

## Evaluation tips

So, if you too would like to try your hands in a participatory action research external evaluation, what would you need to do?

- Have a steering group ready to learn from experienced researchers, but also be ready to express its views and assert its position on a specific issue
- If you are new to research, the issues may be new to you and at times you may feel out of your comfort zone;
- Hence you need to give yourself time to learn, to listen to each other, to listen to the experienced researchers, to discuss, to read and learn from other similar projects before you reach your conclusions as to what you want out of the evaluation;
- Treat your consultant researchers with respect, but make sure they know what you want
- Consider together what are the best ways of capturing the key processes of the project you are focusing on
- There is always more than one process ongoing in a group; such as inner group dynamics and factions, the overall relationships with relevant outer groups; between the group representatives of a specific aspect and the inner, as well as the outer groups.
- Consider how you are going to capture the evolving processes – what are the best methods to do so? You cannot record and video everything and it takes too much time to analyse the data even if you do so!
- So which are the best methods that do not take too much time, are not too intrusive, but still enable the evaluator to get the core of the process/s you wish to focus on.
- You can decide to focus on different aspects of the process at different times, and with different methods.
- Remember, you wish always to retain the authentic voices of the participants, so your methods need to enable this to happen
- It is of value to use more than one method, because each method is better at capturing some aspects, and less good than another method at capturing some other aspects.
- Participants do not necessarily speak in one voice, and may also change their views.
- Hence the importance of looking at processes as different points in time, when people have to make different types of decisions or move to new tasks and roles
- And it all can be fun..
- But it is not always that much fun because you have to take into account all the time that different people have different preferences and priorities, and that you – as the evaluator – cannot impose your preferences on them.
- You can try and convince them to follow your suggestions, or apply their suggestions, or find a new way together.
- If they can understand what it is that you are trying to do and why you stand a better chance for your views to be adopted by the participants.
- Remember, the participants too care about the project, and may have a valid point of view.
- Or they just may be tired of being evaluated..
- But if the evaluation task is interesting they are more likely to become engaged in it.
- Try and have inbuilt opportunities to feed back key findings from your evaluation, included those that are not flattering. The latter are obviously more difficult to accept, but if you ask the participants for their explanation of these findings, you may gain not only an additional insight, but also their readiness to take on board the implications of the findings.