EVALUATE IT:

TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF EVALUATION

IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

CONTENTS

Noreen Kearney, Chairperson, Combat Poverty Agency

This collection of papers on evaluation of community development projects is the first to be issued by the Combat Poverty Agency, as well as being the first of its kind in describing the Irish experience in this field.

By outlining how evaluation has been or might be undertaken in community development programmes it is hoped that it will be of value to projects, community groups and students engaged in similar work in Ireland and elsewhere.

This collection is the fruit of much hard work, analysis and reflection by the contributors. It represents a concern on their part that the effectiveness of their work be demonstrated by assessment which is both scientific and sensitive.

In the past there has been a tendency to rely on traditional research methods to evaluate community development activities, often with disappointing results. Without the acceptance by and involvement of local people and project staff in the evaluation of programmes of this nature, any worthwhile assessment of success (or failure) is unlikely to be achieved.

There has also been a reliance on evaluation experience from outside Ireland, principally in writings from Britain and America.   This collection of papers provides the evidence that such reliance is no longer justified. Indeed evaluation methods which have been tested here can now provide a model to evaluators in other countries.

The papers include accounts, both descriptive and analytical, of what evaluation should consist of in an Irish context as well as some innovative and imaginative evaluations which have already been done in this country.

We believe it will be of use to anyone embarking on community development initiatives.   It will help to ensure that the views of those who have previously been written about by researchers from outside their communities, will in future be fully and actively incorporated into any evaluation of work in this field.

Noreen Kearney

1   BACKGROUND

by

Bernadette Barry

Mary Whelan.

On 1st December 1985, the European Commission launched a
four-year European Programme to Combat Poverty.   It
involved sixty five action-research projects which would
work together to develop and exchange more effective
methods for combating poverty in the different member
states of the European Community.*

The projects are concerned with groups of people particularly
vulnerable to poverty: the long-term unemployed, the young
unemployed, the elderly, single parent families, second
generation migrants, refugees, returning migrants and various
'marginal' groups of the population, notably the homeless.
In the Republic of Ireland, the projects in the programme
were co-funded initially by the Department of Social Welfare
and, since it was established in September 1986, by the
Combat Poverty Agency.

Levels of Evaluation.   From the beginning, it was envisaged
by the European Commission that since this was to be an
innovative programme that it should be properly evaluated.
In fact, two levels of evaluation were seen as necessary:

* See Appendix 1 for short descriptions of the projects in
the Republic of Ireland taking part in the Second European
Programme to Combat Poverty.

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(i)   internal evaluation, which meant that each project would

set up a system of self-evaluation;

(ii) external evaluation, which is being carried out by the Centre

for the Analysis of Social Policy at the University of Bath.

In carrying out this task, the Centre is assisted by a team

of eight researchers each of whom is responsible for monitoring

and evaluating the projects within one or more countries of

the Community.

This collection of papers is concerned primarily with the experience to date of the Irish projects in setting up self-evaluation procedures.   The various contributions represent work, at different stages, to clarify the meaning of evaluation in projects which are concerned with community-based action leading to social change.   The contributions are mainly papers presented at Seminars which have been held since 1986 to discuss evaluation issues.

In January 1986, one month after the programme began, representatives of all the projects came together for a seminar on evaluation.   It was chaired by Professor Conor Ward of the Department of Social Science, U.C.D., and included contributions from people with experience of evaluation in other settings.   These were intended to help in clarifying approaches to evaluation in the early stages of the programme.   The seminar also focused on the relationship between internal evaluation in the projects and external evaluation being carried out on behalf of the European Commission.

During and after this seminar, discussion on the best way
of carrying out internal evaluation centred on three
possible options:

(i)   leaving responsibility for evaluation with project staff and
        management.   Procedures to ensure that it is carried out are
        built into the work from the beginning;

(ii)   recruitment to the project team of a part-time worker with
        responsibility for ensuring that evaluation is undertaken;

(iii)   contracting evaluation out to a body (e.g. a social research
        organisation or a university) with experience of relevant
        evaluation:.

Evaluation options in the projects eventually worked out
as follows: the four Dublin community based projects and
the Sligo project decided to recruit a part-time person
with responsibility for evaluation to the project team.
The three rural projects linked up with the Centre for
Community Development Studies in University College Galway.
The Simon Community project is linked, for evaluation
purposes, to the Social Science Research Centre in the
National Institute for Higher Education, Limerick.

Clarification.   Evaluation procedures adopted in this
programme will provide us with opportunities to examine how
the different approaches are working.   Already, individual
evaluators have adapted and clarified the methods they are
using as the Combat Poverty programme and the needs of their
projects have become clearer.   This process of clarification
has been helped by regular meetings of the part-time
evaluators and opportunities for everyone involved in

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evaluation in the projects to get together at Inter-project meetings.

One of these meetings was in Birmingham at a seminar on monitoring and evaluation attended by staff and management from all the British and Irish projects in the European Programme. Another meeting was in Dublin in December 1986, when representatives from the Irish projects spent a day looking at how evaluation was progressing with guidance from Professor Mike Miller of Boston University.

Insights. This collection of papers focuses on many concerns of evaluators. They present valuable insights both for evaluators, workers on projects using community development as the model of work, and their management committees and funders. The papers from the projects on the Combat Poverty programme reflect work which was undertaken at the early stages of evaluation design. At that time, evaluators were concerned with defining their role and discussing appropriate approaches to evaluation on the projects. The paper by Ward (Paper 2) as an introduction to the topic defines evaluation as learning from experience which can lead to increased effectiveness and perhaps, decrease the emotional demands of innovative social action. Miller, in his paper (Paper 3) uses the term lesson drawing to describe the same activity. He says that one of the components of evaluation is the undertaking of research and reflection "that helps the organization to understand better what it is doing, what effects it has, and what it might do better ...".

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The contribution by Miller raises the many issues of concern in evaluation. One of these is the emphasis on achievement on poverty programmes and of measuring success. As he says, the expectation of success and standards used to measure it are often stricter than those applied to other activities of government. Miller goes on to say that there is a subsequent pressure then on evaluation to 'prove' success and on the action workers to become involved in 'alleviatory activities', such as improving services available to the poor. He recognises that one of the difficulties of evaluation is "gaining a clear picture of what an organization actually does, not what it professes or hopes that it is doing".

He lays out some of the ways this can be approached. The application of the suggested approaches could be applied by some of the projects in the present Combat Poverty programme. Finally, Miller points to the need for evaluation 'to make a case' for maintaining or increasing funding for a poverty programme. In this regard he says "the need is to educate beyond that simple thinking so that a wide range of actions is regarded as mandated by the responsibility assigned to a poverty program."

Approaching Evaluation. The contributions from participants in the Combat Poverty programme present a range of ideas on evaluation both from the perspective of internal and external evaluation. The location of the project within a community, the political, social and economic structure of which it is

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a part is addressed. The location of the project in
community underlies the approach to evaluation of the Centre
of Community Development Studies in UCG (Paper 8). Mernagh
in his paper (Paper 7) also gives importance to this
dimension of evaluation when he emphasises the necessity of
monitoring the "shifting internal community and external
contexts". This is to assess the direction of change in
the community for the project.

All the papers from the projects stress the necessity of
monitoring activities to varying extents and in different
ways. Examples are given on how this is being undertaken.
Obviously, monitoring is seen as an essential part of
evaluation.

The actual skills of evaluators are emphasised by the
contributors, Barry and Hensey (Paper 4), Lee (Paper 5)
and O'Connor (Paper 6) to an extent whereby 'social skills'
of evaluators are recognised as a necessary requirement for
successful evaluation. The evaluator needs to have a
certain amount of flexibility in approach and has to establish
trust amongst the people on the project. 'Good-will' and
'commitment' to evaluation are key requirements on the part
of the project as a whole.

The paper by Kilmurray (Paper 9) is particularly helpful
in setting out the questions to be asked by any organisation
deciding a format for undertaking evaluation. These are
questions such as 'what is action research', 'what is

evaluation' and 'what are the requirements of the project'. The various options on the 'how' are then examined and the paper concludes by addressing the issue of 'who' does the evaluation.

The papers by Faughnan (Paper 10) and Whelan (Paper 11) describe evaluations undertaken on two different projects in the inner city of Dublin. These contributions are valuable in the openess of the authors when sharing their experiences and the approaches in evaluations which reached conclusions.

Evaluation can be a contentious issue. Some of us have wished we could find a better word. Maybe at the end of the four years we will come up with a word or a phrase which expresses better the central part it can play in community development work. It can help with on-going planning in the projects, it can help to focus on issues which concern local communities and need to be brought to national attention in order to bring about policy changes. At the Birmingham seminar, the belief that evaluation could produce 'politically persuasive arguments' was stated more than once. It will be worth the searching and the discussion if those arguments are persuasive enough to contribute to the elimination of poverty from our society.

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2   THE AIMS OF EVALUATION IN THE POVERTY PROGRAMME

by

Conor Ward, Professor of Social Science,

University College, Dublin,

opening the First Evaluation Day in The Poverty

Programme, 17 January 1986.

I see evaluation as systematically learning from experience.
And, as George Bernard Shaw put it, if we are learning from
it, "experience isn't what happens to us - it is what we
make of what happens to us".   To make anything of what is
happening to us we need to advert to what is happening, to
analyse what is happening and to act on our analysis of what
is happening.   The trouble is that when we are involved in
a programme or a project (or even a way of life) usually we
are so busy coping with what is happening to us that we
haven't time or energy for analysis and reaction.   In fact,
we may not always advert to what is happening, especially
when we get used to a usual way of doing things.   That is
the main reason for suggesting that it is worthwhile to
have an explicit process of evaluation built into everything
we do or plan to do: we want to learn from our experience
and so increase our effectiveness and, maybe, decrease the
emotional demands of innovative social action.

Passing on Experience.   Another reason for putting time
and effort into systematic evaluation is that, as well as
being an active ingredient in the development of its own

project, experience should be something that other projects
can learn from.   It should be possible for successful
innovations to be repeated successfully without the trouble
and trauma of learning all over again.   And it would be
nice if mistakes had only to be made once or twice.   It
should be possible to borrow experience as well as to buy
it.   This role of evaluation adds to the aims of advertance,
analysis and action that of producing an adequate account of
what is happening in a project.

The third aim of evaluation, as I see it, is to ensure that
effective programmes and innovative action have an impact
that is greater and wider than their impact on the lives of
those involved in the projects.   From the Poverty Programme
there should come a 'Poverty Policy and Practice' both for
Ireland and for the European Community.

My vision of learning from experience through evaluation is
an ambitious one and it will have to be planned for and
worked for.   There is no do-it-yourself kit available.
In fact, there is more controversy than consensus about
what evaluation means and how it should be done.   The
experiments in evaluation undertaken in Ireland in recent
years compare very favourably with what has been going on in
other countries.   We can start by learning from them and
we can continue by sharing experience, concerns and plans
as the projects develop over the years.

All of us here have experience of evaluation in one way or

another and all of us are interested in what it might mean for the projects which are currently coming into being in the anti-poverty programme. Our discussions will provide an opportunity for us to clarify what evaluation should be and what it should not be, to analyse our experience, both good and bad, and to talk about how the Interim Combat Poverty Board can help the projects to make evaluation useful to themselves, valuable for others and effective in our campaign to combat poverty in Ireland and the rest of the European Community.

A programme to combat poverty is more than a series of actions - it is a programme to change the situation. The extent to which it is a real programme to combat poverty and not just a series of palliatives for those who are poor depends largely, though not exclusively of course, on how good evaluation is. And, while we are waiting for change in policy, practice and power, good evaluation should enable the series of anti-poverty actions to be effective and efficient in improving the conditions and capacity for self-help of those involved in the projects.

3   EVALUATION AS LESSON-DRAWING

by

S.M. Miller, Professor of Sociology and Economics,

Boston University.

Which Evaluation? Evaluation has become a very popular
term in both policy and social science formulations. The
term is used in many different ways, extending from casual
commentary on the problems and progress of a program to
presumably rigorous 'hard' quantitative, cost-benefit,
econometric estimates of their effects. Thus they range
from how to improve a program to judging its impacts.
Improving and judging are obviously related: judgment about
effects tells us about issues to which we should direct
attention; improvement affect outcomes and judgments about
them.

I find it useful to track this omnibus term 'evaluation'
into four components:

(i)   monitoring, checking to see if the project is doing the things
        that it has promised its funders to do and spending its funds
        in financially acceptable ways - a policing function to a
        major extent;

(ii)   lesson-drawing or organizational learning, efforts to
        undertake the kind of research and reflection that helps the
        organization to understand better what it is doing, what
        effects it has, and what it might do better;

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(iii)   assessment is a more systematic effort at judging the effects
        of a program than is involved in organizational learning;

(iv)   quantitative evaluation is the hard, expensive, statistical
        pursuit of the effects of a program.

Monitoring and lesson-drawing are the focus of this article.
At this stage of Combat Poverty, the greatest need is for
organizational or internal learning which involves feedback,
observation, research and reflection.   At the same time,
it is necessary to begin to lay the base for the assessments
that should appear at certain stages in the program in order
to inform or promote policy discussions.   It is important
to recognize and act on the recognition that any discussion
of policy is, at least at some levels, a political question.
Evaluation in its many forms is not only an effort at
gaining an objective picture but also an intervention in
a political game or world.   To a major extent, attention-
getting and issue-or frame-setting are a large part of the
task of programs like Combat Poverty.

The Contexts.   Combat Poverty conducts small-scale,
presumably pilot, projects that are thought of in terms of
their potential national impact.   The challenge is to
develop a national or local authority perspective without
a clear mandate to have that broad concern and yet maintain
accountability to the neighbourhood users of the specific
projects.   There is a built-in tension between immediate
alleviation of want and difficulty in a neighbourhood and
the national, long-run, prevention of poverty.   A

disturbing ambiguity also appears: Combat Poverty receives
governmental funding for its projects at the same time that
a primary task is to raise questions about the performance
and adequacy of government policy and programs. Usually,
he who pays the piper calls the tune; Combat Poverty is
trying to reverse that adage: she who needs the piper calls
the tune. That is a difficult political situation
complicated by the fact that we often choose to ignore, that
staff often appoints itself as the spokespeople for the poor,
speaking in their name. As staff we have the additional
tension of wanting to provide our specialized aid at the
same time that we want to see our clients, customers or users
(notice the uncertainty of the terms we have for those we
work with and for) as our equals with rights.

One should not assume that a poverty program has an indefinite
life even where legislation suggests that it does.
Politicians have a low capacity to defer gratification,
especially when it comes to the poor. They look for 'results'
which are politically comfortable. Poverty programs that
are willing 'to tell it as it is' are seldom reassuring to
politicians and bureaucrats who do not want to change the
status quo. This situation calls for making a decision
about how 'realistic' should be the recommendations of
poverty programs? Should they only seek changes which
have widespread acceptance or should they offer criticisms
which imply the necessity of deepseated changes even when
they have little chance of short-term acceptance? Avoiding
the most disturbing challenges which might promote resistance

and backlash in order to promote discussions of vital
issues is one approach; such an approach always engenders
the question of if not now, when? Issues of this kind not
only affect the design of poverty programs which are
exploratory but also affect their evaluation or lesson-
drawing. What kind of lessons do we seek; how disturbing
or challenging may they be; how broad or narrow should be
the recommendations?

Accountability. Compounding the difficulties of evaluation
of poverty programs is the fact that they are held
accountable to much higher standards than programs aimed
at, say, economic development, aid to business, military
power and the like. At one level, poverty programs receive
much closer scrutiny than do many other governmental
activities. If other expenditures experienced the close
examination of poverty programs, they might be regarded in
less positive ways than they are. At another level,
poverty programs are expected to reach higher levels of
'success' than most other programs. The goal that is
frequently, if sublimely, held is that they should 'eliminate'
poverty as though small-scale poverty programs had the means
to do this. By this standard poverty programs must fail:
they simply are not in a position to accomplish this mighty
goal.

What can poverty programs, especially pilot-type ones, do
in this situation? The need is to think preventively about

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poverty - how to prevent families and individuals from becoming poor. But most programs about poverty are alleviatory, trying to lighten the burden of inadequate incomes by somehow improving services available to the poor. One way that 'evaluation' can help is by bringing attention within the program to spotting the steps and programs that could prevent falling into poverty in the first place or keep a once-poor family from becoming poor again. A primary mission of poverty programs is to keep the eye of society on the obligation to prevent the torment of poverty. The situation where overburdened staff can engage at best only in alleviatory activities which they recognize as inadequate leads to burnout and dissatisfaction. Providing service and analysis is important if a staff is to feel that it is doing more than cleaning up the river downstream while it is continually polluted upstream.

Who is the client or master of the staff and the audience for the evaluation? Is it the state which provides funds? If so, does that mean the politicians or the bureaucrats? Do we avoid telling them things that they would rather not hear, such as the inadequacy of transfer payments or the underfunding of services or the absence of jobs that people seek? Or should we be hard-hitting and unmindful of negative reactions and use the opportunity of a poverty program to say what does not receive positive notices from these our masters? What does 'responsibility' often invoked against those who disturb establishments, mean

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in this situation?   Or are our masters those to whom we directly provide services, those in the individual poverty projects which we minister and administer?   They are a small number of all the poor, almost by definition where a poverty program offers pilot projects to learn about the possibilities of larger interventions.   If we speak in their name, how do they gain their own voice?

Or are our masters the larger population of poor persons? And are their interests different from those immediately involved in our programs?   How do we establish a right to speak in their name?   This is no minor issue when we do not have a definite name for those whose needs we wish to speak about: are they clients, users, customers or - citizens?   Understanding to whom we wish to speak and in the voice and name of whom is vital to conducting effective programs and interpreting, improving, and judging them and their implications.

What are the Goals?   As is now well known among those involved in evaluative types of studies, obtaining clearcut specification of goals against which to measure performance is a major problem.   One reason is often neglected: the purpose of many programs is to come to a decision about what is a worthwhile, practical goal rather than to test a program's efficacy in reaching that goal.   Often we are seeking to discern what we possibly might be able to do in new or depressing circumstances rather than thinking

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that we know in advance what it is we seek to accomplish.
Many programs are searches and explorations rather than
specified experiments, the implicit and often explicit
outlook of those who promote evaluations. With poverty
programs suffering from inadequate funding, absence of key
resources like jobs, deep problems, and political reluctance
to switch attention from better-situated citizens, the
probing for an adequate, authentic, useful and feasible
purpose is often the central goal. We seek to learn what
we might do usefully rather than checking on how well we
have travelled the road to a cost-effective performance.

Having noted the built-in uncertainty of goal, let me move
to outline some likely goals of poverty programs. One,
provide better services to those in immediate contact with
poverty programs. This is essential to win credibility
among the users of programs and a sense of authenticity and
confidence among the staff. It is also crucial to gain
acceptance among politicians, officials and citizens
generally. Is it a sufficient goal? No. The people
served by a project may be worse off as a result of larger
changes affecting their lives despite the excellence of the
project's services. Nor are the much more numerous poor
not involved in the poverty program helped. Decent service
performance is essential; it is clearly insufficient.

Two, affect local and national procedures and policies.
This objective comprises new legislation, changing existing
legislation, achieving institutional changes to improve

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the situation of the poor who are served by agencies. Intentions, resources and implementation are all involved. Changes of this kind can be most disturing to politicians and officials even if many of us would think of them as inoffensive and necessary. Making recommendations, then, is only one step. They need a sendoff and support so that positive action might occur. We need to make sure that someone is listening to and pushing for action on proposals.

Third, develop and deepen public and political concern and activity for the poor. Issues of poverty compete with many other issues for public attention and resources. Gaining action requires that poverty not be ignored or downgraded as a challenge to our societies. A poverty program has to learn how to bring positive attention to the plights and needs of the poor.

Four, empower the poor. A major objective is to aid the poor to speak and act for themselves, to avoid the dependence that they are usually characterized as having fallen into. True, it is economic dependence that is attacked but overcoming political dependence - either that of people like us speaking in their names or politicians presumably acting for them without any sharp process of accountability in place - may be a crucial lever of change. Seeking to empower the poor, if honestly, authentically and thoughtfully pursued, may be a major way of showing our concern for them.

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The goal of empowerment is the most politically dangerous
objective, as it is likely to be perceived as undermining
existing political arrangements. The goal is easily
attacked as going beyond the mandate of a poverty body which
should provide services but not disturb political and social
equilibria. Consequently, if empowerment is pursued as a
goal, it is not served by empty, provocative rhetoric but by
careful, thoughtful,defensible building. Ineffective
posturing does not help the poor.

Goal one of providing services is likely to prevail. The
background and experience of project staff leads to this
way of operating. Further, delivering on improving the
immediate lives of the people we serve is the first need,
both morally and politically. If we fail to perform well,
we have no right to advocate, at least in the eyes of others
if not always in our own eyes. The challenge is to build
quality and diligence into the pursuit of useful servicing
but to contribute as well to the other goals. This is no
easy obligation. If we fail to move towards the objectives
of improving national and local policies and procedures,
deepen public understanding of and concern for poverty, and
empower poor people, we will not have achieved more than a
temporary pickup in the lives of a limited number of poor
people - not an insignificant accomplishment but one that
fails most poor people and the possibility offered by a
national program to combat poverty.

Investigating purpose, goal, aim or objective is a crucial

step in self or organizational learning.   It should not
be assumed that purpose is clear, unambiguous and commonly
accepted inside and outside the project and program, nor
that our activities closely match our purpose.

How we learn.   This section offers some leads about lesson-
drawing, the process of learning about what we are engaged
in so as to improve our practices.   Records, observation,
interviews and, most important, reflection are all involved
in lesson-drawing.   The key is to understand what a project
or program is doing and not doing and to investigate what
the effects are of these actions and inactions.   A first
step is to examine financial expenditures.   Having useful
budgets is a crucial need.   (Specifying the objectives of
spending, not just a broad category of 'staff salaries' is
crucial to understanding what an organization is actually
doing).   Does the way that the organization spends its
money reflect its main concerns?   A good test: would
someone who knew only the data of financial outlays come
to an accurate conclusion about what are the most important
goals of the organization?   Do spending allocations match
goals?   If not, why?   What is changeable in the situation?
Similarly, keeping time budgets - a listing of how staff
spends each hour in a week or other time period - can be
very revealing about what the organization is doing rather
than what the staff would like to believe that it is doing.

Neither money nor time budgets tell how well a project is
performing.   Rather, they indicate how well its deployment

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of its main resources of money and staff accords with its goals. Trying to understand the why and how of what is actually occurring may be illuminating as well as disturbing. Gaining a clear picture of what an organization actually does, not what it professes or hopes that it is doing, is exceedingly difficult, frequently avoided, but essential to improving its performance.

A second approach is to make vocal and discussable the assumptions which the project and program rely on to be successful, effective and authentic. For example, is there an assumption that a referral of a participant to another service actually results in that service accepting the referred person and providing the attention and care that is needed? What basis is there for operating on the basis of that assumption? A third way of learning is to try to uncover what concepts and theories are implicit in what the project is doing. Are they reasonable ways of interpreting what goes on? For example, how is the decline of feelings of community in a housing project explained? How does this explanation (or theory, if you will) affect what the staff does?

A useful device is to reflect on the terms, metaphors and analogies which become common language in a project. In poverty programs, sexual and military metaphors are often used; Exhibit A is 'Combat Poverty' or, in the American case, 'the war against poverty'. How do these terms condition the way we think and do things? Particularly useful is to discern changes in the language that the staff

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and participants may employ or to note differences in the way that staff and participants describe an activity. For example, the training element of a job training program may be emphasized by the staff as a hope about participants' long-term job prospects, while the participants may see the job training scheme as a job and source of immediate income, de-emphasizing the training hope and connotations about the future. These differences may have deep significance for the operation of programs and the interactions of participants and staff.

A fourth approach is to raise the question of what is known and not known about what is going on with both participants and staff? Why are some things not known? Is there a characteristic pattern? What information and understanding are needed? How can they be obtained? How should the project change on the basis of what might become known? That is, the search for greater information and understanding should be seen as a basis for change rather than assigned to a file for later retrieval.

Fifth, what are satisfying and unsatisfying experiences for both staff and those participating in the program? What are the important convergences and divergences in feelings and judgments? How much confidence can be reposed in staff's estimates of participants' reactions? What is the project doing that participants need? How much of the project is devoted to such activities? What is the project not doing that is important for the participants? Are the

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project's records adequate for the task of appraising how well it meets participants' needs? How does the project differ from what it was six months ago? Were the changes anticipated or recognized or did they 'just happen'? What does 'just happened' suggest about the organization? Are the changes regarded in a positive or negative light? In particular, has there been a change in who or what is regarded as the 'good guys' or the 'bad buys' in the situation? If you had the chance now to be where you were six months ago, what would you do differently? It is always useful to ask how have the participants and staff changed?

This listing is offered to stimulate the questions and answers that are especially pertinent to your program. Beyond questions and answers is the challenge to move from lesson-drawing to lesson-using. An important part of lesson-drawing is involving people so that they want to act on the lessons that they helped to develop.

Positive Public Attention. The need to maintain or increase funding for a poverty program requires making a case. One should not assume that poverty programs have a firm permanence and acceptance. Support for them must constantly be won and re-won. The first step is to assure funders and the public that money is being used for the purposes designated. Poor book-keeping and questionable spending have felled many a poverty program. But the task is greater than fiscal regularity; it is to deepen the

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understanding of the public, politicians and officials of
what should be going on in a program to alleviate and
prevent poverty.   The general tendency is to think in
terms of a narrow, magic bullet approach to 'ending poverty';
the need is to educate beyond that simple thinking so that
a wide range of actions is regarded as mandated by the
responsibility assigned to a poverty program.   The obligation
to meet the demands of monitoring includes widening or
changing expectations about what is to be monitored.

More important, is that staffs of poverty programs should
understand that public vacuums do not exist.   If there is
no news about a poverty program, politicians, officials and
the public are likely to think the worst.   No news connotes
bad news.   Poverty programs do not experience welcome
peaceful moratoriums or suspension of judgment.   They are
always judged.   The question is only on what basis.   If
the program does not offer public information about itself,
it will nonetheless be judged.   Even the desirability at
times of a low profile does not make no profile desirable.

A poverty program needs to shape the framework of thinking
about its activities and recommendations.   Its recommendations
should not be a sudden shock or a trumpet blast from a would-
be Joshua;   they should have a foundation in the program's
reports and public statements that have shaped the thinking
about poverty over many months.   To do this, the program
must take the initiative and not just respond to criticism.
Mainly responding to criticism is a hard, and usually

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unsuccessful way to provide a framework of analysis and
an agenda for change. How to organize experience and
present material so that they are politically persuasive
is no easy task. Interesting data that are convincing and
the anecdote that is revealing are important steps in the
presentation of programs and the education of society.
Evaluating public education activities is a crucial part of
the judgment of the effectiveness of a poverty program.
Public education is not something that is done only at the
end of a program or even a phase of it; it must be threaded
through the program if it is to have impact or ward off
attacks.

The term evaluation carries a heavy and mixed freight.
If it is regarded as part of the learning process, it is
more likely to be used. Where it does not imply learning,
it is often regarded as a court which only issues guilty
verdicts. Then, it will obviously be resisted by staff.
Making the evaluation process useful is a necessary step
in making it possible.

Note: A stimulating book on organizational learning is
Donald A. Schon, The Reflective Practioner,
New York Basic Books, 1983 (in paperback).

4   OUR APPROACH TO EVALUATION ON THE EC COMBAT

POVERTY PROJECTS

by

Lorna Hensey, Evaluator, Parents Alone Resource Centre,

Bernadette Barry, Evaluator, West Tallaght Resource Centre.

The ideas presented in this paper are drawn together from

personal experience of evaluations and from study of

evaluation models.   In our experience there is no blueprint

for evaluation.   Even within the context of community

action, evaluations will differ according to the nature of

the organisation and the project.   We believe there are a

number of factors which account for every evaluation

situation being different.   These are:

(i)   the expectations of the evaluation;

(ii)   the context of the project;

(iii)   the personnel in the project.

In designing an evaluation appropriate to any project,

all of these need to be clearly understood by the evaluator.

The expectations of an evaluation exercise which may be a

reflective process for the workers on a project or a

judgemental exercise in terms of determining the future of

a project, generally determine how it is viewed by those

involved.   The context of the project in terms of its

time span, its sources of funding and staffing levels

also determines to some extent the model of evaluation

undertaken. The views of the project personnel on evaluation will also influence the kind of model employed on the project and the process of the evaluation.

Social Skills in Evaluation. In order to reach any level of understanding of a project's structure, the evaluator has to use her skills in observation and social relations. This means she has to get the 'feel' of the project, 'see' what is going on for what it really is, not how she would want it to be, and establish social relations with key individuals in the project. Trust is an essential ingredient in this process. The evaluator needs to establish a level of trust among project personnel, both on a personal level and as a researcher in order to gain insight into the project's 'way of being'.

Understanding of the processes at work on the project means also reaching an understanding with, and of, the individuals in the project. The traditional emphasis on 'objectivity' in research too often allows the researcher to escape from having to expose her own feelings, ideas and personal attitudes. The approach we are suggesting means that the researcher identifies, from the start of the evaluation process, the research position from which she is working.

Flexibility in Evaluation Frameworks. In evaluation research the evaluator will most likely enter a situation with her own perspective on a framework. Yet, because of

the process of community development, she cannot assume
that this framework will remain unchanged. In choosing
an appropriate evaluation model, she needs to work from a
mutually agreed definition of the situation which allows
the model to build from that.

Research methods may also change in the process of
evaluation of community development projects. The nature
and *complexity* of community projects varies both within
projects and between different projects. Depicting such
situations requires imagination. At times, perhaps
techniques outside traditional report writing - such as
photographs, creative writings and graphics - will capture
the processes of the projects with greater effect.

The Structure of a Project. The working relations of
personnel in a project also influence the processes of the
evaluation. The evaluator, where she is employed as a
project member, enters into this structure. She needs to
negotiate her way around the different relationships in
deciding the most suitable framework for the particular
working structure.

Evaluation vis-a-vis the Work of the Project. Within a
community development project, the evaluator needs to adopt
a perspective of seeing the evaluation role and function as
being secondary to the work of the project. As researchers
in the Irish context, where our skills do not have a high

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market value and our role is just developing, this is a
difficult perspective to hold.   At most, we can aim for a
perspective which views evaluation as integral to the work
processes of community development.   Some practical
applications of this approach are as follows:

(i)   being as unobtrusive as possible;

(ii)   being adaptable to the project environment;

(iii)   keeping demands to a minimum and when they have to be made,
         making them at the appropriate time and place;

(iv)   providing feedback in order to keep people informed;

(v)   providing positive feedback whenever possible;

(vi)   when questioning or being critical, to do so in the context
         of suggesting alternative approaches;

(vii)   to see the value of an individual and their social situation
         as being important in itself rather than being part of a
         larger whole;

(viii)   to continue to reflect on one's own perspective and approach.

Conclusion.   The evaluation approach we have put forward
requires self-reflection for the evaluation and involvement
in the process of the evaluation for the personnel in the
project.   We feel that John Rowan's phrase 'objectively
subjective' best describes the approach.   This attempts
to combine both the following ways of 'seeing the world'.
It starts from a primary level of understanding where we
are subjective and reach conclusions in a way that suits
our own wishes.   It is also rational in that it makes sense
of the world in a narrow, limited and personal way.   There

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is then the objective approach, interested in facts only, in what is 'true' or 'false', in what is 'real' or 'illusion', and in what can be proved or disproved. Our approach in evaluating community development projects attempts to combine both these ways of seeing the world into a broader, searching and imaginative framework.

Ref: Rowan, John and Reason, Peter "On Making Sense" pp. 113-137 in Reason and Rowan Human Inquiry, Wiley & Sons, New York, 1981.

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5   AN APPROACH TO EVALUATION OF AN ACTION PROJECT

by

Anna Lee, Project Leader,

West Tallaght Resource Centre.

This paper is a response to the 'Guidelines for Evaluation'
drawn up for the West Tallaght Resource Centre Project by
the evaluator, Bernadette Barry. It attempts to address
a number of issues from the evaluation guidelines with
comments on their application on the ground. In this
project, the tasks assigned to the evaluator have been to:

(i)   write the story of the project as the project evolves and
        to involve others in this task;

(ii)   identify and analyse the successes of the project, its
        difficulties and the obstacles it meets.

Starting from this basis, there have been understandings
about the role of evaluation on the project. The project
management and staff believe there is a need for evaluation.
However, as evaluation has been an aspect of all the
national projects, it must be stated that it was felt that
evaluation was an obligation on the project.

Expectations. Nevertheless, once evaluation was accepted
as being part of the project, the expectations became clear.
We had the following considerations about the role of
evaluation:

(i)   self-evaluation, undertaken by the project staff themselves
       was seen as an extremely difficult, if not impossible task
       to undertake, mainly because of the nature of action-
       development work;

(ii)   external evaluation, where the evaluator is from an outside
       agency was seen also as being difficult both for the project
       and the management and staff.   It was felt that because of
       the project's unfamiliarity with the task of evaluation,
       there might be some resistance, and also that there would be
       too much distance from the work of the project on the part
       of an external evaluator;

(iii) it was considered important that the evaluator would be a team
       member who would contribute to the development of the work and
       take part in decision making.   In the context of these
       expectations a decision was made within the project to employ
       a part-time evaluator who would be a member of the project
       team.

Once the evaluator joined the team, the model for evaluation
developed out of much discussion.   The project did not feel
it had to rush into developing a model, so it is felt that
what has now evolved suits the needs of the project.   As
the objectives and the perspective of community development
in the project determine the way the project workers go about
their work on the project, it is felt that this is also
applicable to the evaluator.   It is considered to be
important both by management and staff that the research
approach used by the evaluator matches as nearly as possible
the overall approach of the project.   We are aware on the

project that research by its very nature may sometimes be in conflict with a community development action model of work.

Functions and Practice.   Evaluation on the project has two functions which are built into the work of the project. The first one is to tell the story of the project.   The second one is to identify and analyse the successes of the project.   The story of the project is being put together on the basis of records, documentation and discussion.   To date, particular aspects of the story have been written up by the evaluator.   The choices initially about events in terms of their significance and the way in which the story is actually written are made by the evaluator.   On the project, we feel that this aspect of the evaluation is important, particularly in innovative developments where other projects may be able to learn lessons.   For this reason and also because the action workers are involved in their own work, the task of writing the story has become that of the evaluator.

Evaluating the work is undertaken in two ways.   It is built into the day-to-day work of the project and it is formalised into evaluation sessions.   As the evaluator is a team member, the team and management are enabled to look continuously at the work and the direction which it is taking to ensure that it is meeting its objectives.   This process has been found positive in that it supports the work and allows realistic development.   We realise that

in its negative form it may often hinder imaginative
developments because of the over-cautious requirement of
adhering to project objectives.

Finally, our approach to evaluation is concerned with the
issue of how the project is working towards meeting its
objectives.   We hope that by adhering to this approach,
evaluation will remain a positive influence in our work.

6   EVALUATING A COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

by

Eithne O'Connor, Evaluator,

Sligo Combat Poverty Project.

To evaluate a community based development project it is
important that aims and objectives of the project be clear
from the start.   Once this clarity is achieved obtaining
full commitment from those involved in the project for
evaluation is the next step.

Deciding on a method of evaluation is important.   From my
experience at present with the Combat Poverty projects and
previously with the Rural Resource projects, I believe
that the 'qualitative' approach is by far the most suitable
for an action project where aims and objectives are always
changing and evolving.   In turn this approach necessitates
fairly constant and full-time involvement with the project
by the evaluator.

'Qualitative' evaluation implies involvement in the project
in its day to day activities and its planning.   Most
importantly it allows the evaluator the opportunity to
capture the 'story', the 'heart' of the project.   This means
that 'intangible' successes of a project are not missed as
could happen in a project using outside evaluators on a
consultancy basis.   The sort of intangible qualities in a
project I have in mind here are those such as developing

self awareness, self-confidence among the people using
the project's resources and facilities, developing group
participation skills and communication skills etc. These
'human' qualities are often the most important success in
community action project and yet have been the ones most
often lost to the records of the project either through a
failure to recognise their importance or by the use of an
external evaluation method which by nature is unable to
observe and record these.

Record Keeping. Since the importance of evaluation is a
relatively new emphasis it is important that certain
structures are arranged to facilitate it. It must not be
so vague and nebulous as to become totally misunderstood and
lost. Collecting data needs to be arranged. A method for
doing this will alter to suit the needs of each action
project. In the Sligo Combat Poverty Project the most
suitable way seems to be the designing of forms to suit each
service provided. By this I mean that, for instance, when
a person uses the Advice and Information Service a form is
completed showing what information he/she was seeking, to
whom or where he/she was referred, if there were return
visits for advice, how successful the service was in
fulfilling the need, etc. Likewise a form designed for
'counselling' needs, 'complaints' etc., would be filled for
each individual using the resources of the project. From
this is built up a comprehensive basis for on-going and
overall evaluation. Minutes of meetings, research on how

users find the project, records of conferences attended, reports of all activities within the project, taking case studies, must all be thoroughly recorded to facilitate evaluation. We then have an organised basis for self-evaluation. This together with participant observation (the 'qualitative' approach earlier spoken of) provides the method of evaluation.

Attitudes. In this short document it is impossible to enter into the many facets within an action project which have a bearing on the overall quality and usefulness of the self-evaluation produced. But one which is of key importance is that of attitude. There must be a recognition of the need for, and the value of, evaluation from all concerned with the project - from management, staff, project users, everyone. There must be a commitment there. If it is seen as an intrusion or an imposition then its worth will seriously be diminished as it cannot be complete without the co-operation and goodwill of all concerned. It makes the task of the evaluator an onerous one at times, since the notion of evaluation is relatively new and can be seen as somewhat of a 'threat' by some people. It is, therefore, important that the evaluator go to particular pains to explain her/his method of evaluation, the need for it and for what audience the evaluation is being carried out. If people can understand that evaluation is basically a method of ensuring a project has built-in structures for measuring success and failure, asking questions, reflecting and

planning, and that the good of the project is the motivating
factor, then I feel self-evaluation can be most useful indeed.

Finally, it is important that an evaluator adopting this
method of evaluation be constantly aware of the fact that
since she/he is part of the working team of the project,
using participant observation, record keeping etc. as the
tools for evaluation that the danger he/she would become too
immersed in the project is always there.   This could cause
a loss of objectivity.   Over-involvement can be problematic
and an awareness of this pitfall is important.

7   ATTEMPTING TO FACILITATE THE EVALUATION OF AN INTEGRATED
     PROGRAMME TO TACKLE POVERTY IN THE LIBERTIES OF DUBLIN:
     AN ACCOUNT FROM WITHIN.

     by   .

     Michael Mernagh, Evaluator,

     South Inner City Community Development Association.

     Evaluation in a complex community setting cannot simply

     comprise measurements of 'before' and 'after' situations.

     Though it may sometimes appear to be so, a community is

     never static.   Conditions are always changing and

     evaluation must take into account other processes that may

     intervene between the expressed aims of a programme and

     the actual outcomes.   Evaluation therefore must take into

     account other variables or changes in a community that may

     have an independent interactive effect on both the programme

     and its established goals.   It must monitor not only the

     developments and processes in the programme itself but the

     shifting internal community and external contexts, and try

     to assess, for planning purposes, in what direction change

     is already occurring.

     The S.I.C.C.D.A. Context.   The South Inner City Community

     Development association, which is a voluntary community

     umbrella organisation, is concerned with the overall

     development of that area of Dublin's Inner City called

     The Liberties (pop. 12,000).   Its major aim is to enable

     local people to initiate and manage an integrated

development programme which will attempt to meet needs of the most vulnerable people in a community which is already very deprived. It is attempting to carry out the programme in the face of forces (internal and external) which add to the already high levels of deprivation experienced within the community. Because of what it sees as the interlocking nature of the problems facing people, the Association has decided to adopt the community development or integrated approach to tackle these problems.

The underlying philosophy is that no needy person, regardless of his/her situation, should be ignored or should not form part of S.I.C.C.D.A.'s central concern and attention. Given the area and its people, this means that families with special needs, including some fifteen traveller families, homeless people, youth, the elderly, the long-term unemployed lay as much and perhaps more claim to programme resources, time and plans, as do those who are seen to be less at risk. In terms of maximum participation of people in tackling their own problems, this adds a further complex challenge to the Association.

Programme Aims and Projects. The following are the overall programme aims:

(i)   to promote and ensure, through community development, the total development of the area and its people in a manner acceptable to and suitably controlled by the people themselves;

(ii) in conjunction with local people, to design and initiate a programme which will cater for their social, economic, cultural and educational needs;

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(iii)   to facilitate and integrate a programme to tackle the
        needs of the elderly, families with special needs, unemployed,
        homeless, youth, traveller families, in the project area and
        involving their participation in so far as possible;

(iv)   to identify and attempt to bring about change in the existing
        state policies, services and attitudes as they affect the
        lives of the groups mentioned above;

(v)   to create a greater awareness of the nature, extent and causes
        of poverty in the area, both amongst the volunteers on the
        programme and people generally in the community.

The programme comprises a range of projects all at
different states of development and all requiring continuous
energy and attention by way of planning, resourcing and
assessment.   In total there are about one hundred people
actively involved either on a daily or weekly basis.   These
include staff, volunteers, trainees and local people who are
employed in a number of small enterprises.   There are
twice as many again indirectly involved in or affected by
programme activities on a regular basis.   These include
neighbourhood associations, youth organisations, the
elderly, travellers and families with special needs, etc.

Because of the nature of its funding and the various training
and employment schemes which it uses, the programme has
continuous reporting and lobbying relationships with fourteen
statutory agencies, all of whom interact with and sometimes
shape the development and direction of the programme.

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In summary, it is a 'rolling programme' whose dynamic and growth change from week to week.

Evaluating the Programme.   It goes without saying that the evaluation of such a broadly aimed programme poses a number of challenges both for the person facilitating the evaluation and the people who are actively involved in the action. From the beginning of the programme in 1982, there has been an awareness of the need for and a commitment to evaluation. In order to ensure this, great emphasis has been laid on detailed planning and reflection on a regular basis within the Association.   All meetings at all levels have been carefully minuted, classified and filed away.   Apart from the weekly and sometimes daily meetings of various committees, time out (in the form of day-long sessions) has been taken by the members to reflect on the general growth and direction of the association and its programme, and the facilitating and inhibiting factors to this growth and direction.   A number of residential weekends have been regularly organized by the various Management Committees for this purpose.

Given the underlying philosophy and aims of the Association it has been agreed within the programme that any evaluation must be in the first instance an internal and holistic one.

(i)   internal: in that it must be organized and facilitated from within;

(ii)   holistic: in that it must actively involve all sections of the programme and all its 'key' people in a continuous process of monitoring and assessment of its planning and planning outcomes.

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In the programme as described, any successful attempt at evaluation will, I believe, depend on the clarity of 'What' is to be evaluated and 'How' this is to be done. In this context good planning, short, medium and long-term is essential.

Evaluating: What. In order to clarify what is to be evaluated, the programme had been divided into five 'areas of concern', each with its own terms of reference which states precise concrete objectives, methods of operation, work programmes, management and accounting procedures. These five areas, though separate, are closely interlinked within a common programme perspective and structure in the shape of a central management and policy shaping and directing committee. The 'what' of the programme is therefore carefully discussed and planned both at an overall programme and at individual project levels.

Evaluating: How. Each project in the programme sets its own targets, keeps reports and assesses its progress and impacts and reports to the Central Committee on a regular basis. In order to ensure a more ordered and creative interaction, a more comprehensive model for monitoring and evaluating the programme is currently being developed. Bearing in mind that the target groups as identified are the key concern of the programme, the task of the programme and its many parts is to develop and use all the resources in the community towards servicing these people. A further aim is to identify and coordinate all the potential external

resources of agencies in the same cause. The 'how' of
this to date has been through planning meetings and
discussions at many levels both within and outside the
programmes with evaluation and assessment of their
usefulness and direction by the core team (staff and
management). This process is continuing.

All staff and volunteers are asked to keep notes on
activities, meetings etc. and their observations on these.
In addition all formal meetings at all levels are carefully
minuted and kept. Special weekly monitoring sheets have
been issued to the core team to enable them to record key
events and developments arising out of the work of the week.
Volunteers in particular have been asked to identify the
kinds of skills which they require to empower them to manage
the programme. Special training inputs and reflection days
are organized to enable them to acquire these skills.

Conclusion. Evaluation and reflection within the programme
to date has led to a change in its direction and in the
volunteers themselves in that they view and manage the
programme. We are, however, still at the early stages of
what is a painful but challenging process and creative process.
The task of the 'evaluator' is to facilitate the process of
planning and reflection at all levels and amongst all sections
of the programme. The essential part of this task, as I
see it, is to help all the active participants to see,
understand and act more clearly and in a planned manner,
what they may have already been doing in a confused manner.
This requires on the part of a facilitator a great deal of

maturity and patience as well as the technical and social

skills outlined elsewhere in this collection of papers.

8   EVALUATING THE IRISH RURAL PROJECTS:

SECOND EUROPEAN PROGRAMME TO COMBAT POVERTY,

by

Chris Curtin,

Micheal O Cinneide,

Centre for Community Development Studies,

University College, Galway.

The west of Ireland is beset by many problems which have
greatly retarded its development.   Geographical remoteness,
poor communication facilities, a relatively poor natural
resource base, and cultural negativism arising from a long
tradition of out-migration, and state policies which have
stifled initiative and self-help, all make the task of
stimulating development extremely difficult.   University
College, Galway, mindful of these development problems and
of various educational responses to underdevelopment
throughout peripheral Europe, provides courses on community
development as part of its extra-mural programme of adult
education.   These courses are designed to facilitate and
equip community groups who express a desire to contribute
to the development of their localities.   They are manned
primarily by full-time members of staff of the University
and particularly of the Centre for Community Development
Studies.   It is in this context that the involvement of
the staff of the above Centre in the evaluation of the
rural projects must be seen and understood.   Indeed the
participation of two of the sponsoring rural groups in the

EC Combat Poverty Programme arose directly from such courses and strong links with the Centre also existed in the case of the third group.

The Method of Evaluation.   Our modus operandi consists of a prearranged number of visits (ranging from a minimum of eight to a maximum of sixteen per annum) to the groups, during which various aspects of the projects are examined in detail.   At the beginning of each year we devote considerable attention to the formulation of objectives for that year and the strategies for attaining these objectives also are examined in detail.   As the year progresses, both the objectives and strategies are continuously refined in the light of experiences.   Towards the end of the year we provide an independent objective account of the progress made by the groups.   This account constitutes the annual report of the project which is made available to the groups and outside interests for due consideration.

The Process of Evaluation.   The nature of our involvement in the evaluation process is seen by us as a natural continuation of the Centre's previous links with these groups.   Thus we regard ourselves as resource people or facilitators who participate as far as possible in defining realistic goals and implementation strategies for the groups. In this regard we see ourselves as active participants in, rather than external evaluators of, these projects.   We are particularly concerned with the processes by which particular task objectives are attained and we emphasise

the lessons for the locality and for policy makers of the various experiments that are undertaken. In this regard we may differ somewhat from many local members of the sponsoring groups who are generally and understandably preoccupied with the achievement of task objectives regardless of process.

Finally, we would like to comment on our unique position vis-a-vis the projects. Because of our previous and continuing involvement with the groups, we share a deep understanding of the problems they seek to resolve and the limitations of the available resources. Yet, we are sufficiently detached from them to assess objectively all aspects of the projects in hand. We also are ideally placed to bring ideas, resources and university expertise to bear on the problems of the locality. Because we are geographically removed from the projects, however, our involvement in them is necessarily limited and the degree of participant observation is likewise restricted. Thus we are unable to observe fully at first hand the processes at work and depend greatly on the full and frank co-operation of the group.

9   EVALUATION IN THE RURAL ACTION PROJECT (N.IRELAND)

DISCUSSION OF AN APPROACH*

by

Avila Kilmurray, Project Co-ordinator,

Rural Action Project (NI).

The requirement for careful monitoring and evaluation of
the projects selected for funding by the EC Second Poverty
Programme has been emphasised both throughout the application
period and since the successful projects were announced.
It was envisaged that evaluation would take place at three
levels:

(i)   each project is required to monitor its own activities;

(ii)   evaluators have been appointed to evaluate the projects in
       each country;

(iii) evaluation will take place on a cross- EC basis co-ordinated
       by Dr. Graham Room, the Centre for the Analysis of Social
       Policy at the University of Bath who will work closely with
       the Institut fur Sozialforchang and Gesellschafts politik in
       Cologne.

Of particular interest and concern, however, to the Rural
Action Project (NI) was the first level which required
projects to set up an internal system of self-evaluation.
In an attempt to examine the implications of such a system,
the R.A.P. management committee and staff team posed
themselves a number of questions:

*   This paper arose out of two earlier discussion
       papers by Avila Kilmurray and Jimmy Armstrong
       on evaluation of the Rural Action Project.

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(i)   what is evaluation?

(ii)   what is action-research?

(iii)   how can action-research be evaluated?

(iv)   how can this discussion be applied to the specific
        requirements of R.A.P. (NI)?

This paper seeks to address a number of these issues, by
drawing on a selection of the literature available on
evaluation, and by discussing the debates and practical
implications of seeking to devise an evaluative system for
an individual - but multi-faceted - project.

What is Evaluation?   It has been suggested (Armstrong and
Key 'Evaluation, Change and Community Work', 1979) that
essentially evaluation seeks to answer the questions 'How
are we doing? Are we accomplishing what we set out to do?
How can we improve what we are doing?'   In more formal
terms it was held that "evaluation is the collection of
data about the outcomes of programmes of action relative
to the goals and objectives set in advance of that programme".

Much discussion on the topic of evaluation has been
encouraged in the United States.   One collection of papers
(Rossi and Williams, Evaluating Social Programs 1972)
sought to make the distinction between:

(i)   evaluation which examines the effectiveness of
        particular social policies, i.e. the extent to
        which the policies accomplished intended effects;
        and

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(ii) policy analysis which is concerned with working out

ways of making informed and intelligent decisions

among alternative social policies.

It was held that both processes are complementary and that
the best circumstances under which to conduct policy
analysis would be when the effectiveness of alternative
social policies are known through evaluation research.

It has been held that to evaluate a social action programme
is to collect evidence regarding its effectiveness;   Walter
William's definition of effectiveness is the impact of the
programme - its capacity to cause changes in those (or the
area) who are exposed to it.   The measurement of such
changes however must be carried out with an awareness of
the broader context in which they take place - thus a decline
in unemployment may be as a direct result of the impact of
the social action programme; however it may also be due
to a change in the economic climate or a shift in government
policy unconnected with the programme.

From a preliminary review of the literature it would appear
that there is a multiplicity of approaches to evaluation.
These have been summarised by Key, Hudson & Armstrong in
'Evaluation Theory and Community Work' (Community Projects
Foundation, 1976):   "The approaches can be divided into
two main types which are themselves based on a necessarily
arbitrary division of an imagined 'hard...soft' continuum.
The two types are called 'hard-line approaches' and 'soft-
line approaches'".

Hard-line approaches are those which assume an exact definition of evaluation and a set of specific procedures to be used, these being procedures and techniques of a rational and objective kind. Those using these types of approaches see evaluation as a substantial and systematic activity. Soft-line approaches are characterised by a general or vague definition of evaluation with few specific procedures, where such procedures as exist are subjective and allow for opinion, and where evaluation is considered an unsystematic and even marginal activity open to the partial or eclectic application of various techniques.

It may be argued that this comparison of the opposing approaches is rather too stereotyped and somewhat exaggerated. However it would appear clear that traditional evaluation was grounded in the assumptions of natural, 'scientific' experimentation and thus sought to provide once-and-for-all decisions on the worth of an experiment on a supposedly objective basis. As James, Hosler and Allmarch 'Evaluating a Community Action Scheme' 1983 have asserted, 'this is obviously not an appropriate model here'. Thus the hard-line goal model approach - where the programme of action is planned and later assessed in strict relation to stated general aims and to the objectives that are specified in order to contribute to the achievement of those aims - is not the model of evaluation that can appreciate the dynamics of a social action project. What is needed is an evaluative approach that can cope with a continuous process of assessment and re-definition of the detailed project

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objectives in order to allow on-going development, rather than attempting to set up a prescriptive model for copying.

Finally it must be noted that apart from problems about what type of evaluation, there are those who would ask 'evaluation for what?' It has been suggested that evaluation may be a form of control or a process of learning from practice, and as Armstrong and Key point out - "Despite practical difficulties we believe that ... learning from evaluation (can be) increased, by having a clearer grasp of what is going on..." In order to ground the pilot project firmly in the pilot areas it may well be decided that it is important that such learning should be reflected back on the communities, as well as the project workers and other decision-making agencies. Indeed within the Rural Action Project it was accepted that the Project had a responsibility to undertake this task. As the initial project coordinator, Jimmy Armstrong, suggested in an internal discussion paper:

> "The learning should not be confined to the direct
> participants (action people); indeed the aim is
> to derive lessons which can be used by other
> researchers and policy makers at various levels.
> In addition we recognise the interest of the other
> 'rural theme' projects in the programme, the four
> parent voluntary bodies who manage the Project,
> the statutory authorities who participate in the
> coordination panel, the district councils in the
> project areas, and other community groups outside
> the project areas. If the lessons derived from
> the Project are to be transferable they should be
> derived by standardised, broadly-accepted and
> objective procedures. It is the application of
> these evaluation techniques which makes up the
> research part of our action research project.
> The output of the evaluation system should reflect
> the requirements of the interested parties.
> 'Evaluation for whom?' is therefore a question
> which requires some detailed analysis".

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Thus we have arrived at a very comprehensive list of interested parties to the question of 'Evaluation for Whom?'

What is Action-Research?   The designation of the Second EC   Anti-Poverty Programme projects as action-research initiatives added an often under-estimated additional dilemma to the evaluative approach.   Action-research has rapidly become a concept almost as difficult to define as that of 'community'.   However, underlying its Heinz-variety aspect the term is used to describe all kinds of approaches which include a combination of the two elements, action and research.   Smith 'Action-Research in Community Development' 1975 sounds a warning:

> "... action-research is almost always linked
> with those nebulous but attractive areas of
> social policy, where imagination quickly
> outruns our ability to translate ideas into
> practice - 'community education' (etc) ...
> the promise is of dramatic change;   the
> assumption that experimental action and the
> 'superior vision' of research will somehow
> identify the magic ingredient..."

Even without believing in the 'crock of gold' formula, there are a number of combinations that action and research can take, which without initial clarification can result in a collection of somewhat distracted leprechauns/project workers as the case may be.

Powley and Evans 'Towards a Methodology of Action Research' examine the concept and make the point that "in action research the goals and methods of practice and research are interdependent and closely interwoven".   They further

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acknowledge - based on the findings of the National
Children's Bureau - that whenever necessary, changes and
modifications in the practice approach will be introduced,
reflecting the research task of evaluation.   However, they
then go on to describe a study which had separate 'research'
and 'action' staff.   This in the community development
context may be neither necessary nor desirable.   Research
data may be compiled in various forms by all staff, and the
interpretation of such data would be carried out on a
collective basis - in relevant gatherings at both the staff
and the community level.   Thus 'research' might be built
in as an integral part of the project, and not viewed as a
separate 'academic' activity.

In summary Powley and Evans offer a framework for action-
research:

(i)   the formulation of goals (programme), and the interpretation
        of goals into action plans (programme - process);

(ii)   the implementation of the action programme (process);

(iii)   the evaluation of the action programme (product).
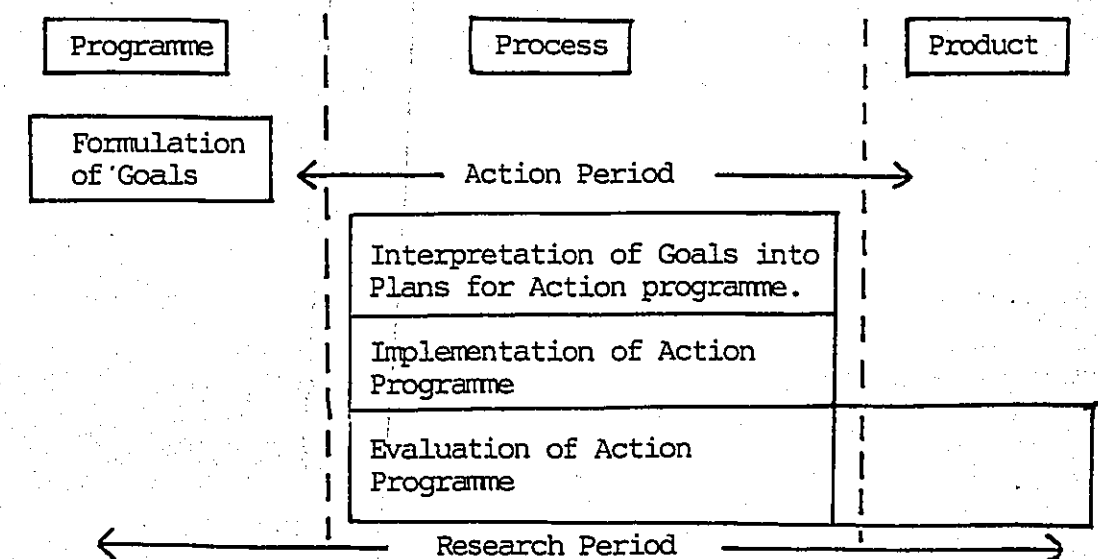
While this may be a good starting point for the design of an action-research project, the requirements of initiatives such as the Rural Action Project (NI) demand a somewhat more dynamic formula - with allowance for a possible re-assessment of goals during the course of the project in order to allow for interim evaluation and a community input.   It is accepted that any evaluation of such a project should not be restricted to an assessment of how far the initial objectives of the programme have been achieved;   it should also attempt to describe and define the processes by which the programme has led to certain outcomes.   This entails a clear awareness of the changes and shifts as the work develops.

Methods of Evaluation of an Action-Research Project.   It would seem to be generally accepted that an important aspect of the 'art' of evaluation is in selecting the particular changes to be studied in the light of the significance of the changes and the availability and reliability of data that can be used to measure these changes.   However, put this way it would seem that there may be a danger of the tail-wagging-the-dog in that availability of measuring rods can have an impact on what might be measured.   This cannot be allowed to happen.

A number of issues must be recognised with this approach:

(i)   some changes are of more fundamental significance than others, and must be considered as such;

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(ii)   the evaluator may wish to get below the surface to find out
        how the changes came about;

(iii)   the immediate, concrete results of the project may be less
        significant than later, less tangible results.

Indeed the ultimate test to be applied may be whether the
project generates its own continuing activity and whether
the local communities have come to an agreement as to how
to bring about change and what changes are desirable.

One of the problems of evaluating social action programmes
is that often the effects may be expected to be small and
thus may not be easily observable.   This reinforces the
need for constant observation and recording.   However, this
then raises the question of what should be recorded.   In
other words, what are the objectives of the social-action
programme, which themselves will be based on a concept of
strategic changes?   One categorisation that has been used
in evaluation is:

(i)   changes in individuals:

        *   their information, skills, attitudes,

        *   increasing knowledge, skills and new approaches to problems,

        *   increasing dissatisfaction with traditional levels of
            living, traditional status or class relationships,

        *   increasing belief that economic and social advancement can
            be obtained through new forms of social organisation and
            activities,

        *   increasing awareness of the power of collective action and
            community purpose;

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(ii)   changes in social relationships and institutions:

     * increasing economic opportunity through new forms of work, subsidies etc.,

     * increasing communication between statutory and voluntary agencies,

     * increasing power of groups participating in these changes, and diminishing influence of groups resisting changes,

     * decreasing power of individuals/agencies monopolising resources;

(iii) changes in social overhead capital:

     * *increasing investment in community services and facilities.**

If these categories provide an indication of a number of possible strategic changes in the pilot project areas they must be related to the overall project objectives.

In the event, the Rural Action Project shared the difficulty of many social-action projects in having somewhat vague general objectives. In the initial application sent to the EC these were listed as the following:

(i)   to examine the specific nature and extent of rural deprivation in four areas of Northern Ireland and to explore possible methods of alleviating it;

(ii)   to improve the quality of life through collective community action in the four pilot areas;

(iii)   to facilitate co-operation and co-ordinated action between both statutory agencies and between the voluntary and statutory sector;

*   Typology from UNESCO Study 'Evaluating Development Projects'.

(iv)   to monitor the use and effectiveness of mobile Information

Units in a rural setting;

(v)   to highlight the issue of rural deprivation in both statutory

and public awareness, and to seek the commencement of informed

discussions on the issue in an attempt to influence policy.

Given the generality of these objectives, these were then
detailed around each aspect of the R.A.P.'s three-dimensional
strategy - the four rural development projects; the mobile
information units and the policy development and public
awareness campaign.

Each of these in turn had the following aims:

(i)   Rural Pilot Areas:

*   to identify underlying problems in each selected area with

particular reference to those most at risk - the elderly,

the disabled, the long-term unemployed and single parents,

*   to identify resources available in the statutory, voluntary

and private sectors to tackle the problems of deprived

rural areas,

*   to develop an integrated community development strategy

which will be implemented in an attempt to alleviate the

problems, and to campaign for necessary change,

*   to identify and promote the positive features of rural

areas;

(ii)   Mobile Advice and Information Unit:

*   to provide welfare and general rights advice to rural

areas and to monitor lack of knowledge of particular

aspects of information,

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* to disseminate information on statutory and voluntary services, as well as passing on information and ideas generated by the pilot projects,

* to act as an initial point of contact with individuals in isolated rural areas, and provide a basis for small one-off meetings,

  to offer mobile facilities to other voluntary and community organisations;

(iii) Policy Development and Public Awareness:

* to encourage the relevant Government Departments and local statutory agencies to develop considered and co-ordinated responses to rural need,

* to raise public awareness about particular aspects of poverty and deprivation in rural areas by means of the media and educational initiatives,

* to sponsor meetings on a district and regional basis to identify issues of common concern, with specific reference to deprived groups in rural areas,

* to organise discussion on issues such as declining services, inadequate facilities, transport services, the impact of planning legislation, etc. and to encourage the development of alternative approaches and policies.

In the light of experience, however, and the pressing demands of the 'action' side of the Project, the posing of the 'problem' to be researched was identified by Jimmy Armstrong (Project Coordinator) as that of either:

(i) rural development - how to achieve the multiple goals of more employment, better incomes and housing, conservation of water, preservation of amenities and the production of cheap and healthy food in impoverished rural areas or;

(ii) community development - how to use community action to meet the needs of rural dwellers.

Although it was recognised that these two definitions of 'the problem' were not necessarily mutually exclusive as community development could - and on occasions is - used as a means of achieving rural development, nevertheless, it was noted that rural development could be investigated without reference to community development.

Casting a cold eye on what was required in the context of a time-limited, action-research exercise was the need for a decision on the relative priority given to these objectives, given the important implications for the design of the evaluation programme. For example, if community development was the objective, then the evaluation system might be concerned with the measurement of the type of changes out-lined under the UNESCO frame given earlier. If rural development was the primary objective, then the impact of the Project's activities might be measured by changes in specific criteria such as employment, incomes or housing. Where community participation is involved this method should be evaluated by comparing it (on the basis of cost or efficiency) with other methods. For example in activity x, what advantages/disadvantages did community management/ ownership have over private enterprise?

Given the pressure of certain constraints - e.g. project time; staff time, etc., the R.A.P. Management Committee decided that the correct emphasis for an anti-poverty project should be on the issue (and evaluation) of rural development, while not under-estimating the importance of community development as an innovatory - if somewhat long-term - methodology in achieving the former. In the light of this decision the UNESCO model aide memoire is important - that unexpected results may in fact be more illuminating than those that are planned.

How to Evaluate? A range of methodologies have been put forward for evaluating social-action programmes:

(i)   Before and After Study - perhaps of pilot project areas - examining what difference did the programme make. This is based on the assumption that the behaviour of the individual/ group before the programme is a measure of performance that would have continued to occur if there had been no programme;

(ii)   Comparison with Control Group - This is basically comparing changes experienced by groups within the project area as against a similar group outside the area;

(iii)   Process Oriented Qualitative Research - (Weiss and Rein in Evaluating Social Programs) - this, despite the name, consists essentially of employing sensitive observers to monitor the unfolding of a programme as it is going on, noting particularly those events that are critical, collecting documents and sensitively observing the effects of the programme on institutions and individuals.

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(iv)   Critical Appraisal Process - As described by Key, Hudson and
       Armstrong seeks to build in community involvement.   In the
       initial period a Programme Model is built which seeks to
       produce the questions that will be asked and the events that
       will be selected for questioning in the application phase.
       In the latter, critical appraisal papers can be drafted which
       may be analytical papers or lesson papers which seek to look
       at what is happening in the light of the questions posed.

In effect the Critical Appraisal process as outlined would
seem to be in line with the Process Oriented Qualitative
research approach - and indeed may well be more community
based.   The comparison with control group option may be
difficult to operate, unless it can be used as an informal
control on the Before and After approach.   It would seem
that what might be needed is a dual methodology combining
the Before and After comparison and the Critical Appraisal
method.

Implications For Rural Action Project.   An initial R.A.P.
evaluation paper suggested that it is important that
baseline data be collected in order to both permit later
assessment of project results and to provide an input into
building the Programme Model (Critical Appraisal Approach),
as such data will help define the dimensions of the issues
involved.   Such base-line data may be supplemented with
exploratory interviews with community leaders, organisations
and agencies.   Base-line data might also include an
additional survey at this stage.

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In the next phase (alongside the reflection of the area
findings back to the community) it may be necessary to
gather data by systematic observation and questioning.
The former might well mean taking note of the numbers
attending meetings etc., while the latter might well take
the form of a small survey:

(i)   what people know about the project activities;

(ii)   what they think are the purposes of the project;

(iii)   how important do they feel these purposes are;

(iv)   what changes, if any, have they observed or do they believe
        have occurred during the course of the project;

(v)   how the persons in the project area themselves changed, if
        at all, during the course of the project;

(vi)   which of the changes, if any, have occurred as a result of a
        particular project operation.

Such a study might indicate the need for later communication;
for fuller agreement as to the purposes of the project - the
need for programme changes and the possibility of discrepancies
in view among various groups in the community.   Alongside
the community perceptions of the programme, valuable data
can be provided by records of meetings and through the
workers' records which will be a vital element. In addition
to this, semi-structured interviews could be carried out
with statutory representatives, etc.

It was envisaged that this continuous record of ongoing
events and perceptions would provide a sufficiently broad
range of evidence to allow periodic collective evaluation

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(among the project workers and with the community) of how
much is being achieved in relation to the goals.   Such
periodic evaluation might also allow the flexibility to
change.   Speaking on the basis of their experience Powley
and Evans suggest that:

> "Too often quantitative evidence is produced at
> the end of a report in order to make it look
> respectable.   There is then a danger that,
> presented with quantitative summary data on the
> programme's effects and a mass of case history
> material, those who study the report will feel
> inclined to digest the statistical information
> without absorbing the detailed descriptive
> material.   This incomplete consideration of
> the findings may inform the reader about what
> changes have taken place during the course of
> the study, but he will not know how or why they
> occurred".

Again, however, stock must be taken in the light of the
Rural Action Project experience.   As Jimmy Armstrong held
on the question 'How do we Evaluate?' - "This involves the
definition of criteria that can be used to indicate the
success or expected effects of the programme of action.
In addition, we must be sure that these criteria can be
measured and that a suitable data/information collection
procedure has been introduced".

He challenged the suggestion that evaluative data might be
collected by Rural Action Project staff and that the
interpretation of this data could be carried out on a
collective basis, partially on the practical grounds that
the Project staff were already fully occupied on the 'action'
side, and further that - "The literature on evaluation would
seem to advise that in the interests of objectivity,

the action and evaluation functions should be kept quite separate, although continuous collaboration between the personnel is obviously necessary". Thus eight months into the Project the very real problem remained - who was going to do the evaluation research for the Rural Action Project?

The Criteria for Evaluating Rural Action Project. In early discussions a number of points were put forward in an attempt to devise an evaluative framework for the Project. These included:

(i)   the type of evaluation needed must be able to cope with a continuous process of assessment and re-definition of the detailed project objectives in order to allow on-going development;

(ii)   in the case of the action-research process it is envisaged that research data may be compiled in various forms by all the R.A.P. staff, and the interpretation of that data should be carried out on a collective basis - at both staff, management structure and community levels;

(iii)   evaluation should not be restricted to an assessment of how far the objectives of the programme have been achieved. It should also seek to describe and define the processes by which the programme has led to certain outcomes, and has been carried out;

(iv)   it is necessary for the R.A.P. to be clear about its overall objectives, the programme aims and such strategic changes as it considers necessary;

(v)   given the complexity of the range of programmes involved in the R.A.P. it may be necessary to view evaluation in a multi-

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dimensional approach - with evaluation being carried out at
various levels, then drawn together in an overall perspective;

(vi)   the evaluation methodology adopted may be a combination of
        the Before and After approach and the Critical Appraisal
        approach in order to allow maximum participation and flexibility;

(vii)   a programme will have to be decided in order to provide clear
        direction to the workers as to the records that must be kept
        and the research data gathered;

(viii) it is agreed that the ultimate test to be applied is whether
        the R.A.P. generates its own continuing and expanding activity
        in an attempt to understand and eliminate rural poverty,
        deprivation and inequality.

Again, however, these points indicated a level of generality
that had to be brought down to earth.   Jimmy Armstrong posed
this for the Project Management Committee by putting forward
the following points as the possible goals and objectives of
R.A.P.:

(i)   to experiment with innovative approaches to meet the needs of
        rural dwellers in the pilot areas.   This could be described
        as a straightforward commitment to rural development;

(ii)   to encourage more direct participation by the local community
        in both planning and development decisions;

(iii). to experiment with mechanisms which would lay the basis for
        coordination between the statutory, voluntary, local authority
        and community effort;

(iv)   to create and implement a system of evaluation.

He suggested that "objectives (ii) and (iii) accord with the terms of

reference laid down by the EC for rural projects.

They also reflect some of the interests of the parent

voluntary bodies. Objective (i) reflects the interests

of the individuals, community groups, probably District

Councils, and the apparent (consciously decided?) priority

given to it is also found in most of the other rural theme

projects."

The formulation, when considered in detail, differed from

the original far-flung framework proposed in the EC

application. It was, however, accepted by the Management

Committee as a more intrinsic definition of what the Project

was about, and thus what it had eventually to be assessed

on. This overall judgement could itself only be made in

the context of the evaluation of the various aspects of the

multi-dimensional R.A.P.(NI) programme. In the event this

is what it was decided to do.

Impressed by the argument that the evaluation had to be seen

to be the objective, the R.A.P. Management Committee agreed

to commission the Policy Research Institute (NI) to carry

out the evaluation of the Project and its constituent

elements. To this end the various roles of the evaluator,

the Project staff, the Management Committee and the local

Area Steering Committees are in the process of being worked

out in terms of evaluative input. However while the brunt

of the monitoring and evaluation work will undoubtedly fall

on the initial three , the importance of collective

assessment of a community-based, action-research project

has not been ignored.   An essential aspect of the agreed
evaluative process will be an annual (at minimum) gathering
of those involved in the Project.   It is hoped that this
merging of, on the one hand, careful monitoring and analysis
of evaluative data, and on the other, the collective
discussion of the various interests and communities, will
offer a suitably balanced judgement of whether the Rural
Action Project was worthwhile.

Foot Note   "To date there has not been a field evaluation
              of a social-action program that could not be
              faulted legitimately by good methodologists
              and we may never see one".

                                        Rossi & Williams.

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10 EVALUATION - A PERSPECTIVE FROM WITHIN THE LOURDES YOUTH

AND COMMUNITY SERVICES PROJECT

by

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Lourdes Youth and Community Services is a training and
development project which serves Dublin's north inner city
and is located in the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes, Sean
McDermott Street.   The project developed from three
separate community based initiatives in the early nineteen
eighties.   These were, the Lourdes Craft Centre which
provided opportunities for children, young people and
adults; the Monto Skill Centre where woodwork skills were
taught and the Community Services Project in which young
people provided services for other young people in the area.

In 1983 the three projects came together to form Lourdes
Youth and Community Services following negotiations with
the Youth Employment Agency to provide a comprehensive and
integrated approach to training and development in the
area.   The new project was established on a two year pilot
basis.   It comprises two major elements:

(i)   a full time one year training programme in crafts, wood work

        or community services for young people between the ages of

        fifteen and twenty-five years;

(ii)   it also operates as a broad community resource, providing

informal and part time programmes for all age groups and
working for the overall development of the community along
with other projects and groups.

The particular approach to evaluation within the Lourdes
Youth and Community Services Project is influenced by two
factors:-

(i)   actual format for evaluation chosen by the project, which
        provided the opportunity to be totally involved and to be part
        of it for one year;

(ii)   nature of the project - the goals are multiple and very broad,
        relating to the development of the individual and the
        development of the community.   Also the project is a pilot one,
        innovative in its approach and responsive to changing needs.
        The capacity to be flexible, to change and to develop are
        important aspects of it.

These two factors pointed towards a specific approach to
evaluation which is now being broadly pursued - one which
is essentially qualitative in nature.

A Qualitative Approach.   Qualitative research permits one
to get first hand knowledge about the 'world' in question -
to get close to it, and to develop one's approach and
analysis from this.   There are three elements central to
a qualitative approach to evaluation;

(i)   it attempts to understand the project or programme as a
        totality.   It rests on the assumption that an understanding
        of the programme's context is essential for understanding the
        programme itself;

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(ii)   it attempts also to make sense of the situation without

imposing pre-existing expectations on it.   The dimensions

emerge from open ended observations and they are allowed to

emerge rather than presupposing in advance what they will be -

the understanding emerges from experience of the project;

(iii)   the research does not attempt to manipulate the setting in

any way - the idea is to understand naturally occurring

phenomena within their natural context.

In the Lourdes Youth and Community Services project this

approach to evaluation was most appropriate because:

(i)   it made it possible to take account of the wider context

within which the project operates and indeed from which it

grew;

(ii)   the developing nature of the project demanded that the methods

used to study its implementation must be open ended, capable

of describing the process of change and of evolving goals.

The qualitative approach enables one to look at the process

and not simply the product - why and how certain things are

happening, how the parts fit together.   Knowing what a

programme achieved is useful, knowing why is much more so;

(iii)   where programmes operate on the assumption that different

people will get different things from the process, it is

important to be able to focus on the unique outcomes for

individuals rather than apply standardised measures which

could well miss out on the nuance, the detail and the

subtleties which make a significant difference between the

points on a scale;

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(iv)   this approach also enables one to provide an analysis that
        will bring people into the experience of the project, through
        participation and through dialogue with people within it.
        The analysis is not, therefore, the result of an independent
        technical process imposed from the outside.

Involvement in the Project.   This particular model of
evaluation was gradually clarified and adopted as the
opportunities offered by and through the projects became
apparent.   This process took some time as I struggled with
different approaches.   Within the project there was ample
opportunity to be involved personally in aspects of the
programme and in its management and organisational structures.
This involvement was essential, particularly in the early
stages of my work.   It ranged from attending meetings of
the Management Committee to participating in a women's craft
group.   At an organisational level I attended all staff
meetings, planning days, project leaders' meetings, management
committee meetings, served on working groups and participated
in staff training and development sessions.

I was actively involved in particular aspects of the
programme - in helping to facilitate personal development,
social and life skills, community information sessions.
Like members of staff, I was available to help out as
required in other elements of the programme - going on
outings, giving a hand in running the children's open groups,
talking to people who visit the project.   Like members of

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the staff team I also participated in the social aspects
of the programme - functions, sports competitions, fund
raising events.

The whole informal aspect of the project is quite extensive
and involves several womens groups who use the resources of
the Craft Centre on a weekly basis.   I participated in
these groups along with the other women, doing crafts or
engaging in other activities which the group selects e.g.
talks on health issues, cookery etc.   At the level of the
wider community I participated in some of the committees
and issues in which the project is involved e.g. the area
Voluntary and Statutory Committee which concerns itself
with youth issues and which has recently run a workshop on
unmet needs of youth in the area and is currently embarking
on a Teamwork Scheme geared towards unattached young people.
I also followed up on areas of particular interest by doing
selective studies on, for example, the use of facilities
within the project, following up on ex-trainees.

By being based full time in the project and involved in many
aspects of it, there was plenty of access to and contact
with staff, with others involved in the project and with
other projects in the community.   This contact was available
on an ongoing day-to-day basis and for more specific
discussions as they arose.   Such involvement is essential
at many levels.   Firstly it is essential in terms of
learning and beginning to understand the nature and scope
of the project, secondly it is important in attempting to

contribute to the project, and thirdly in being accepted
as part of it.   Through this involvement I came to identify
the philosophy, the many dimensions of the project and how
they fitted together and the more detailed elements of their
implementation on a day to day basis.

In the process of coming to understand the project I began
to devise methods of recording data - some done directly
through talking with people, some through observation, while
other efforts were made in association with staff and
participants.   Questions began to emerge which provided a
focus for talking to participants, for following up on
information and for observation:

(i)   what do participants experience in the project, what is it
        like to be in it?

(ii)   what resources are provided, who is involved and who uses them?

(iii)   how are the programmes organized?

(iv)   what progress is being made in particular areas?

(v)   what changes have taken place over the two years and why?

(vi)   what is the relationship with other projects?

(vii)   what do staff do, how do they view their role?

(viii) how is the programme tailored to meet individual needs?

(ix)   does it reach its target groups and how?

Approaches to collecting data.   In evaluating a project,
the way it operates is of equal importance to looking at
its impact.   The approaches to doing the evaluation have
to reflect this focus.   One of the major 'tools' used is
that of participant observation.   This permits one not

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only to see what is happening but to feel what it is like to be part of the project - to become capable of understanding it as an insider while also describing it for outsiders. Participant observation is extensively supported by talking to people, focusing on the subjective elements for staff and for participants in the full time programmes and in the informal elements of the project. The talking is done formally and informally, individually and in groups, at a philosophical level and in terms of quite specific situations.

The case study approach is also an important element, because it takes the individual as the focal point and attempts to highlight the process and the impact in relation to the person and their own situation. This approach makes it possible to look at individual goals and at progress towards them. This is particularly relevant for those objectives where standardised measurements may not be in any sense illuminating e.g. growth of self confidence, ability to work in a group, development of trust.

There are also documentary sources available which provide background data on the project - minutes, records, proposals and submissions made; data on the area necessary for social analysis; the structure of natural or local services in relation to vocational, educational or youth fields.

Some Key Areas in the Evaluation are:

(i)   attitude;

(ii)   planning;

(iii)   time and timing.

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(i) The attitude of staff, of management and of the project as
a whole to evaluation is crucial. For it to be in any
sense a creative process, the support of the project is
essential. It needs some people to be enthusiastic about
its possibilities and it certainly needs an active tolerance
on the part of all. The attitude will influence not only
the quality of the analysis but the extent to which the
project can have a real input into it and its usefulness
in turn to the ongoing development of the project. However,
the question of attitude is not a one-sided affair and the
relationship between evaluator and the projects should
ideally be based on mutual trust, respect and co-operation.
People within the project should be kept informed about
what one is doing and why, and have ample opportunity to
contribute to the process. The evaluator needs to be
available to the project to be part of it and to provide
ongoing feedback.

(ii) With the Lourdes Youth and Community Services Project there
is a commitment not only to evaluation, but to the whole
area of planning. This is evident in structures to
facilitate this and in the manner in which decisions are
made - there is a forum for reporting, reflecting and
planning. This and the access to it has been one of the
most important aspects from my point of view. If these
structures did not already exist, it would have been
important to provide such a forum to facilitate reflection.

(iii) There will always be a limited amount of time available

and it is important to have realistic tasks and targets.
Time limitations are prevalent not only in terms of getting
on with the evaluation, but also for staff in the project
where there is pressure in meeting the day-to-day demands,
in responding to the inevitable crises and in ensuring that
necessary planning is done.   In these situations it can be
difficult to discuss issues in depth and to set up and
maintain relevant information systems hence the importance
of building in opportunities to meet, to reflect and to
plan.

The length of time available to undertake the evaluation
may be a critical factor in the contribution which the
evaluation can make to the ongoing development of the
project.   Under the tripartite arrangement between the
Social Science Research Centre U.C.D., the Youth Employment
Agency and the Lourdes Youth and Community Services Project,
I spent one year virtually full time based on the project.
For the remaining four months I spent most of my time based
in U.C.D. writing the report.   This arrangement had several
advantages.   However, the time available to become familiar
with the project and its various dimensions, be involved in
it and in a position to contribute to it was relatively
short.   Also, I feel that the evaluation should commence
with the initiation of the project rather than a year later,
as happened in this project.   In the initial stages a lot
of time was spent by staff identifying and clarifying goals
and objectives; building relevant programmes, adapting
them in the light of experience and changing needs, and

providing the foundation upon which the project could continue to develop. Quite a lot of change occurred during the first year. Some of this can be identified retrospectively through discussions with people and through reports. However to be in at the beginning, to learn along with the new staff team, would have been more satisfactory in many respects from my point of view and no doubt also from the point of view of the project itself.

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11 AN EXPERIENCE OF EVALUATION RESEARCH

by

Mary Whelan.

In community development, as in all other aspects of life
we are constantly evaluating. We make statements about
what worked or did not work, and whether we achieved what
we hoped we would achieve at the end of a given period.
Evaluation research is an attempt to be systematic about
what we all do anyway. It involves giving evidence for
what we are stating, reflecting on what we are doing, maybe
changing what we are doing as a result of that reflection
and producing, at the end of a given period, a coherent
statement of what we were about and where we got to or did
not get to.

In doing evaluation in action projects, we are human beings
looking at our own and other people's activities. It is
not like quality control in a factory. Total objectivity,
in my view, is not possible. We are involved in a dynamic,
creative, often exciting interaction - a continuing dialogue
among people committed to action which they hope will lead
to social change. On the other hand, I believe that while
total objectivity is not possible, objectivity and 'standing
back' (but not apart) is vital on the part of the person
responsible for evaluation. Innovatory projects are also
going to demand innovatory approaches to evaluation. There
are no complete blueprints. We each have pieces of the

jigsaw.   Putting them together and learning from each
other can be one of the most exciting parts of this programme.

My experience of evaluation.   Between 1981 - 1985, I
worked, on a half-time basis as an evaluator in a community
based child-care project in inner-city Dublin.   It was a
residential project heavily focussed on action - on caring
for children and involving their parents in an inner-city
community, devastated by unemployment, poor housing, lack
of opportunity for people and the beginning of a serious
heroin abuse problem.

I was apprehensive when I started in this job, for many
reasons.   How would I introduce a 'research perspective'
into the work?   Would the project staff accept this or see
it as something imposed on them and therefore, be hostile
to my role?   Would I get drawn into the action, because
that was where my heart was, and never produce a report
which the terms of my contract said I had to do?

Four years later, it is impossible to say how much I
learned from the experience.   My enthusiasm for 'action'
broadened into seeing evaluation as a vital part of the
action and not something separate and removed from the
struggles of work on the ground.

I did not have to lose my humanity to evaluate an action
project!   I found that it was possible to care about what
happened to the children, for example, while, at the same

time trying to understand and make explicit the work being done with them. The project staff, far from being hostile, welcomed evaluation and came to see me as a team member and the process of evaluation as an intrinsic part of the project's work.

However, I did have plenty of problems, such as the lack of a clear model to guide me in the early stages. I also had to establish my role as evaluator. I was close to the staff team and yet I did not work 'shifts' as they did. The most searching questions about evaluation and what I was doing in the house were asked by the children! In the early stages especially, I had problems achieving a balance between enough involvement in the action to understand the work of the project and learning to facilitate an 'action-reflection-action' process by the staff which became an important part of the evaluation.

It was lonely. I was unable to find many people doing this type of work and the few who were doing it were too busy with our own projects to spend much time discussing methodology. I was lucky also. I had the support of the Professor of Social Science in University College Dublin, because I had a fellowship there which enabled me to do the work. He was familiar with my work and listened, guided and suggested, read drafts and gave me the research back-up I needed to enable me to see the project through.

Approach to Evaluation. There was a certain amount of pressure on staff and management to demonstrate 'success' in this project because it was innovative (community based and planning to involve the children's families closely). It was also labour-intensive having begun with four full time staff. One year later it had five full time staff, a part time evaluator and six children in the house. It also had the back up of a consultant psychologist, consultant social worker and several people who worked in the project on a voluntary basis.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul was the main sponsor, but the project also received state funding amounting to 45% of all spending over the first three year period. The plan was that after three years, both the state and voluntary interests would assess whether further support for the project was indicated. The 'results' of the evaluation were to be a major factor in this assessment.

I spent the first three months 'absorbing' the work of the project. I had no experience of residential child care and I believed that I needed to experience every aspect of the process of caring for children and working with their families in order to understand it. I also needed to get to know and develop working relationships with the people involved in this project. The staff met every Tuesday and, in the early days, it was always difficult to find someone to be with the children during this meeting. I offered to do this initially and spent many hours running

around sand-dunes, going to the swimming pool, visiting
'places of interest' in Dublin, or sitting talking in the
kitchen. One day a group of people from one of the state
funding agencies visited the project. I was frying fish
in the small kitchen, which suddenly seemed to fill with
men dressed in suits and carrying briefcases. I saw a
few surprised looks when the project leader introduced me
as the evaluator. I had no time to explain that this was
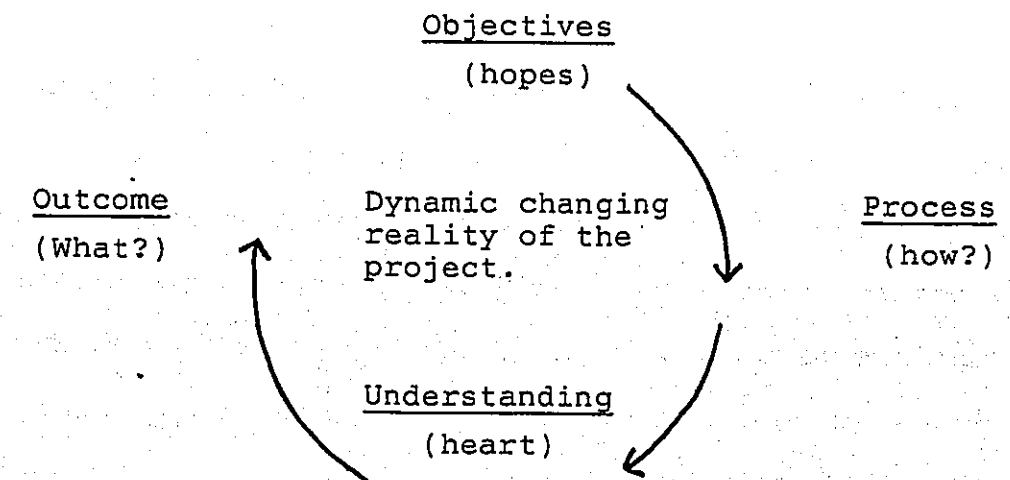'participant observation'!

While I always remained involved to some extent in the
action of this project, the first three months of 'immersion'
were vital from my point of view. I listened and looked
and tried to refine my powers of observation and
understanding. I saw staff sitting with and holding
distressed children for hours. I sat on the stairs late
into the night with staff members whose main pre-occupation
was 'being there' for a child who had only come into the
house that day and could not sleep. I saw parents, who
had referred their child to the project because they could
not handle him any longer, begin to come regularly to the
house for meetings with staff in order to prepare for his
return home. I felt anger and frustration at a society
which does nothing about social conditions which contribute
to such unhappiness in young children. I wondered how I
would ever write all this up. I wished I was a child care
worker, a community worker, anything but an evaluator!
In those days, I took notes about everything, wrote down
stories, took minutes of meetings, but had no idea of

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what I would eventually do with it all!

Process of Evaluation.   After six months, I produced an
outline of how I hoped to evaluate this project.   The
feed back I got from staff, management and my research
adviser was invaluable and helped me to refine it.   I was
too 'outcome' orientated.   It was pointed out to me (most
vehemently by a member of the management committee) that
I was not giving enough attention to, as he put it, the
huge question of HOW? - how the objectives were being met
or not being met, the work being done, what was actually
going on in the project - the process.

For example, I could say that, at the end of eighteen
months, five children who had been out of school for more
than two years were now back at school and attending
regularly - that was the outcome.   But the changes that
had taken place to allow that to happen, the work that went
into it by children, parents and staff, was very complicated
and involved relationships, struggles, successes and
failures.   If another project wanted to do similar work,
they would want to know about these - not just that the
children were back in school or back home with their
parents.   I had to find a way to tell people about this
aspect of the work - to try to give an understanding of
what was going on as well as the facts.

Eventually, the totality of what I was trying to describe,
understand and analyse began to clarify itself as follows:

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                              Objectives
                               (hopes)

      Outcome        Dynamic changing        Process
      (What?)        reality of the          (how?)
                     project.

                           Understanding
                             (heart)
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In this article, I will just summarise briefly how I tried
to systematically approach the various elements in evaluation
of this project.

Objectives.   Before the project began, the general
objectives were worked out by the management group.
Basically they were to explore and test the viability of
a community-based approach to full-time care of seriously
at-risk children (aged 8-12) as an alternative to placement
in large-scale, single sex institutions which are often
situated at a considerable remove from the child's family
and community.   Involvement of families, and the fact that
the house was located in the community the project hoped
to serve were seen as central.

One of the first things we realised was that objectives
change as they are affected by experience of the project
in action.   Staff and management learn as they go along
and they integrate this learning into their work.   If
the evaluator sticks rigidly to the original goals and
tries to measure progress against them, her results will

be out of date by the time the project is finished and
she will probably have 'lost' the main 'actors' in it.
An evaluator can help the process of re-defining objectives
by reflecting back to staff what they are doing and
asking why and how.   At a staff discussion on the role of
evaluation in this project, there was agreement that
'asking questions' was a helpful aspect of my work.   I
learned that it was important to ask them at the right time!

Process.   A great deal of my time as evaluator went into
trying to find ways of making explicit how the work was
done in this project.   My goal was to describe, analyse,
and interpret a changing reality which was influenced by
such intangible factors as the personality of the project
leader, the attitude of the funding agency and whether or
not we had a good summer!   My final approach evolved from
many discussions with staff, management, colleagues and my
research adviser.   I went around in circles and got back
to basic values which, we all agreed, were central to how
the work was done.   I facilitated two lengthy and very
interesting discussions where staff members examined their
own attitudes and beliefs which influenced their work.
They agreed a statement of a 'value base' which underlay
their work in this project.

Several more action/reflection sessions produced the
'guiding principles' of the project which were based on
these values.   These included for example trust, discipline,
fun, structure, consistency and respect.

The programme of the project gave tangible expression to
the values and 'guiding principles'. It was basic to the
experience of a child and his/her family from their first
contact with the project. I had participated in all
aspects of it - from taking a child into care to attending
discharge meetings involving staff, parents and other local
workers. Through my own experience and observations and
staff records and observations, I was able to give details
of the referral system, daily and weekly routine,
counselling sessions with the individual children and
discharge procedures. I looked, for example, at the
difficulties involved in even introducing a routine into
the life of a child who has no experience of 'milestones'
in a day such as school, mealtimes and bedtime.

In looking at 'process' in this project, I was very aware
of how much depended on the five people who made up the
staff - on their commitment, their approach to work and the
way they worked as a team. I had read reports which
described and analysed the work of projects but gave no
picture of the people who did this work. So I talked
with the staff individually and collectively, formally and
informally about their lives, their work experience and
their hopes for this project. I observed how they worked
through working alongside them, eating and sleeping in the
same house and through attending meetings, case conferences
and seminars. A chapter of the report on 'The Staff Team'
includes sections on leadership, teamwork, communication
in the project, staff development and training. This

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exact project could never be repeated elsewhere because
all the people involved would be different.   However, one
of the goals in evaluating it was to make the method of
work as clear as possible, so that others could understand
it and adapt it to their own situation if they so wished.

Understanding.   Understanding is based on far more than
absorbing facts and other people's analytic insights.   A
piece of music or poem can convey an understanding which
is deeper and more whole than a wordy dissertation.   How
could I write the music of the project - the underlying
truth which gave it its meaning?   Mostly, I used words and
struggled to find the right ones.   I learnt to write down
the stories of events which struck me as expressing the
central meaning of some aspect of the project.   In the
early days these were written on the backs of envelopes and
I even found 'key' words written on the back of my hand!

Photographs became a part of the evaluation report of this
project and, for me, one of the most innovative discoveries
of my three years' work.   We met a photographer who was
interested in the work and agreed to work with us in order
to express, through photographs, some of the 'process' of
the project.   He became a frequent visitor to the house.
He showed the children how to use his camera and soon they
became so used to his presence that even his taking pictures
at mealtimes   was not considered to be an intrusion.
Soon we had a series of photographs around the 'guiding
principles' and the programme of the project.   All the

staff participated in selecting the final set of pictures.
We devised captions, most of which were quotes from the
report, which tried to relate the meaning of the pictures
to the text.   The photographer made us a set of slides
which have proved invaluable in helping us outline the main
contents of the report to people interested in the work.

Outcome.   The three central 'components' in this project
were the children, their families and the local community.
At its most basic, I had to be able to say what changes
had taken place at the end of three years.   This involved
the struggle of trying to break down the central elements
in each of these areas and to keep records and documentation
which would show the changes taking place.   It also involved
simply asking people what changes they had or had not
experienced.

I will just summarise our approach to this task in the area
of work done with the children.   The goals set for work
with the children had 'outward' and 'inward' dimensions.
Put very simply, the clear hopes of the parents, staff,
management committee and (although it was expressed in very
different ways) of several of the children themselves was
that, after a period of time, they would be:

(i)   regular participants in whatever aspect of the
        education system was available and appropriate for
        each child (this included alternative education
        projects);

(ii)   out of trouble with the law;

(iii) in control of their parents.

Much more difficult to measure were the goals set for the personal, educational and social development of each child which were intrinsic to the desired outcome of the residential care experience.   We approached this task as follows.   The project staff had several sources which helped to provide a picture or an understanding of areas in the life of each child which were causing problems for him/her.   These included referral for psychological assessment, daily logs and observations and assessment by parents, project staff and other adults involved in the life of the child.

Based on these sources a profile was built up of areas in the life of each child where he/she was having difficulty under the headings:

(i)   personal (including physical and emotional);

(ii)   family and social;

(iii)   educational.

Then goals were set for work with the child.   Examples of these were 'establish order/consistency in life', 'establish trusting relationships with adults','stabilise in school/ alternative school'.   Progress was monitored at weekly staff meetings and at the regular evaluation meetings a comprehensive review of each child's progress was done.   At these sessions, goals and the work being done by staff, children and families to work towards them were discussed.   They were modified

or changed if necessary and plans were made for the next three months. In this way, at the end of the evaluation period, we were able to show the 'goals set' for each child and whether they were 'partially achieved', 'fully achieved' or 'not achieved'. This could then be related to the more 'observable' outcome, i.e., what was this child doing at the end of the evaluation period?

People 'on the outside' saw children better developed physically, able to hold a conversation with an adult and going regularly to school. Most important to many people, they saw children no longer heading for a life of crime and alienation from society. In the project, we saw tears and laughter, celebration and despair as children, families and staff struggled with issues that touched on the meaning of life itself. How do you evaluate that?

A Method of Work. If I were to undertake another evaluation, I would be much clearer about my method of work from an earlier stage. As it was, it took me about one year to clarify where I should be and why, what records I needed, etc. My method as it evolved could be summarised as follows.

Participant Observation. While taking part in a limited way in activities in the house, I tried to consciously observe what was happening and formed impressions which I subsequently tested out through systematic observation and recorded the results. I frequently looked to members of

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staff for clarification of how a particular situation was handled, for instance, and this helped me to understand their approaches to their work. My day-to-day involvement included 'sleeping-in' one night a week during the first one and a half years. This gave me an opportunity to talk informally with staff on duty and to experience the 'residential' aspect of the project.

Attendance at Meetings. I attended all weekly staff meetings and monthly management meetings as well as selected admission or discharge meetings and case conferences. I also attended the staff planning day organised three times a year by the project leader and the staff. Because of other commitments which I had in the community, I took part in local seminars and meetings of community development groups in which staff members from the project were also involved.

Evaluation days. With the co-operation of the project staff and Management Committee, I organised nine staff evaluation days, one staff/management evaluation day and four Management Committee Meetings devoted specifically to evaluation. Agendas for these sessions were focussed on:

(i)   the on-going work of the project in relation to its three major dimensions, i.e. children, families, local community;

(ii)   re-definition of original objectives in relation to experience of the project in action;

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(iii)   perception of the staff and the Management Committee of the work of the project;

(iv)   at staff evaluation days, a detailed review of each child and family in relation to goals set was undertaken.

Record-keeping.   I had access to all staff records.   In addition, I kept detailed notes of all meetings attended and copious notes of my observations.   I made use of a flip chart on occasions when evaluation of the project was the subject of a meeting.   As I began to clarify the key elements in the project, I developed a system of cross-referencing from notes and minutes of meetings to a card index system which formed my approach to the structure of the report.

Why Evaluation?   Different interests have different perspectives on evaluation.   Staff (if they believe in it) can see it as:

(i)   a help in goal clarification and on going planning;

(ii)   a way of looking at how they are doing and what the problems are;

(iii)   bringing knowledge from elsewhere; other projects, other research, to use as a mirror against which this project can look at itself;

(iv)   a way of getting something written about their work - the 'story' of the project;

(v)   a basis for negotiating continued funding.

Funding agencies can see evaluation as:

(i)   a way of measuring costs and effects - did we get value
        for money?

(ii)   a way of producing a 'model' that can be replicated elsewhere;

(iii)   providing 'hard facts' on the outcome of the work;

(iv)   providing recommendations for future action.

Policy makers may view evaluation as:

(i)   making information available about different methods of work,
        successes, failures;

(ii)   examining implications of results of evaluation for policy
        and practice.

Social activists would have questions about evaluation.
Evaluation studies can join thousands of other research
reports which are left on shelves and their findings never
seriously considered. How do you ensure it is taken
seriously? How does evaluation of, for example, community
based initiatives in deprived areas contribute to social
change? What is the responsibility of the evaluator
'beyond the evaluation study'? How do you communicate to
funding agencies the necessity for qualitative as well as
quantitative evaluation? Innovative social projects
demand innovative approaches to evaluation. We will have
to continue to take risks!

PROJECTS INVOLVED IN THE SECOND EUROPEAN

PROGRAMME TO COMBAT POVERTY

1   INISHOWEN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT GROUP.

The area to which this project relates is the peninsula of

Inishowen in Co. Donegal, with a population of 28,000.

Its main objectives are to coordinate the work of voluntary

organisations throughout Inishowen with a view to more

effective development in the whole area and to integrate

the work of all government agencies in the area into this

coordinated effort.

2   COISTE POBAL CHEANNTAIR CHLUAIN CHEARBHÁIN.

This project serves an area of fifty square miles comprising

the parish of Louisburgh, Co. Mayo, and half of the

adjoining parish.   Its main objective is to unite the three

existing community councils in the area into one District

Community Council in order to provide an integrated approach

to the development of the area.   Another objective is to

coordinate existing voluntary bodies under the new council.

3   CONNEMARA WEST LTD.

COMMUNITY RESOURCE AND EDUCATION PROJECT.

The area covered by this project is the parish of Ballinakill,

fifty-five miles west of Galway city, with a population of

1,711 or four hundred families.   An objective of the project

is to encourage and assist the development of the resource

base of the community, with community participation in

planning and management.   It also promotes educational,

6   PARENTS ALONE RESOURCE CENTRE.

This project operates in Coolock in northeast Dublin.   It
covers Community Care Area 8, one of the regions of the
Eastern Health Board.   Its aims include combating the
social isolation of single parent families by providing a
base for the provision of information, support and advice,
carrying out research relevant to these families and making
governmental and local agencies and the public generally
aware of their rights and needs.   Single parent families
are involved in all aspects of the project's activities and
in shaping its direction.

7   SOUTH INNER CITY COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION.

S.I.C.C.D.A. is a voluntary community umbrella organisation
concerned with the overall development of that area of
Dublin's Inner City called The Liberties (population 12,000).
Its major aim is to enable local people to initiate and
manage an integrated development programme which will attempt
to meet needs of the most vulnerable people in the community.

8   WEST TALLAGHT RESOURCE CENTRE.

This project is located in an area consisting of four large
and relatively new local authority housing estates in West
Tallaght with a population of 20,000 people.   It is a
focus and resource for community activity in West Tallaght
concerned with social and economic issues such as
unemployment and welfare rights.   It is also developing
responses to the needs of women and young families in the
area.

cultural, information and training opportunities and services and aims to increase awareness within the community of issues and activities concerned with development.

4   SIMON COMMUNITY WORK PROJECT STUDY.

The Simon Community was established in Ireland in 1969 and now has four communities here. As well as providing accommodation, Simon also runs 'work projects' in three centres.   The aim of this project is to study the previous and present work skills of senior residents, to identify their work preferences and to explore the likely opportunities for work for residents with skills.   It also plans to collect and study information on comparable work projects and to establish the work projects on a pilot basis.

5   DARNDALE/BELCAMP CENTRE FOR THE UNEMPLOYED.

This project is located in Darndale/Belcamp in northeast Dublin, an area of 1,200 houses with a population of 6,500. Its overall objective is to improve the quality of life of the unemployed and expand the range of opportunities available to them.   It aims to create awareness among the wider public of the effects of long-term unemployment and to bring the needs of the unemployed to the forefront of political discussion and decision making.   The project operates a resource centre, a drop-in centre and is involved in both community based and national initiatives aimed at highlighting and tackling unemployment.

9   SLIGO YOUTH CONTACT CENTRE.

The project is located in Sligo town which has a population of 20,000.   It is linked to other initiatives to meet the needs of young people being developed by Sligo Young Enterprises.   The centre provides a place where young unemployed people can meet and share ideas and skills as well as life experiences.   It also provides information, advice and referral to training opportunities.