

Facilitating tribal farmers to identify change in their farming systems

Published in the Evaluation Journal of Australasia, Vol 9 , Numbers 1&2, pp 31-36

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Abstract

The KRIBP (KRIBHCO Rain-Fed Indo-British Farming Systems Project) attempted a new approach to evaluation in order that project staff and indigenous people gain a mutual understanding of overall change to the Bhil tribal farming system in Western India. Participatory models were used to enable the farmers to visualise their farming system, and to identify and discuss the changes that had occurred over the five-year period of project involvement. These models formed part of a village case study evaluation, which employed both qualitative and quantitative data.

Criteria for evaluation based upon the farmers' perceptions of improvement were identified during the creation of the models and subsequently used to develop semi-structured interview guides. The results of the evaluation were presented back to the people in booklets that included drawings, photographs and simple text.

Introduction

Evaluation has a prominent presence in agricultural development projects in lower income countries. However, this evaluation culture has its own norms and definitions, which appear to have developed independently from the world of 'Program Evaluation'. There is a strong focus on the use of logical frameworks, and an increasing tendency towards participatory process project design (Farrington & Nelson, 1997). The author of this paper worked as an internal evaluator on behalf of the KRIBP project in tribal villages during 1996 and 1997. During this work the method of 'participatory farming systems models' was developed to facilitate farmers to articulate their own indicators of change to their farming systems.

The KRIB project

The KRIBP (KRIBHCO Indo-British Farming Systems Project¹) as described elsewhere (Jones *et al.* 1996; Mosse *et al.* 1995) is a participatory farming systems development project situated in the Bhil tribal region of Western India. It was initiated in 1993 and is located in one of the poorest regions in India. The project strategy, orientated towards improving the livelihoods of poor farming families, involves an extended process of participatory planning in order to generate location-specific plans for development of natural resources and social institution development (Mosse *et al.* 1995). The project is based on the premise that sustainable development depends on enhancing local self-reliance through institutional and community development. The aim of the project model is to build participatory farming systems development approaches through the establishment of village level groups that target the very poor and take account of gender concerns.

The evaluative research relating to this paper was carried out between 1996 and 1997, when the project was at a settled stage. This paper reviews one method for evaluation that was developed during a series of village case-studies. However, it should be noted that in addition to case-study evaluation, the project conducted other types of evaluation. A monthly monitoring system is in place, along with process documentation, in addition to a mid-term assessment of economic impact of the project interventions, and assessment of the cost and benefits of participation.

Modes of participation

Over the past 20 years, agricultural research and development in government programs and non-governmental sectors alike have seen a move towards increasing participatory approaches. However, the degree of 'participation' in these new programs varies greatly in implementation. Much work has been carried out in this area and the reader is referred to Okali *et al.* (1994).

¹ The project is implemented by the Krishak Bharati Cooperative Ltd (KRIBHCO), a government of India parastatal and one of the leading fertiliser manufacturing marketing organisations in India. As a cooperative KRIBHCO also engages in development projects in farming communities. ODA (the Overseas Development Administration of the British Government) provides approximately 91% of the funding, the remainder is funded by KRIBHCO.

The word 'participation' appears in many project documents and texts in the field of agricultural development. However, it seems that there are several interpretations of this word. Table 1 describes the continuum of participation in evaluation practice in the field of agricultural research and development. Within each category presented in the table, the level of participation will vary considerably.

The third category in this table best represents the form of participation seen in the KRIB project case-study evaluation. With the global move towards agricultural development which is group-focused and increasingly participatory, it would seem that this category of evaluation could serve the double purpose of including the values of the participants in the evaluation, as well as meeting project demands for accountability. The evaluator's role in this category is that of facilitation.

Table 1. Continuum of participation in evaluation

	External evaluation	Consultative evaluation	Collaborative evaluation	Self-evaluation
Continuum of participation	_____			
Evaluator	External	External or internal	External or internal	Internal
Audience	External	External or internal	External or internal	Internal
Who develops the program objectives?	Project staff	Project staff, some consultation with participants	Project staff, in collaboration with participants	Internally by participants
Who develops evaluation indicators?	Project staff	Project staff	Evaluator with participants	Internally by participants
Key difference	Participants are not consulted and don't direct the evaluation	Participants are consulted during the information gathering process but do not direct the process	Participants and evaluator direct the evaluation together	Participants carry out their own evaluation for their own purposes
Possible Purposes of evaluation	Accountability symbolic, enlightenment of outsiders, summative evaluation	Accountability, understanding of program impact, could be formative or summative	Understand program impacts, enlightenment, formative evaluation, empowerment	Empowerment, group strengthening, self determination

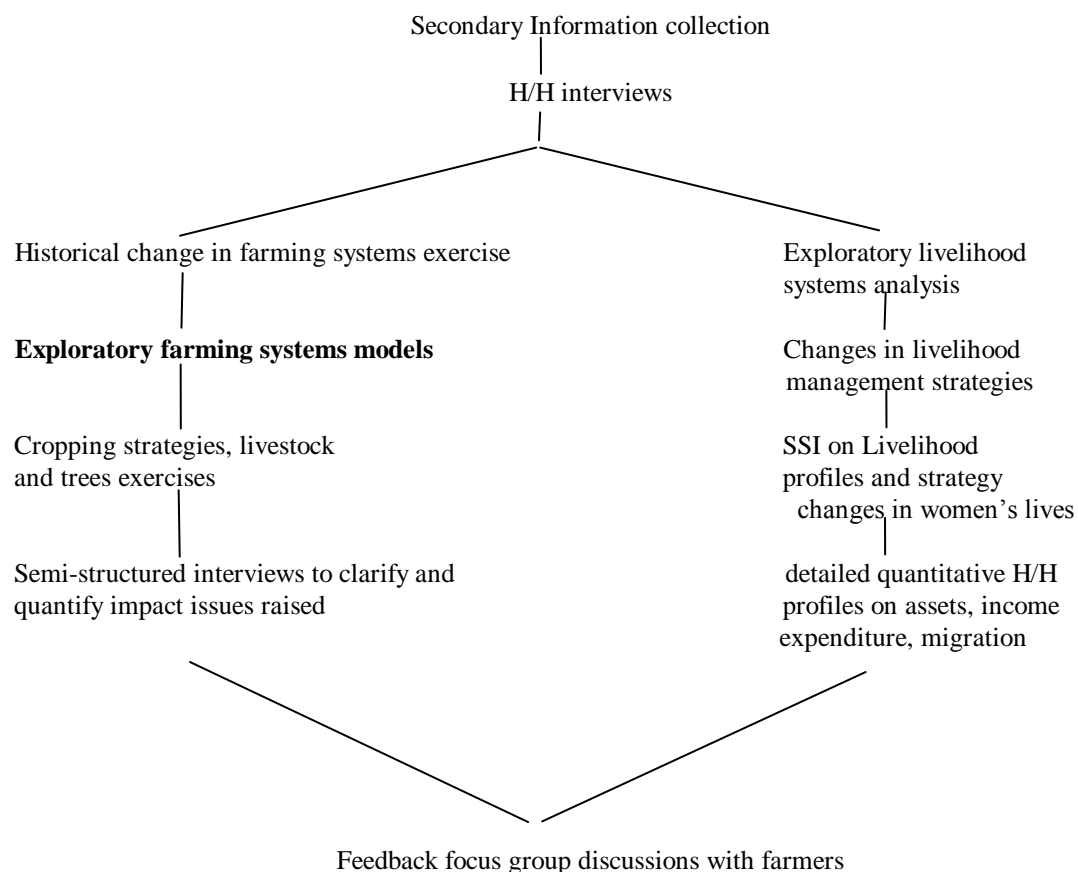
The evaluation

The evaluation described below forms part of an in-depth study of three project villages, which were conducted in order to understand the farming system, livelihood system and to get an overall view of the impact of the KRIB project initiatives. The case studies covered two states, Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, and three villages where the KRIB project is working. In all three case studies, project impact was assessed by considering local perceptions of project-induced changes, in the wider context of change occurring over the five-year period in which the project has been operating. Key impact indicators arose out of the preliminary participatory analysis of farming and livelihood systems. These indicators were then used as a guide for future base line and impact studies in a wider range of project villages.

How the models fit in with the overall process of evaluation

Household interviews (HHIs), Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) exercises and semi-structured interviews (SSIs) were planned to follow a logical order, to be flexible enough to enable the incorporation of learning as the process of information collection proceeded (see Figure 1). In line with the objective verifiable indicators (OVI), impact was considered with regards to who was benefiting: male or female; different socio-economic classes. The participatory farming systems models were used at an exploratory phase in this process, to ensure that the evaluation was based upon the values of the farmers themselves.

Figure 1 Information Collection Flow



Source: Dart 1997

Methodology

The aim of the exercise was to learn how farmers perceived their farming system and to identify the sub-systems. It is hoped that this holistic view of farming systems would then create an ideal context in which to question the participants about any changes to this system brought about by the project.

The participants were asked to represent the various enterprises of the farm using materials available nearby. In different villages the models were constructed using different materials, which included: clay, straw, seeds, twigs, dried cow-dung and anything that was at hand. A key factor was that the facilitator was not involved in creating the model. When the diagram was completed they were asked to draw arrows (or represent arrows with twigs) from one enterprise to another, to represent recycling and flows of materials and labour. Finally they were asked to represent the market and indicate flows of materials and labour to and from the market using arrows.

The second stage was to ask if any changes had occurred in this farming system over the period of project involvement. Specific enterprises and relationships were pointed out and the participants were encouraged to talk about any changes in these flows and relationships. Every exercise was repeated and carried out with both male and female farmer groups. An effort was made to select informants from all socio-economic classes.

These models were used to explore the ways farmers view changes in their livelihoods and farming systems. Indicators such as the number of buffalo and the change in bride price came out of these exercises as local indicators of improved well-being. These indicators were then used along with indicators developed by the project team to carry out semi-structured interviews. These findings were presented back to the farmers in booklets that included drawings, photographs and simple text. The literacy rate for the case-study villages was below 10 % : for this reason pictorial representation was more appropriate. During the feedback meeting the booklets were altered to include the farmers' comments and analysis of the results.

The evaluation findings were used by project staff to gain insight into the holistic effect of project interventions on the farming and livelihood systems. This approach formed one part of a larger impact assessment effort, which included other forms and approaches aimed more at accountability and evaluation for project management.

Was the process empowering?

The participating farmers indicated that they were very pleased to receive feedback on the evaluation findings for a variety of reasons. It is hard to measure to what degree the evaluation process was empowering in itself. However, some of the women farmers perceived that being included in the process had elevated their status and it was found to be an unobtrusive method to gain insight into a complex system. It also supported the participatory nature of the project. The community groups explained that they felt ownership over the evaluation and would keep the evaluation reports as village records for future use. Whilst the evaluation findings did not feed directly into village work plans, it is hoped that they will be used to focus the next phase of village planning.

The approach to evaluation, especially the farming systems models, enabled farmers to identify what change factors were important to them. In this way, the methodology supported the overall participatory approach of the project. It allowed self-determination of which changes were important, and which changes should be measured. The evaluation also had the aim of enabling the project staff to understand the values of the project participants, which were fed back into the project's organisational learning system. The models themselves were not used for accountability purposes, but indicators were developed from these models and used to measure how these factors had changed before and after the project intervention. These measures were ultimately used for two purposes, for the community itself as a record and for the project to understand and to be accountable for the project's progress (along with other evaluation efforts).

Patton (1997) writes "empowerment evaluation is most appropriate where the goals of the program include helping participants become more self-sufficient and personally effective. In such instances, empowerment evaluation is also intervention orientated in that the evaluation is designed and implemented to support and enhance the program's desired outcomes". The use of farming systems models to explore local understanding of change appears to be consistent with this description.

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