

# Methodologically Inclusive Transformative Evaluation as an Enabler of Social Inclusion

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Evaluation of social projects, programs and policies initially was perceived as the means to rationalize social policy-making by generating value-free scientifically collected information about policy options. Evaluation was viewed as an objective, fair, neutral and impartial process that can produce the truth. While many evaluation practitioners still share this vision, there is a growing understanding within the professional community that “the set of profound beliefs that each evaluator holds as his or her worldview about the nature of reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and the nature of human nature (axiology), is reflected in the approaches he or she chooses to employ in practice – knowingly or unknowingly, consciously or unconsciously” (Bawden, 2006, p. 38).

So, if evaluation is never value-free, what values should be given a priority? International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation (IOCE) holds the position that equity and social justice should be central values for evaluators. Evaluation that is based on values of equity, equality, social justice, and human rights and freedoms, as well as on the principles of tolerance and embracing diversity, can serve as one of the mechanisms enabling all citizens to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

IOCE also holds the position that evaluation – including impact evaluation – should be methodologically inclusive. IOCE calls for a multiple method approach to evaluation that does not consider any single method (e.g. randomized control trials) as first choice or as the ‘gold standard’. Methodological inclusiveness enables evaluators to create opportunities for all social groups to participate in evaluation and thus contributes to enhanced social inclusion.

## **Transformative Paradigm as the Foundation for Socially Inclusive Evaluation**

Paradigm is a set of worldviews hold by a person. Transformative paradigm proposed by Donna Mertens (2009) places central importance on the lives and experiences of socially marginalized groups and communities: e.g. women, racial and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, poor. Because of its focus on social justice as a principal value and recognition of the need for methodological inclusiveness, the transformative paradigm is congruent with the IOCE position on evaluation. Transformative paradigm explicitly calls for socially inclusive evaluations, so the application of its principles enhances the capacity of evaluation to contribute to overall social inclusion in the society.

Transformative paradigm alerts evaluators to the existence of multiple versions of reality. It recognizes that these versions of reality are not equal, and that some of them are given privilege based on social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender, religion and disability positionality. Evaluation based on the transformative paradigm should challenge versions of reality that sustain

oppressive systems and make visible versions of reality that have the potential to further human rights and social inclusion.

Transformative paradigm sets forth a number of ethical principles for evaluators:

- Evaluators should identify and respect cultural norms that support human rights and social justice;
- Evaluators should identify and challenge cultural norms that sustain social oppression;
- Evaluators should not just extract information and data from the communities, they should also give back to the community in a meaningful way;
- Evaluators should recognize and validate the knowledge, expertise and strengths in the communities they work with;
- Evaluators should facilitate enabling conditions so that actions to enhance social justice and human rights will continue after the evaluator leaves the community;
- Evaluators should recognize and properly communicate their limitations.

Transformative paradigm recognizes that knowledge is constructed in a complex cultural context of power and privilege. Evaluators have to understand realities of communities and social groups they work with. To develop the necessary awareness, evaluators need to establish interactive and trusting relationship with communities involved in evaluations.

As for evaluation methodology, transformative paradigm stipulates that method decisions should be guided by two criteria: ability of methods to capture the contextual complexity and their appropriateness to the cultural groups involved in the evaluation. This means that evaluators should use a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods and data to facilitate responsiveness to different stakeholders and issues.

### **Transformative Evaluation as an Enabler of Social Inclusion**

Transformative paradigm challenges the old-school approaches that focused on problems and deficiencies and asserts that all social groups and communities have strength and assets and that people are experts in their own situations and contexts. Using the language of the human capital model (Gratton & Ghoshal, 2003, see Table 1), transformative evaluation treats people as investors who can provide their intellectual, social and emotional capital, especially knowledge about their communities and life experiences and self-awareness, to help achieve the goals of evaluation.

Table 1. Model of Human Capital.

Intellectual capital	Social capital	Emotional capital
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cognitive complexity</li> <li>• Learning capacity</li> <li>• Specialized knowledge and skills</li> <li>• Tacit knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Network of relationships</li> <li>• Sociability</li> <li>• Trustworthiness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-awareness</li> <li>• Ambition and courage</li> <li>• Integrity</li> <li>• Resilience</li> </ul>

Evaluators also have to regard themselves as investors that bring not only specialized evaluation knowledge and evaluative skills, but their social and emotional capital. Self-awareness is especially important for evaluators because it is crucial for establishing effective partnerships and relationships with community members as well as for understanding one's worldviews that influence the perception of other people experiences (Mertens, 2009).

Transformative paradigm requires evaluators to develop networks of relationships with members of social groups and communities where they work. Given that evaluators and members of social groups and communities often come from vary different social and cultural backgrounds, the very process of the development of the relationships gives all parties an experience of social inclusion within a framework of a single evaluation. Potentially these experiences can be later translated into other situations.

The direct effect of the inclusion in the process of evaluation is the creation of opportunities for expression of interests and worldviews of less privileged members of the society and for inclusion of these interests and views into the political discourse thus contributing to higher social inclusion in the society at large.

### **Framework for Judging the Quality of Transformative Evaluations**

Mertens (2010) has developed a set of questions that are to help evaluators to assess if the assumptions of the transformative paradigm were realized in the course of the evaluation. These questions are as follows:

- To what extent were the evaluators able to identify cultural norms within communities that were supportive of, or deleterious to, the pursuit of social justice and human rights?
- How did the evaluators demonstrate that they had taken action to support the norms that supported human rights and social justice while challenging those that sustain an oppressive system?
- How did the evaluators demonstrate that they were leaving the community better off than when they began the evaluation—in terms of increased knowledge, capacity or changes in policies or practices?
- In what ways was the evaluation framed to take into account the expertise, knowledge and strengths of the community in order to provide a platform for authentic engagement between the evaluator and the community?
- How did the evaluation address the sustainability of the changes in the community that provide for the possibility of taking action to enhance social justice and human rights after the evaluator leaves the community?
- To what extent did the evaluator reveal different versions of reality?
- How did the evaluators determine those versions of reality that had the potential to either support or impede progress towards social justice and human rights?
- What were the consequences of identifying these versions of reality?
- How did this evaluation contribute to the change in understandings of what is real?
- What is the nature of the relationship between the evaluators and the stakeholders?

- What evidence is there that the evaluators addressed issues of power differentials explicitly and that the voices of the least powerful are accurately expressed and acted upon?
- How did the evaluators establish a trusting relationship with the stakeholders?
- To what extent did evaluators engage with the full range of stakeholders to gather qualitative data that enhance their understandings of the community?
- To what extent were the methods used responsive to the specific needs of the different stakeholder groups?
- How were the methodologies designed to enhance use of the evaluation findings to support the pursuit of social justice and human rights?

Given that evaluation constitutes an integral part of the policy-making process by generate evidence to inform public policies, many of the principles that are applied to evaluation are derived from and are transferable back to a broader policy-making context. Many of the above questions – with some modification - can potentially be used to assess the level of social inclusiveness of the public policy processes.

## **Conclusions**

Methodologically inclusive evaluations where the choice of methods is guided by the need to capture the contextual complexity and appropriateness to the cultural groups involved in the evaluation can create experiences of social inclusion within a framework of a single evaluation for all parties involved.

Inclusive evaluations create opportunities for expression of interests and worldviews of less privileged members of the society and for inclusion of these interests and views into the political discourse thus contributing to higher social inclusion in the society at large.

As evaluation constitutes an integral step on the public policy process, that is, the collection of evidence to inform the decision-making, questions that frame the assessment of social inclusiveness on an evaluation can be used to frame the assessment of social inclusiveness of the public policy development processes.

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