



**Participatory Technology Development Working Paper 8**

**PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION WITH PASTORALISTS IN  
EASTERN SUDAN**

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## SUMMARY

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Since the 1980s, participatory approaches have been increasingly applied in pastoral development projects (cf. Waters-Bayer & Bayer 1994). However, most experiences are confined to the phase of situation analysis, whereas project implementation, monitoring and evaluation still take a fairly conventional approach. In evaluations, external consultants still tend to be “controllers” reporting primarily to the funding agencies. Yet there is growing recognition that genuine ownership of development activities grows out of a process approach that entails joint learning by project staff and beneficiaries through participatory monitoring and evaluation. The Agency for Co-Operation and Research in Development (ACORD) felt that external evaluators could play a role in stimulating and facilitating this joint learning, at the same time as taking a look at the development work from the outside. It therefore supported the idea, initiated by the team of an ACORD-supported project team in eastern Sudan, to organise a mid-term evaluation by the project team, the local people and external consultants. This paper describes this participatory evaluation, which involved Beja pastoralists, Beja members of the Red Sea Hills Development Programme, a staff member from the Head Office of ACORD in the UK and two consultants from Germany, and some subsequent project activities related to participatory monitoring and evaluation.

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## 1. Background

Beja pastoralists have been keeping camels and goats in the arid Red Sea Hills for centuries. After droughts in the 1970s and 1980s, which severely depleted animal numbers, the Beja have had difficulties in reconstituting their herds and adapting their economy to new circumstances. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, many Beja communities received food aid or participated in food-for-work programmes.

The ACORD-supported Red Sea Hills Development Programme (RSHP) started operating in Halaib Province in northeast Sudan in 1989. At first, the programme worked in a limited area around the small centre of Suffaya, where many mobile pastoralists could be found. The initial focus was on water development. In 1992, under pressure from local government officials, the programme expanded to cover all coastal and inland (hilly) zones in the Province, and incorporated a few activities related to livestock husbandry and community development.

In 1995/6, the programme underwent a major review, out of which a new three-pronged strategy for intervention emerged, involving participatory planning and implementation, gender sensitivity and environmental concerns. A new programme team was recruited, made up almost entirely of local persons. After six months' on-the-job training and coaching in participatory methods by a Sudanese specialist on Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) methods, the team began to facilitate community planning with selected Village Development Committees (VDCs) in the coastal zone.

In the new strategy, a range of participatory tools was introduced for assessment, planning, training and monitoring purposes. The programme thrust is to give local people the means to determine and implement their own development. The stronger gender orientation was designed to ensure that this extended to women in a context of very conservative gender relations.

Consistent with the participatory and self-critical approach of the programme, the RSHP team and ACORD decided to invite external consultants to make a mid-term review of the programme jointly with the RSHP team and Beja communities. This was in 1998, at the point when the programme wanted to shift the focus of its community development activities to the hilly inland areas inhabited by mobile pastoralists, yet retain some support to the coastal areas, where livelihood patterns are more diversified.

The team, in consultation with the VDCs, developed a profile for the external evaluators. Priorities were given to strong participatory skills, familiarity with pastoral livelihoods, a mixture of social and natural science disciplines and gender balance. Ability to speak Arabic was preferred, but the RSHP team felt that the other elements of the profile were of higher priority. The team knew of the work of two consultants based in Germany filled the profile, with the exception that they did not speak Arabic, and asked ACORD to approach them.

The terms of reference (ToRs) for the external consultants were discussed and drawn up by the RSHP team based in Port Sudan, the VDCs in both the coastal and hilly zones of the project area and ACORD desk officers in Khartoum and London. In the ToRs, it was stipulated that participatory methods of evaluation would be applied, and the RSHP team and VDCs even proposed specific methods (e.g. SWOT: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats). ACORD head office in London added some points to the ToRs, such as assessing the cost effectiveness of selected activities.

## **2. From ToRs to questions to evaluation design**

In the first two days after the arrival of the external consultants, they and the RSHP team worked through the ToRs together and transformed each statement into a question. They then brainstormed about how each question could best be addressed together with the villagers. They agreed on a selection of participatory methods that could be suggested to the villagers.

The RSHP is promoting the development of community organisations (male, female, and mixed) among the Beja agropastoralists, who plan, implement and monitor a variety of activities prioritised by each community. These include para-veterinary services, goat restocking, fodder supply, well repair, construction of water cisterns, making of soil embankments to harvest water for cropping, setting up women's centres (with training in literacy, sewing, horticulture etc), cooperative shops, community funds for human medicine, and boat rehabilitation (many pastoralists whose herds were depleted by drought have now taken up sea activities). The evaluation was carried out together with four communities – two on the coast and two in the hills – in each case, in villages representing relatively strong and relatively weak community development, as judged by the RSHP team.

In each community, the evaluation started with two meetings: one with the men and one with the women, as the sexes are strongly segregated in this Muslim society. The objectives of these meetings were to introduce the external persons, to stimulate a general discussion about the village's development work and to give the villagers an opportunity to select project-supported activities that they wanted to examine in more detail. At these initial meetings, local co-evaluators (one woman and one man) were selected by their fellow villagers.

After the larger meetings in each village, the RSHP members and external evaluators met with the two local evaluators to design the process of the evaluation in their village. The local evaluators suggested the size and composition of the various local groups with whom different aspects of the development work should be assessed. These were interest groups involved in the particular activities identified in the community meetings and, in most cases, they were likewise segregated according to sex. The local co-evaluators arranged the various visits and meetings. It was also up to them to decide whether the final feedback meeting with the community should be segregated or mixed. (As it turned out, in all cases, they chose the latter option.)

## **3. Exploring perceived benefits**

The evaluation team asked each of the different interest groups to identify the many benefits of the activity in question, and a member of the RSHP team drew each benefit on an A4 sheet of paper. The sheets were placed on the ground and anchored with stones. In the Beja settlements, which have few or no firm buildings, it was difficult to find walls on which to post pictures. Even when the discussions took place inside a shelter - which was usually made of driftwood and well "ventilated" – a strong wind managed to remove anything that was not weighted to the ground.

Each village participant was given ten beans (red for men, white for women) and asked to distribute them among the benefits most important to him or her as an individual. Some people explained their choices as they placed the beans. The votes by men and women for each picture were then counted and weighted, e.g. if five men and ten women were voting, then the votes of

the men were multiplied by two so that it was easier to compare the relative importance given to the benefit by men and women.

The evaluation team members then posed questions to probe reasons why certain benefits were more important overall than others, and why certain benefits were more important to one sex than the other. The discussion was in the Beja language and was recorded by a member of the RSHP team. The non-Sudanese members of the team depended largely on the notes of their Sudanese colleagues, as excessive interruptions for translation would have disturbed the flow of discussion among the villagers.

#### **4. Identifying beneficiaries**

Proportional piling was used to identify which wealth classes were benefiting from the activity. Four piles of beans were placed on the ground, to represent different wealth groups within the village: very rich, medium rich, medium poor, very poor. The evaluators deliberately made the pile for the very poor the smallest one. The villagers then re-adjusted the piles to represent the proportions of households in the village that were in these different wealth groups. They were asked to explain how each group differed from the other (i.e. criteria of wealth/poverty). Then they were asked to point out which group(s) benefited most from the activity. This led to lively discussion and to redistribution of the beans, sometimes even to the creation of a new pile. For example, when it was realised that the pile of beans representing "very poor" included people with a few livestock and those with none, whereas the para-veterinary services were benefiting the former and not the latter, one group of villagers decided to subdivide the fourth pile into "very poor" (few livestock) and "very very poor" (no livestock). The discussion then moved to why certain people were benefiting more than others.

#### **5. Examining environmental impact**

The discussion about environmental impact was based on a simple "before" and "after" matrix depicted on the ground with sticks, leaves, etc. or simply drawn in the sand. In those cases where the villagers did not think there had been enough time for any perceptible environmental impact, they said it was useless to make the matrix. As the activities being evaluated were, in most cases, no more than two years old, this reaction was understandable. In such cases, the evaluation team did not push the villagers to make a matrix if they saw no point in doing so.

#### **6. Assessing local organisational capacities**

The VDCs assessed their own organisational capacities by applying the SWOT method, writing in Arabic on a poster on the ground. This was a method with which the villagers were already well acquainted and had requested during preparation for the evaluation. However, the programme team was eager to learn other ways of helping committees assess their capacities. Therefore, the external consultants introduced what the team called the "moons exercise". This is based on an approach developed by Norman Uphoff (1991): The committee was asked what they considered to be desirable traits of a committee and its functioning. One of the statements was, for example: "All members attend meetings regularly and take part in decision-making". Then a member of the evaluation team drew four phases of the moon on the ground (full, more than half full, less than half full and a thin crescent moon) and suggested that this could stand for "All/Many/Some/Few members attend meetings regularly and take part in decision-making". The

members of the VDCs reflected on past meetings and discussed who had attended and who had played a role in decision-making, until they reached agreement about the phase of the moon that showed the VDC's present stage of development in this regard. The evaluation team then asked the VDC members what they still needed to do to attain the ideal state (full moon), in which direction they would develop if support from the RSHP would continue or cease, and why this would happen.

In all villages, the RSHP had started by promoting the creation of separate men's and women's development committees, each focusing on the activities most important to that gender. In some cases, the villagers had already started to form a mixed-gender VDC. In one village where a joint men's and women's development committee had not yet been formed, a brainstorming and visualisation exercise (in written Arabic) was done of the pros and cons of a joint committee. As the villagers, through their experience with scales in the cooperative shop, were familiar with weights, they could weigh the relative importance of the pros and cons. They (men and women) came to a decision that the pros weighed heavier. This type of evaluation tool served two purposes: to assess the strengths of the separate women's and men's committees but also to further the process of village organisational development.

In those villages where a Venn diagram had been made during PRA exercises two years earlier, the villagers drew a new one to show the present situation of institutional linkages, and compared this with the old one. However, the new situation had become so complicated that the diagram could be understood only by those villagers directly involved in drawing it and interpreting the results (more institutions, many more linkages, changes in linkages of woman's organisations etc). Nevertheless, those who has drawn the Venn diagram were able to explain to the evaluation team and later to the other villagers what the major changes in the last years had been, e.g. that women had previously had no contacts outside the village, or only indirectly through men, whereas now women were interacting with circles outside the village, such as with traders to supply their cooperative shop. Some breakthroughs were revealed: women were actively involved in VDCs, had more freedom of movement and generally had a much stronger profile in public.

## **7. Feedback**

Each village evaluation culminated in a feedback workshop in which the Beja-speaking members of the team showed the results, received comments and posed questions to advance debate in the village, particularly about institutional development. Here, the non-Beja speakers were completely dependent on the notes taken by the other members of the team.

The village evaluation reports were distributed in printed form in Arabic (including the drawings) and on cassette in the Beja language. The programme team facilitated discussions of these reports in the various villages, as part of the process of further planning by the villagers.

The implementing agency, ACORD, was sufficiently interested in the process of the evaluation to send a person from head office to document it (Pantuliano 1998). As part of this process documentation, the RSHP team (without the external evaluators) made its own assessment of the evaluation. The team found it to be a learning experience that contributed to the programme's own methods and findings in monitoring and evaluation. It had indeed been for this reason that the RSHP team had been interested in having a participatory mid-term evaluation. The team members had wanted it to contribute to their own learning and that of the villagers with whom they were working.

## **8. General assessment of the evaluation**

A large part of the success of the participatory evaluation was due to the fact that the RSHP team and the villagers involved as co-evaluators were already skilled and experienced in applying participatory tools. Another precondition for success was that ACORD accepted a limitation in the scope of the evaluation, realising that all aspects of the programme could not be evaluated in a participatory way in a short period of time.

One weakness of the evaluation was the limitation in types of local participants. The contacts of the external evaluators were limited to people having contact with the RSHP team (all Beja) and were primarily people who were benefiting from the training and other development activities supported by the programme. This restricted the possibilities of involving "non-beneficiaries", particularly non-Beja ones. The internal and external evaluators met with few (Beja) people who were not benefiting directly from the programme.

Furthermore, within the communities, the contacts were via the VDC. The composition of these committees reflects largely the power structure within the community - with some important adjustments, such as the creation of women's or joint development committee, so that women have a new public voice. However, the traditional leaders and/or their relatives tended to be those selected as local co-evaluators. The voices of some groups of people in the community and in the neighbourhood who were using the same natural resources were probably not heard.

The implementing agency's questions about cost effectiveness could not, in the end, be adequately answered in the approach taken in the evaluation, because the participatory tools and the time available did not permit the collection of sufficient quantitative data. Also prior to the mid-term evaluation, basic conventional data had not been recorded and analysed by the project. This made the evaluation almost entirely dependent on villagers' qualitative perceptions and opinions, and their rough estimates of costs and benefits.

Analysis of the data from the participatory evaluation was carried out on several levels: village evaluators were involved in analysis at the village level (preparation and implementation of the feedback workshop), the programme team was involved at the programme level (discussion and comparison of the different village findings and preparation of the draft evaluation report), but neither group was involved at the stage when the external evaluators took a step back to regard the functioning and technical expertise of the programme team. However, the team had the opportunity to comment on this level of analysis, as the revised draft of the report was sent to them and to agency headquarters. The village reports, with a summary of the main recommendations from the overall report, were taken back to the villages. The evaluation report in English was sent back to the programme team and the implementing agency, and can serve as a reference for present and potential donors.

## **9. Follow-up to the mid-term evaluation**

The participatory evaluation brought about a number of changes at the level of the villages and the programme. More attention has been paid to environmental issues, both on land and at sea. In 1999, awareness-raising activities were carried out which drew inspiration from the traditional *sillif* system of resource management, and the RSHP stimulated exchange visits between villages for sharing experiences around this theme. Some tree-planting activities were also



undertaken. The programme increased its sea-related activities in line with the outcome of the evaluation. Oyster farming is now being supported, and loans for fishing boats are provided on a full-recovery basis, instead of being subsidised, as was the case before the evaluation. The evaluation had shown that this activity was bringing sufficient income that the beneficiaries could pay back a loan. This freed up funds for activities to support more disadvantaged segments of the population.

Changes in project management at village level have also come about. In Eit village, the participatory evaluation prompted the VDC to try to become more inclusive by bringing on board more representatives from outlying areas instead of just the core village. In Dongonab, it was recognised that too few individuals within the village were controlling decision-making with insufficient reference to the people who are supposed to benefit from the different project activities. A project committee was therefore set up which consists of members of each sub-project and which liaises with VDC. This is a model that is spreading to other villages within the project area.

The project has continued to use a number of the exercises undertaken during the participatory evaluation. These include the “moons exercise”, SWOT and different ranking exercises. Some of these have been integrated into the Participatory Impact Monitoring (PIM) system, a community-based methodology originally devised by the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ) that was adopted by RHSP shortly after the evaluation. Initially integrated into the work of two villages in 1999, PIM has now been extended to a further two villages.

The participatory evaluation brought about a slight but important change in the way the programme perceived itself. The sustainability lens has moved away from a focus on technical support to projects to a more conscious focus on developing community capacity to manage projects. In other words, the various projects are now regarded as community-managed experiments that are given strategic and gradually diminishing technical support by the RSHP team.

The participatory mid-term evaluation and, subsequently, PIM have been attempts to provide the Beja communities with a structured framework for their own monitoring and evaluation. The local groups are presenting their findings to each other and the rest of the community in various visual forms (charts, tables, matrices), in addition to oral and some written feedback by the few, still too dominant literate persons in those villages where such persons exist. In addition, the RSHP team is doing its own monitoring of the local groups' activities and organisational development, using visual techniques such as those used by the groups themselves, as well as Venn diagrams and mobility maps.

PIM is a natural continuation of the programme's participatory approach that gave rise to the participatory evaluation. It is proving to be a systematic way of institutionalising monitoring and evaluation within the RSHP and within the communities and is helping to create more sustainability in community management of activities to improve local livelihoods.

## 10. References

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