

## EVALUATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN INTRODUCTION

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### ABSTRACT

*This article provides a brief background to the articles in this edition on evaluation in South Africa. The overall background is self-evident: South Africa is a country which has undergone a political revolution, with a government of national unity in place. The formulation and implementation of new policies, and the programs which form part of them, will be an important part of South African politics in the years to come.*

*These articles also appear against the more immediate background of trying to place evaluation on a surer footing in this country. In this introduction the efforts of a group of South African evaluators to position themselves and their activities in such a way as to make evaluation an accepted part of the organizational landscape, and to play a useful role in a future South Africa, are described as well.*

### INTRODUCTION

Societies undergoing rapid and dramatic change typically set in motion processes which facilitate as well as impede evaluation as an enterprise. The emphasis on accountability, credibility, efficient utilization of resources, human rights, and policy changes that accompanies social transformation is compatible with, and easily translated into, evaluation concerns. The difficulty is, however, that in such societies tremendous demands are made on available resources, and that evaluation does not figure high on the list of priorities.

The situation in South Africa at present does not differ much from this account. Since the election and investiture of a government of national unity in April 1994, there is an increased urgency in efforts to address the ills of the apartheid past. The most dramatic example of this is the government's Reconstruction and Development Program, which is committed to meeting basic needs in terms of education, health, housing, electricity and water as a primary development strategy. However, numerous programs and projects to address the inequalities of health care and education, for example, have been in existence for many years (see Louw, Katzenellenbogen & Carolissen, this issue). It is to be expected that in future such programs and projects will

be guided increasingly by overall policy (see the article by Meyer & Hofmeyr in this issue). Whether these interventions are part of the national reconstruction program or not, they are going to expand, and so will be the amount of money being spent. The question is whether these efforts will be accompanied by an emphasis on evaluation.

Already there is an awareness of the need to evaluate, in the widest sense of the word: how to prioritize and implement programs of reconstruction and development; how to establish priorities of needs; holding individuals and groups accountable for funds being spent; how to monitor the implementation of programs; a consideration of the effectiveness of such programs; etc. Individuals and organizations in South Africa are beginning to think beyond the present, and to anticipate that difficult decisions about policies and programs will have to be made in the future. These will include questions about which programs to implement/support financially, who will decide whether policies and programs are working, what criteria will be used for these decisions, etc. This awareness of the need to evaluate is particularly strong in the various non-governmental organizations (NGOs), whose continued funding is often dependent upon some form of evaluation of their activities, in the educational sector, and in the domain

of public health. There are hopeful signs that this awareness of the importance of evaluation is increasingly recognized in government departments as well: for example, representatives from the Auditor-General's Office (the South African equivalent of the GAO) attended and participated in the workshop described below. The papers in this collection provide further examples of such an awareness.

Program evaluation in South Africa at present attracts a relatively small number of practitioners and researchers. Very few are independent practitioners/consultants with evaluation as full-time or major-time activity, and there are even fewer contract research firms. The majority therefore are not full-time in evaluation; they typically are in university departments of education, sociology, psychology, etc.; at health and educational policy units, also attached to universities; and at research bodies, such as the Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa's major funder of social science research, and the Medical Research Council. In addition, opportunities to receive formal training in evaluation methodology, such as degree conferring programs, are almost non-existent. As a result, those currently in evaluation either have re-tooled their methodology training in their primary discipline (e.g. psychology) into evaluation methodology, or have received training overseas, typically the U.S.A.

These deficiencies have been recognized, and attempts made to address them. For example: in 1990 the Human Sciences Research Council brought Mark Lipsey, then of Claremont Graduate School, to this country to assist in an evaluation of a second language teaching program (see the article by Mouton, this issue), and to conduct program evaluation methodology seminars in the major centers. Lipsey returned to South Africa in July 1994, to continue these seminars. Carol Weiss of Harvard University is another prominent evaluator who was a recent visitor to South Africa.

The relatively small number of individuals who are involved in evaluation in a major way, nevertheless do important and significant work. Given the state of evaluation, and program development, in this country, most of the work involves process rather than outcome evaluation. An additional difficulty they face is that they often work in isolation from one another, since there is no network or association of evaluators, and they are not always aware of the evaluation expertise available. Attempts have been made to bring evaluators together around training workshops and seminars, but these have been difficult to sustain. The fact that there are so few evaluators, that even fewer see evaluation as their primary affiliation, and that work loads are ever increasing, has a lot to do with it.

#### **Beginning to organize**

Working on the assumption that the time was opportune to give some thought to the development of pro-

gram evaluation in South Africa, a small number of individuals involved in the field organized a 2-day symposium in Cape Town in 1993. The major objective of the symposium was to bring together the disparate groups currently involved in program evaluation. These groups included donor organizations, potential users of evaluation services, actual users, researchers, teachers of courses in program evaluation, and practitioners.

Apart from having this kind of representation and diversity at the symposium, additional criteria were considered to establish the list of key individuals and organizations to invite. It was thought to be politic to tap into organizations which are likely to have (a) the capacity to support evaluation research and practice; (b) political legitimacy; and (c) extensive experience with programs which will have high salience to an interim and post-interim government. In the end, 35 individuals, whose inclusion reflected most of the above mentioned considerations, attended the deliberations over 2 days.

The Centre for Science Development of the Human Sciences Research Council provided partial funding, which made it possible to "import" the then president of the American Evaluation Association, David Fetterman, to deliver the keynote address at the symposium, and to act as general consultant on the issues on the agenda. His visit made it possible for South African evaluators to hear him talk about empowerment evaluation before the AEA members got to hear it! He also presented workshops on *Empowerment Evaluation* in Pretoria, and *Qualitative Methods in Evaluation* in Cape Town and Durban.

The program for the symposium was structured around the major interest groups attending, with sessions involving donor and funder concerns, teaching of program evaluation, and case studies of program evaluation research. It allowed participants to get a better idea of the needs of actual and potential users, of the views of donor organizations, of training possibilities being offered, of the experiences different groups had with evaluation, of methodologies current locally, and of the activities of practitioners.

It became clear that a surprising amount of work was being done in South Africa—some of which are reported in this volume. However, the demand for evaluation still outstrips the supply of evaluation expertise. One consequence of this is that organizations quite often rely on foreign experts as consultants, who bring their ways of doing evaluation with them. Quite clearly, there is a need to make more training facilities available locally. Although the universities can act as important training grounds, it was felt that training should also take place outside the universities. Another problem area identified was the lack of published information on the evaluations done or being done locally, and it was clear that the publication of local evaluations deserve attention, in order to improve quality.

In more general and more ambitious terms, it was thought that the symposium ought to contribute to the development of a critical mass of serious thinkers and doers in the field of evaluation. The intention is for the group to become the base for "capacity building" with regard to program evaluation skills in South Africa.

In this regard, the symposium was regarded as a starting point in what hopefully will be a longer term process. Although the objectives for the two days were limited to the ones outlined above, it was recognized that much more was needed to begin laying a sound conceptual foundation which would permit program evaluation to be rooted in several fields, and to create the interpersonal and interorganizational linkages needed to provide the programmatic and financial commitments in order to nurture the conceptual base.

With this in mind, an Evaluation Task Group was formed and given a 4-fold brief: to promote and strengthen communication between those individuals and organizations interested in program evaluation; to organize a more inclusive conference on program evaluation in 1994; to prepare a motion to form a national evaluation association to put to this meeting; and to organize regional meetings around evaluation issues. Regional meetings have taken place, but arrangements for a national conference early in 1995 did not materialize. It therefore will take a special effort to launch evaluation on an organized basis in this country; whether it will happen at all is not clear.

It is also clear that a major association, such as the AEA, can play a useful role in fostering evaluation efforts in places where it is needed, but not yet supported. An important form of support is contained in a visit such as David Fetterman's: to have the AEA president at similar meetings adds an important dimension to the discussions. Given the embryonic state of evaluation locally, consideration also could be given to the introduction of some form of an exchange program between universities or government departments. Furthermore, the AEA's plan for an International Congress on Evaluation in 1995, is another welcome signal, which might turn out to be timely and appropriate for the local development of program evaluation.

### **The Articles**

The articles brought together in this volume provide a brief glimpse of some of the evaluation activities in South Africa. They are in no way representative of the field locally; that clearly would have been an impossible task. But they should give the reader an indication of local evaluation concerns and practices.

Policy development is a matter of urgency, and in the areas of health, education and housing these policies virtually have to be developed from scratch. The paper by Meyer and Hofmeyr identifies the most important needs of policy analysts in the educational sector, and gives a useful indication of the implications of these needs for evaluators. At a more micro level, Doherty and Rispel use health policy formulation as a framework for discussing the employment of participatory research techniques to facilitate the process.

Given the history and legacy of apartheid, numerous community level programs are being introduced to alleviate some of its effects. Louw, Katzenellenbogen and Carolissen discuss a community health project in the light of appraisals of what is considered as a social good, and Kelly and Van Vlaenderen use a health project to develop a method of evaluating participation. Although not evaluating a community-based program as such, the students in Paulsen, Lee, Tollman and McKenzie's Diploma in Primary Health Care Education will ultimately be involved in community health care.

The authors provide good illustrations of methods currently in use locally. Participative research is an indication of the importance of community participation in the development of service provision: the papers by Louw, Katzenellenbogen and Carolissen; Kelly and Van Vlaenderen; and Doherty and Rispel are clearly in this tradition. Methodologically, Mouton's paper is an exception. He presents the results of a large scale, multi-site evaluation, done in a quantitative mode—something quite rare at this stage of South African evaluation. However, qualitative methods are used to interpret the data, in a combination of these two approaches. Meyer and Hofmeyr provide further discussion of the methodological debate in South Africa under the heading "Evaluation paradigms."