

Strengthening Capacity for Evaluation in the Context of Developing Countries and Indigenous Communities

Gary Miron
The Evaluation Center

Slides for Evaluation Café on February 8, 2006

The problem

- Evaluation practices have been rapidly transferred/applied in developing countries and indigenous communities with mixed success
- Resistance from indigenous communities: evaluation seen as insensitive, irrelevant, and potentially damaging to local interests

Response from indigenous communities

- A. Evaluation is Western practice and should not be used in indigenous communities
- B. Evaluation as a discipline is universal in nature, however, the application and use of evaluation in indigenous communities are often not appropriate

Obstacles for appropriate application of evaluation in developing countries or indigenous communities

- Weak position of evaluation (low priority in national agendas and absence of an “evaluation culture”)
- Insufficient coordination of evaluation activities
- Limited capacity for evaluation (trained evaluators, information and technical resources)
- Conflicting priorities for donors and recipients
- The framework for the dissemination of evaluation findings

Three comprehensive reviews of environments for education evaluation and research (Shaeffer & Nkinyangi 1983; Gopinathan & Nielson, 1988; (Miron & Sorensen, 1991)

Constraints on evaluation capacity building in developing countries

- perception that evaluation is largely unrecognized and unorganized as a scientific pursuit
- piecemeal approaches, individual efforts and initiatives according to the “contract-contact principle”
- large proportion of the evaluation results and experiences are unpublished and or unavailable
- large demands on a limited evaluation capacity – in terms of numbers of evaluators – which can lead to poor-quality evaluation
- dependence upon foreign expertise and funds

Questions for discussion

- How to build capacity for evaluation in context of developing countries and indigenous communities?
- What are strategies or practices that we can use to compensate for linguistic, cultural, and class differences when working in cross-cultural settings?
- Are there epistemological differences between evaluation in indigenous communities or in the West?
- Is evaluation universal and can the formal practice of evaluation be adapted across national and cultural boundaries?

Notes from our discussion regarding appropriate application of evaluation in cross-cultural contexts

- Clarify objectives of evaluation and how findings will be used
- “Judgment-free” evaluation
- Use existing frameworks or examples to justify evaluation: e.g., law and sports
- Incorporate indigenous values into the evaluation
- Incorporate local representatives in review/advisory panels for the evaluation
- Involve stakeholders/impacted parties in defining evaluation questions, planning the design and methods for collecting data, interpreting results, disseminating results