory approaches offer very valuable opportunities for responding to the concerns raised. However, the experiences lived also prompt reflection on the importance of considering the political contexts in which they are embedded, as well as the socioeconomic circumstances and, especially, the current democratic crises in the Latin American region. All of the above adds complexity to the implementation of participatory approaches that succeed in transforming the living conditions of people.

The Path Ahead: Building South-South-North Bridges

The fruitful cooperation between DEval and Mideplan in the region and on this subject has highlighted the importance of broadening the perspective of evaluation approaches that recognise the central role of the participation of diverse groups of actors — especially local actors and the target population of interventions. Support for entities and organisations, together with training and knowledge exchange over the last decade, has demonstrated that the active participation of these groups in evaluation significantly enriches the process by contributing their local knowledge and lived experiences.

For 2025, a new cooperation project is being planned with a global focus that integrates the knowledge and experiences generated in Latin America, through South-South-North learning and the inclusion of perspectives from Africa and other regions. This project will seek to strengthen national evaluation systems and promote good governance, through the exchange of experiences and lessons between different countries and continents, as well as the generation of new shared knowledge, within the framework of the 2030 Agenda.

One of the planned lines of action will be the reinforcement of inclusive and local approaches in evaluation. The valuable experience accumulated throughout a decade of work in participatory evaluation, briefly recounted in this chapter, will be a crucial resource for deepening these approaches and facilitating the creation of new spaces for exchange and cooperation.

In this way, the new project will act as a bridge for mutual learning and the facilitation of South-South-North exchange, promoting dialogue and shared understanding about the importance of inclusive and local approaches in evaluation. The aim is to integrate approaches and methods that include the active participation of local actors and the target population, the recognition of local and cultural practices and knowledge as valid forms of knowledge in evaluation processes, as well as in the generation and dissemination of evidence —such as storytelling and indigenous evaluation approaches—. Likewise, gender, feminist, and human rights approaches will be

incorporated, with a view to highlighting the structural inequalities and systematic discrimination faced by certain population groups.

As we near the final stretch to achieve the 2030 Agenda, these approaches are reaffirmed as fundamental for ensuring that evaluation practice responds to the real needs of the population and contributes to building more comprehensive and context-specific responses, promoting more sustainable and equitable development. In this scenario, the path ahead for the cooperation between DEval and Mideplan, together with their diverse partners, is both highly challenging and motivating: the commitment is to the experience acquired, mutual learning, and the creation of global synergies.

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Reviews

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The book is an original and significant contribution to the field of the evaluation of social programmes and projects.

In the first chapter, the editors provide an introduction that places the field of Participatory Evaluation in its historical and conceptual context. In Latin America, the field of evaluation and of the approaches used to address it has grown. The reforms implemented in social services and policies confer a new status on the evaluation of their processes and results. The New Public Management movement has influenced the development of the evaluation field, in which an instrumental, quantitative approach associated with the efficiency and impacts of projects predominates.

In the Latin American tradition, evaluation has been understood as a tool for those who decide on, implement or fund projects and, in order to demonstrate their results and impacts, it is mainly quantitative indicators that are evaluated. Despite the contributions and importance of such evaluations, the indicators used tend to simplify more complex realities and are insufficient to capture the psychosocial and cultural dimensions related to the contexts, processes and results of projects. These evaluations are communicated in a specialised language that is remote from much of the project implementing community and from the citizens who turn out to be their beneficiaries. The consolidation of democracy in our countries and the empowerment of the population create a favourable setting for this kind of evaluative practice, which seeks to ensure that the non-evaluator stakeholders —that is, the interested parties and those whom the evaluation concerns, especially local managers and a programme's target population— become meaningfully involved in the process of carrying out the evaluation.

In the first chapter, the book's editors put forward robust arguments concerning the development and importance of this type of evaluation in the current Latin American context. They understand evaluation as a social practice in which its definitions, methods and uses are themselves the outcomes of the interactions and forms of knowledge that are co constructed through dialogue within working contexts.

The subsequent chapters present various case studies carried out in Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile and Mexico. They gather important empirical experiences that contribute to the development of the field of participatory evaluation. The case study chapters are well crafted and have a similar structure. Their objects are varied and of differing kinds: evaluative studies of projects that promote the autonomy of people with intellectual disabilities (Costa Rica); participatory experiences in working class neighbourhoods of Santiago (Chile); interventions that create Community Peace Centres within the peace process in Colombia; the evaluation of the inclusive, holistic development

of children (Brazil); and a study of the Mi Pasaje programme, which provides free public transport tickets to students, older adults and people with some form of disability (Mexico). Despite the differences in context and scale, it is possible to discern a certain common structure in the participatory evaluation processes presented. In all of them, broad participation is promoted among the various actors who intervene in the projects, whether as designers, implementers or direct and indirect beneficiaries; particular training processes are carried out to share knowledge and criteria in the evaluation; evaluation questions, criteria and indicators are defined; instruments are designed and applied; and the results are reported, together with the processes for communicating them.

The experiences gathered in this book reflect different ways and methods of organising these processes. Lessons and insights are identified, highlighting the achievements, the limitations and the problems that participatory evaluation must resolve.

Among the achievements, community empowerment stands out, along with the improvement of policies and the promotion of transparency and accountability, among others. Through different methodologies, the evaluative processes acknowledge local knowledge and voices, fostering a deeper and more sensitive understanding of the realities that are the object of the evaluated projects' intervention.

As for the problems to be resolved, notable among them are the information asymmetry and the power relations that are reproduced, explicitly or implicitly, among the participants in these processes; the relationship between expert knowledge and local knowledge; the definition of indicators and methods which, in some cases, are led by teams of professionals as a way of guaranteeing validity and rigour; the analytical procedures; and the influence these experiences have on public deliberation and on the design of social policies with a greater role for citizens.

A more in-depth reflection on the relationship with traditional approaches and with quantitative methods of evaluation remains a pending challenge. Also needed is a reflection on its contribution to public deliberation and to the field of discussion and decision making at the different levels of the public sphere.

The book undoubtedly succeeds in conveying this new perspective on evaluation, carrying out a critical review of the experiences as a contribution to its development within the field of policy evaluation. It appropriately combines the presentation of experiences with the conceptual and methodological reflection that must accompany all evaluative practice. It will be essential reading for those who wish to gain a deeper understanding of this perspective, or for those who, through their professional work, decide to commit themselves to innovative designs of social intervention and evaluation.

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This work brings together a series of experiences in the field of participatory evaluation in different Latin American countries —a practice that must be promoted if genuine improvements are to be achieved in public policies and, consequently, in the quality of life of communities—.

It highlights the diversity of backgrounds, methodologies, cultures, actors and strategies, which underscores the need to keep working on strengthening and sharing experiences of participatory evaluation.



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