Increasing the rigour and trustworthiness of participatory evaluations: learnings from the field

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Participatory evaluation and participatory action research (PAR) are increasingly used in community-based programs and initiatives and there is a growing acknowledgement of their value. These methodologies focus more on knowledge generated and constructed through lived experience than through social science (Vanderplaat 1995). The scientific ideal of objectivity is usually rejected in favour of a holistic approach that acknowledges and takes into account the diverse perspectives, values and interpretations of participants and evaluation professionals. However, evaluation rigour need not be lost in this approach. Increasing the rigour and trustworthiness of participatory evaluations and PAR increases the likelihood that results are seen as credible and are used to continually improve programs and policies.

Drawing on learnings and critical reflections about the use of feminist and participatory forms of evaluation and PAR over a 10-year period, significant sources of rigour identified include:

■ participation and communication methods that develop relations of mutual trust and open communication

■ using multiple theories and methodologies, multiple sources of data, and multiple methods of data collection

■ ongoing meta-evaluation and critical reflection

■ critically assessing the intended and unintended impacts of evaluations, using relevant theoretical models

■ using rigorous data analysis and reporting processes

■ participant reviews of evaluation case studies, impact assessments and reports.

Introduction

Participatory forms of evaluation and impact assessment and participatory action research (PAR) are increasingly used in community-based programs and initiatives, sometimes in combination. These methodologies have been used effectively in a broad range of fields such as for widening participation in further and higher education (Thomas 2000), preventative drug use programs (Dugan 1996) and community IT projects (Lennie et al. 2004). Diez (2001, p. 907) suggests that participatory evaluation can be a useful tool to 'mobilise communities for regional action, empower local agents and enhance learning capacity'.

Participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) methodologies emerged from the extension of PAR to evaluation and the growing interest in evaluation as an action learning and capacity-building process. The increasing interest in PM&E is due to a number of factors, including:

■ the growing demand for greater accountability and demonstrable impact of community-based initiatives

■ stronger capacities within non-government organisations (NGOs)

■ mounting evidence that PM&E produces positive results and is particularly useful in assessing the impacts of complex system change and community initiatives (Parks 2005; WK Kellogg Foundation 1998).

PM&E enables those involved to develop skills, experience and knowledge in planning and conducting evaluations that can result in more effective and sustainable solutions to local problems and issues. These methodologies also enable ongoing improvements to be made to programs and policies thus meeting community needs and organisational goals better.

However, despite the growing acceptance of the value of PM&E in many countries around the world, this methodology is still not widely used. Reasons for this include: issues with defining who should be involved; the approach is seen to lack credibility in terms of rigour and validity; and PM&E may appear to cost more than non-participatory approaches (Parks 2005, p. 13). Furthermore, Mayoux and Chambers (2005, p. 271) argue that participatory approaches to impact assessment are often seen as a 'fashionable and 'politically correct' frill to the more serious task of 'expert' surveys and (more rarely) qualitative research'. As a result, participatory methods 'have received insufficient investment of training, time and resources to be done well' (Mayoux & Chambers 2005, p. 271).

In addition, due to factors such as differences in power and knowledge among those involved, participatory methods can produce unintended disempowering effects and must therefore be undertaken with great skill and care (Gregory 2000; Lennie 2005; McKie 2003). Rigorous analysis and assessment of both the intended and unintended outcomes, as well as of the impacts of participatory evaluations and PAR projects, is therefore required to develop more effective strategies for community engagement and empowerment.

In PAR and participatory evaluations, the emphasis is mainly on knowledge generated and constructed through the lived experience of participants, rather than through social science (Vanderplaat 1995). The scientific ideal of objectivity is usually rejected in favour of a holistic approach that incorporates the diverse perspectives, values, agendas and interpretations of participants and evaluation professionals. However, as Dick (1992, 1999), Guba and Lincoln (1989), Thomas (2000) and others suggest, rigour need not be lost in this approach. Indeed Mayoux and Chambers (2005, p. 272) argue that when used well, 'participatory methods generate not only qualitative insights but also quantitative data which are generally more accurate than those from conventional survey approaches and methods'.

Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 233) propose that the criteria of 'trustworthiness' is more appropriate than traditional scientific criteria for assessing the quality of their more participatory 'fourth-generation evaluation'. This evaluation methodology is underpinned by an interpretivist philosophy and a constructivist framework in which evaluation is seen as leading to social action and change. Their trustworthiness criteria, which parallel the conventional criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity, are: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln 1989, pp. 236–243). A second approach to assessing the quality of fourth-generation evaluation is the use of 'authenticity criteria', which are based on the assumptions of constructivism (see Guba & Lincoln 1989, pp. 245–250).

Dick (1999) suggests that, as well as the many sources of rigour found in qualitative approaches (such as multiple methodologies and information sources, and multiple methods of data collection and analysis), attention to the processes associated with the cyclical and action-oriented nature of action research (and of most participatory evaluations) can strengthen the rigour of this approach.

Using various criteria and strategies that increase the rigour and trustworthiness of participatory evaluations and PAR projects appears to be important to:

■ improve the quality and effectiveness of the methods and processes used and the outcomes of the program and its evaluation

■ increase the likelihood that evaluation results, case studies and reports are seen to be credible and that participatory evaluations are used

- continually to improve community-based programs and projects

- critically assess the impacts of participatory evaluations and PAR projects on different participant and stakeholder groups and organisations

- develop more practical and useful theories of community participation and empowerment

- counter criticisms from some quarters that participatory evaluations and PAR lack objectivity and that their results are therefore biased and unreliable.

This paper draws on my learnings and critical reflections about the use of feminist and participatory forms of evaluation and impact assessment and PAR over a 10-year period and relevant literature on these methodologies. Following a discussion about the key aims and philosophy of participatory evaluation and PAR and the issues raised by these approaches, various strategies and processes that were found effective in increasing the rigour and trustworthiness of evaluation outcomes from various projects conducted with a diversity of community participants, NGOs and government partners are outlined.

Aims and philosophy of participatory evaluation and PAR

PAR and most forms of participatory evaluation aim to develop equal partnerships between participants and research/evaluation professionals and to create plans and knowledge that lead to action and positive social change. Knowledge is seen as related to power and power is related to change. PAR projects seek to include and actively involve community members, and to enhance democracy and individual, group and community empowerment (McTaggart 1991). PAR is a political process because it involves people making changes together that affect others (McTaggart 1991, p. 177). Critical reflection is an important source of rigour in each PAR cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. This is discussed in more detail later in this article.

PAR encourages the active involvement of a broad range of stakeholders in designing and conducting projects and supports capacity-building processes. It can generate appropriate action, new ideas and long-term visions, foster ongoing change and improvement, and enables regular critical reflection on outcomes (McTaggart 1991). Thomas (2000, p. 112) argues that PAR 'challenges the hegemony of orthodox evaluation research methods' and therefore offers more opportunity to develop and evaluate long-term strategies for widening participation in education and lifelong learning.

Three main reasons have been put forward for increasing the involvement of community participants and other stakeholders in evaluations. These are:

(1) to increase utilisation of evaluation results; (2) to represent the values and concerns of the multiple groups involved in decision-making; (3) to promote the empowerment of disenfranchised stakeholder groups previously left out of the process (Papineau & Kiely 1996, p. 81).

Different forms of participatory evaluation emphasise different levels of participation. Empowerment evaluation is notable in that it encourages active involvement of a diversity of stakeholders in all stages of the evaluation and has a number of clearly articulated principles, including improvement, democratic participation, organisational learning, accountability, and using evidence-based strategies (Fetterman & Wandersman 2005).

Participatory feminist evaluation methodologies and feminist PAR are openly political approaches that seek to understand, give voice to and validate women's needs, values and lived experiences and to take the various contexts in which women live into account (Lather 1991; Lennie 2002b). Such evaluations aim to improve programs in ways that meet women's diverse needs and goals better and to bring gender and other differences and issues to the fore. In its more critical forms, feminist PAR and evaluation also include analysis of the gendered power relations in projects and the contradictory outcomes of participatory methods that can often be overlooked (Lennie, Hatcher & Morgan 2003).

The methods and underlying philosophies of various forms of participatory research and evaluation thus contrast markedly with traditional program evaluation methods such as quasi-experimental impact assessments. In these traditional approaches, the evaluator is expected to adopt an impartial and objective perspective, and program activities are usually reduced to quantitative indicators (Vanderplaat 1995). In contrast, qualitative indicators are increasingly used in participatory impact assessments, along with multiple methods that aim to reflect 'the complexities of everyday reality' and the different perspectives of those involved (Worthen, Sanders & Fitzpatrick 1997, p. 154). However, while an openly political approach is often adopted, there are numerous ways in which the rigour and trustworthiness of the methods, findings and outcomes of participatory evaluations and PAR projects can be increased.

Issues raised by participatory evaluation and PAR

The use of participatory research and evaluation methodologies raises many complex theoretical, methodological and ethical issues that have implications for the quality of the evaluation and the trustworthiness of the findings and outcomes. They include:

- *The need to ensure stakeholder representativeness.* Several studies have highlighted the complex barriers and issues that arise when researchers and evaluators attempt to involve a broad diversity of participants and stakeholders, which need to be addressed (Lennie 2002b; Mathie & Greene 1997; O'Meara, Chester & Han 2004).

- *The potential that the conflicting agendas and perspectives of various stakeholder groups will hinder the effectiveness of the evaluation.* However, while power is a central issue in participatory evaluation, it is often ignored (Gregory 2000). As McKie (2003) argues, there is a need to focus on the communicative and relational dimensions of participatory evaluations, which can affect their outcomes in unintended ways. Rigorous assessment of the empowering and potentially disempowering impacts of participatory evaluations and PAR projects is therefore required.

- *The need to critique the concepts of empowerment and participation when assessing the impacts of participatory research and evaluation.* Idealistic or naive assumptions are sometimes made that community participation will automatically lead to empowerment. However, Humphries (1994) points out that the concept of empowerment can be used to justify oppressive practices; while the forms of participation range from co-option to collective action (Martin 2000, p. 200).

- *The time, energy and resources required to build evaluation capacity, plan and conduct evaluations, and develop relationships based on trust and open communication.* To be effective, participatory evaluations require sufficient time and resources, particularly in the early stages where some participants may be unfamiliar with participatory methods or may see evaluation as a judgemental process that could affect their program funding or jobs.

- *The need to demystify evaluation and encourage participants to think in an evaluative way.* As McKie (2003) points out, evaluation has a language and methods that can be excluding. There is a need to consider the appropriateness of the language used and the value and relevance of evaluation to those involved. The methods used to build evaluation capacity and understanding therefore require careful design, implementation and use.

Increasing rigour and trustworthiness: learnings from the field

Increasing the rigour and trustworthiness of participatory evaluations clearly requires the use of methods, criteria and strategies that are appropriate to the skills, knowledge and background of program stakeholders and the resources available. The ideal is that rigour is incorporated into all stages of the evaluation and that the theories and assumptions of evaluation professionals and others are continually questioned.

Through my work over the past decade on feminist PAR and participatory evaluation projects (with people in rural and regional Queensland and New South Wales and diverse project partners) and having undertaken reviews of literature in this field, I have identified a number of strategies that can increase the rigour and trustworthiness of each stage in participatory evaluation projects. These strategies include:

- community participation, engagement and communication methods that develop relations of mutual trust and open communication

- using multiple theories and methodologies, multiple sources of data, and multiple methods of data collection

- ongoing meta-evaluation and critical reflection

- critical assessment of the intended and unintended impacts of evaluations using relevant theoretical models

- using rigorous data analysis and reporting processes

- participant reviews of evaluation case studies, data analysis and reports.

Community participation and engagement processes

Rebien (1996, p. 169) argues that stakeholder analysis is critical to identifying all of the stakeholder groups that could potentially be involved in participatory evaluations and to improving the evaluation. In programs and projects that seek the participation of a broad diversity of community members in widespread locations over a number of years, effective participation and ongoing communication methods are also required to improve the quality and trustworthiness of the evaluation.

The following strategies can increase the effectiveness and inclusiveness of community participation and engagement processes:

- *Identifying relevant stakeholders and personally inviting them to participate.* Program staff can assist in developing lists of people and organisations that could be invited to participate. Program coordinators, community development officers and community health and education workers with strong networks and long-term relationships with a broad diversity of community groups and key community members can provide particularly useful assistance in identifying key people.

- *Using multiple methods for ongoing communication and participation.* Both face-to-face communication and communication via technologies such as email, phone and conferencing systems are valuable. However, relationships need to be built through face-to-face meetings and workshops before technologies can be effectively used for significant evaluation activities. An interesting outcome of a recent project that I managed, was that some rural participants felt more empowered to make critical comments about the project in workshops that used interactive conferencing technology to link up the participating communities with the research team and project partners (Lennie et al. 2004).

- *Building mutual trust and open communication* through actively listening to participants in an empathetic way, facilitating discussions and gathering continuous feedback on the evaluation process through face-to-face meetings, workshops and via technologies, and using this feedback to improve the processes used. The development of such relationships is vital to achieving high-quality outcomes and more trustworthy and richer data as well as leading to better feedback concerning the analysis and interpretation of evaluation data.

- *Using processes that aim to be inclusive and empowering for a diversity of participants.* This requires a sufficient understanding of participants' needs, issues and goals, the relationships between those involved, and high-level facilitation and negotiation skills. It also requires an awareness of the power relations that may arise and the potentially disempowering effects of participation for those with less knowledge and power.

- *Gathering relevant quantitative demographic data about participants* (i.e. gender, age, occupation, ethnicity, etc.) to enable more accurate assessment of the inclusiveness of the evaluation and the diversity of participants.

Using multiple theories, methods and data sources

Triangulation is considered by many involved in PAR, feminist and qualitative research as an important means of obtaining richer and more rigorous data and a better understanding of research or evaluation questions and their context (Dick 1992; Lather 1991; Staley & Shockley-Zalabak 1989). Staley and Shockley-Zalabak (1989, p. 250) describe triangulation as 'the use of multiple and diverse data sources and collection techniques to study a single research question or understand complex phenomena'. They go on to argue (1989, p. 253) that 'multilevel triangulation' is useful in feminist research as it encourages use

of the researcher's complex personal experiences, enables a contextual portrayal of participants, and 'encourages a view of subjects as active participants who help define research agendas, provide data, and verify data interpretation'. However, Lather (1991, p. 67) suggests that triangulation needs to be expanded beyond the use of multiple measures to include 'multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes', and argues that researchers 'must consciously utilise designs which seek counter patterns as well as convergence if data are to be credible'.

Findings from the evaluations of various community-based projects I have worked on demonstrate that an interdisciplinary approach that uses multiple theoretical and methodological frameworks and multiple data collection methods and sources of data can greatly increase the trustworthiness and rigour of the evaluation and its outcomes. For example, the evaluation and impact assessment of the feminist PAR project, 'Enhancing Rural Women's Access to Interactive Communication Technologies' (Lennie 2001; The Rural Women and ICTs Research Team 1999)[1] employed two distinctive methodologies, multiple methods, and multiple sources of data. The two methodologies were: a participatory feminist evaluation methodology based on praxis feminist theories and 'feminist deconstructive ethnography' that incorporated feminist poststructuralist theories, ethnographic research and discourse analysis.

The methods used in the participatory evaluation and impact assessment included:

- qualitative methods such as individual interviews, focus group discussions conducted via teleconference, participant observations of activities such as workshops and online conversation groups, maintaining a fieldwork diary, feedback questionnaires with open-ended questions, analysis of participants' diaries and email messages, and case studies of the impacts of the project on four diverse participants

- quantitative methods such as feedback questionnaires with fixed-answer questions, statistical analysis of demographic and other relevant data on participants, and calculation of the number and percentage of women in different groups (including farming women and professional town-based women) who had various needs and how well they were met

- regular formal and informal critical reflections on the project with rural women participants, other members of the research team and project partners

- coding and analysis of interview and focus group data using the qualitative data analysis program NUD•IST[2]

- triangulation of the multiple sources of data and the multiple theories, methodologies, methods and data sources that were used.

This approach enabled greater creativity and flexibility in the design, conduct and reporting of the evaluation (Lennie 2001). Using multiple frameworks and methods enabled the richness and complexity of the data to be illustrated, a diversity of participants and stakeholders to be given voice, and analysis and interpretation of the data from different perspectives. A pragmatic, pluralist, critical, open inquiry approach to participatory feminist evaluations was advocated.

Ongoing meta-evaluation and critical reflection

The quality and responsiveness of participatory evaluations are also enhanced by engaging in an ongoing process of meta-evaluation and critical reflection. This involves regularly collecting and analysing formal and informal feedback on the methods, processes and outcomes of participatory evaluations and individually and collaboratively engaging in 'critical reflexivity' regarding projects. This process is important to the validation of PAR and participatory evaluations as it opens up these methods to critical scrutiny and assessment. Fonow and Cook (1991, p. 2) define reflexivity as 'the tendency of feminists to reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process'. This process is often advocated by feminists, action researchers and ethnographers as a means of achieving greater honesty and accountability in their research work. Critical reflection can also allow action researchers and evaluators to acknowledge the often contradictory agendas that underpin methods that aim to be empowering and inclusive.

An example of an ongoing process of meta-evaluation is provided by the LEARNERS[3] project, which was conducted over three years in collaboration with people in two rural Queensland communities, five public sector partners, and five research team members (Lennie et al. 2004). Using PAR and participatory evaluation methodologies, a major objective of this project was to critically assess the use of the 'LEARNERS process', which aimed to build the capacities of rural participants in evaluating their community IT projects. The ongoing meta-evaluation and critical analysis of the impacts of the project drew on multiple sources of qualitative and quantitative data and used multiple data collection and analysis methods. This data included:

- Responses to feedback questionnaires completed by workshop participants in each community.

- Transcripts of individual in-depth interviews conducted with people who represented a diversity of participants in terms of level of participation, community organisation, gender and occupation.

- Transcripts of three focus group discussions held with participants that provided valuable contextual information about local community networks and relationships and women's formal and information leadership.

- Notes and transcripts from critical reflection workshops held in each year of the project. These involved key community participants, project partners and the research team and were conducted both face-to-face and via conferencing technologies.

- Email messages containing feedback on project activities and suggested revisions to the LEARNERS process.

- Entries in a fieldwork diary.

- Responses to an online questionnaire about project impacts completed by project partners.

Benefits and outcomes of the ongoing meta-evaluation of the LEARNERS project included:

- The feedback, critical reflections and suggested improvements enabled the researchers to make continuous changes to the project, and the methods that were used, in ways that better met the diverse needs and interests of project participants and partners.

- The information shared in activities such as workshops and focus groups provided greater mutual understanding about the project, the issues affecting the communities involved, and the local contexts.

- The use of multiple sources of data and multiple methods, the ongoing feedback from participants on draft reports and case studies and a summary of the impact assessment increased the rigour and trustworthiness of the final case studies and project reports.

- The multiple evaluation methods enabled a number of important communication and contextual issues to be raised. They included the need for the LEARNERS process, and the language used to explain the process, to be simplified to increase community members' understanding. This feedback eventually led to the creation of a user-friendly online resource called 'EvaluateIT' (http://www.evaluateit.org) that enables community groups to effectively plan and conduct participatory evaluations of community IT projects, using an easy-to-understand four-step process with key questions and examples at each step.

Rigorous data analysis processes

Rigour in undertaking the data analysis and interpretation can be increased through the following strategies and methods:

■ *Taking a 'critical reference group perspective'* (Wadsworth 1997, p. 16). This involves the analysis and the incorporation into the analysis of participants' own understandings of their needs, the needs of familiar others, and key concepts such as 'program sustainability' or 'women's empowerment'. This approach enabled a better understanding of the needs, values, interests and agendas of the various groups who participated in the Rural Women and ICTs project. It also assisted in producing more valid interpretations of the evaluation data. However, feminist evaluators were considered to need an awareness of their own (possibly incorrect) assumptions about rural women's needs and the processes that rural women themselves may find empowering (Lennie 2001).

■ *Using relevant theoretical models to frame the analysis, such as models of individual and group empowerment.* An example of this was the development and use of a model of empowerment/disempowerment to critically assess the impacts of the Rural Women and ICTs project. This model drew on an existing model of empowerment, various meanings of the concept of 'empowerment' provided by participants and stakeholders, and a rigorous analysis of relevant data collected, using the NUD•IST program. The model identified four forms of empowerment and disempowerment: *social*, *technological*, *political* and *psychological* that were used to assess the effects of the project and activities such as online conversation groups on participants (Lennie 2001, 2002a). This model was subsequently used effectively to rigourously assess the intended and unintended impacts of the LEARNERS project on individual participants and the community organisations involved (Lennie et al. 2004; Lennie 2005).

■ *Employing data analysis programs* such as NUD•IST and NVivo to efficiently code, manage and analyse large volumes of qualitative data more effectively.

Other strategies include:

■ Developing sets of criteria for assessing the level of significance of program impacts, based on the number who indicated this impact on themselves or others and participants' assessments of how significant the impacts were.

■ Developing rigorous criteria for selecting individual participants or particular groups of participants for the development of case studies.

■ Where possible, stating the actual number of participants or interviewees who gave a particular type of response, rather than using imprecise terms such as 'some' or 'many' in the written analysis.

Participant review and reporting

A number of other strategies can be used effectively to increase the rigour and trustworthiness of case studies and reports on participatory evaluations. They include:

■ asking a representative selection of participants and stakeholders to critically assess and review preliminary analyses of data, and to draft evaluation case studies and reports

■ ensuring that a diversity of voices is represented in the evaluation report

■ illustrating evaluation case studies and reports with rigorously selected examples of data such as verbatim quotations from interviews and feedback questionnaires.

Critical reviews by stakeholders of preliminary data analysis and interpretation, draft case studies and evaluation reports are a significant means of obtaining face validity (Lather 1991). Guba and Lincoln (1989, p. 239) argue that the process of testing data, preliminary categories and interpretations with members of stakeholder groups is 'the single most crucial technique for establishing credibility'. They suggest that this process should take place continuously during the data collection and analysis and again when the case study is prepared.

The following provide examples of this process from the Rural Women and ICTs project. Drafts of the case studies about four participants were sent to each of these participants for comment, validation and reflection. They all agreed that their experiences had been accurately represented and gave permission for personal details to be included. Drafts of a case study on a contentious online discussion about native title and reconciliation were also sent to interested participants and others for comment and discussion. This feedback, discussion and reflection were incorporated into the final analysis, case studies and reports, thus enhancing trustworthiness.

Discussions about these case studies were considered to have contributed to the 'dialogical validity' (Sirotnik & Oakes 1990) of the evaluation. This is described as 'the capability of information to nurture, stimulate, or otherwise provoke rigorous discourse' (Sirotnik & Oakes 1990, p. 46) and is considered highly relevant to evaluations based on social justice principles. This process may have raised awareness of new concepts and issues related to rural women's participation and empowerment, and the power-knowledge relations enacted in the project, which some participants and stakeholders may not have considered previously.

A similar process of ongoing participant and stakeholder review was important to increasing the rigour and trustworthiness of case studies and evaluation reports produced by the LEARNERS project.

Conclusion

The value of PAR and participatory evaluations in improving programs and assessing their impacts more accurately is widely acknowledged. However, concerns remain about the rigour and validity of participatory methods and other limitations and issues. This paper has suggested various strategies to improve the rigour and trustworthiness of participatory evaluations in order to increase the credibility of results and the use of these results to continually improve community programs and related policies. Sources of rigour identified as effective include:

- undertaking effective stakeholder analysis and using community participation, communication and engagement methods that develop relations of mutual trust and open communication

- using multiple theories and methodologies, multiple sources if data, multiple methods of data collection and analysis, and triangulation of multiple methodologies and data sources

- conducting ongoing meta-evaluations and engaging in regular critical reflections on the program and the outcomes of the evaluation

- employing relevant theoretical models in the analysis such as the model of empowerment/ disempowerment used to assess the impacts of the Rural Women and ICTs project and the LEARNERS project

- using rigorous data analysis processes, including qualitative data analysis programs

- inviting stakeholders to review draft case studies, impact assessments and reports and illustrating reports with rigorously-selected quotations.

In projects involving people living in geographically dispersed communities, technologies such as interactive conferencing systems and email may assist in obtaining more open and honest feedback about projects (Lennie et al. 2004). However, relations of trust and open communication need to be developed through face-to-face meetings and workshops before such technologies can be used effectively.
A number of factors can obviously hinder the effective implementation of the strategies and methods suggested in this paper, particularly insufficient time, funding, resources, skills and knowledge, and the use of inappropriate language and communication methods. If these issues are overcome, there are significant benefits in increasing the rigour and trustworthiness of participatory evaluations, such as greater community inclusion and empowerment, organisational learning and program sustainability.

Notes

1 This project was conducted from 1996–1997 by a research team from the Faculties of Business and Education at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) in Brisbane in collaboration with eight project partners and women in 10 Queensland communities. It was funded by an Australian Research Council grant.

2 'NUD•IST' stands for Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising. This program and the NVivo program were developed by Qualitative Solutions and Research Pty Ltd.

3 'LEARNERS' stands for Learning, Evaluation, Action & Reflection for New technologies, Empowerment and Rural Sustainability. This project was conducted from 2001–2004 by a research team from the Faculties of Business and Creative Industries at QUT. It was funded by grants from the Australian Research Council and the Office for Women, Queensland Government.

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