



Possibility of Participatory Evaluation for Promoting Sustainable Agriculture Project in Samroung Commune of Cambodia

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Abstract In all over the world, many organizations implement project from a viewpoint of sustainable development. In case of Japan, 10.5 billion USD is used for Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2012. Projects were not only implemented but also evaluated by donors, experts and implementers such as NGO and universities. This kind of conventional project evaluation is designed mainly by implementer side and local people regarded as just informants. But criticisms for conventional project evaluation were also studied by other researchers. In 2000, previous study stated that thinking of experts often different from that of people in developing country. Other studies also mentioned that, for improving quality of assistance, it is necessary to conduct project evaluation by adding the point of view of local people and feedback results of project evaluation to local people. However, implementation of participatory evaluation also has difficulties such as resource limitation and conflict of interest. So, this study dealt with the possibility of implementing participatory evaluation for project from a viewpoint of sustainable development in Samroung commune of Cambodia. The study was advanced through comparing evaluation result of conventional evaluation and model participatory evaluation. Result shows that result of two evaluation approaches has some differences because of resource limitation and less objectivity. Therefore, this study concluded that project evaluation better to be done not only by experts but also by local participants. This study proposes different approach of participatory evaluation for evaluating the project properly with more local voice in shorter time and less expense. This approach has potential to enhance accountability toward stakeholders of Japanese ODA because result of evaluation is led with more local voices with objectivity of experts. Process of this approach also has potential as capacity building for stakeholders including local people in Cambodia.

Keywords participatory evaluation, conventional evaluation, participation level, sustainable development, Japanese ODA

INTRODUCTION

In all over the world, many organizations implement project from a viewpoint of sustainable development. In case of Japan, 10.5 billion USD is used for Official Development Assistance (ODA) in 2012 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014). Projects were not only implemented but also evaluated by stakeholders such as implementer, donor and expert. This kind of conventional project evaluation is designed mainly by implementer side and local people regarded as just an informant. By framework of ladder of participation that is considered as one of the classic and most influential participation theories, this participation level is evaluated less than placation under degree of tokenism. It is because that the ground rules allow people to advice but retain for the power holders the continued right to decide (Arnstein, 1969).

Criticisms for conventional project evaluation were also studied by other researchers. Chambers (2000) stated that thinking of experts often different from that of people in developing

country. Other studies also mentioned that, for improving the quality of assistance, it is necessary to conduct project evaluation by adding point of view of local people and feedback of the results. Participation of stakeholders for evaluation is recognized to have benefit not only for improving their knowledge and technique related to evaluation but also for their capacity development on development management. For JICA (2001), the participatory evaluation has 4 objectives: 1) building management capacity, 2) promoting ownership, 3) enhancing effective feedback, and 4) advancing accountability for donor and Japanese citizens. So, participatory evaluation can be considered as one method for capacity building and for expecting sustainability of future activities on project site because stakeholders learn method of project evaluation, strengthen ownership of projects, and improve their management skills in project implementation. Although participatory evaluation does not have a fixed and agreed-upon definition, this study applies the definition of Cousins and Earl (1999) who defined participatory evaluation as applied social research that involves a partnership between trained and practice-based decision makers, organization members with program responsibility, or people with a vital interest in the program. But it also has difficulties to implement. For example, to make reasonable evaluation result without conflict of interest seems to be difficult to make because this evaluation system involves more stakeholders as evaluator. If there is no conflict of interest, result of evaluation will be trustable and carry out positive impact for accountability toward donor and citizens. So, for implementing sustainable development positively, this study dealt with the possibility of implementing participatory evaluation for project from a viewpoint of sustainable development in Samroung commune of Cambodia.

Study Site

Study covered 11 villages which are located in Samroung commune, Phrey Chhor district, Kampong Cham province, Cambodia. These villages consist of Bontey Thmey, Takrit, KondalKoang, TompongRisey, Svayprey, Samroung, Sodey, Thmey, Veal, Smei and Preykhcheay village. This commune is located at the distance of 83 kilometers from Phnom Penh city and 8,111 people are living in 2011 (Fig. 1). In Samroung commune, conventional farming system is mainly applied for production in order to increasing yield. For promoting sustainable farming systems through sustainable agriculture based on natural resource circulation, Institute of Environment Rehabilitation and Conservation (ERECON) and Tokyo University of Agriculture has been implementing a project titled project on promoting sustainable agriculture in Samroung commune of Kampong Cham province, Cambodia since April 2011.

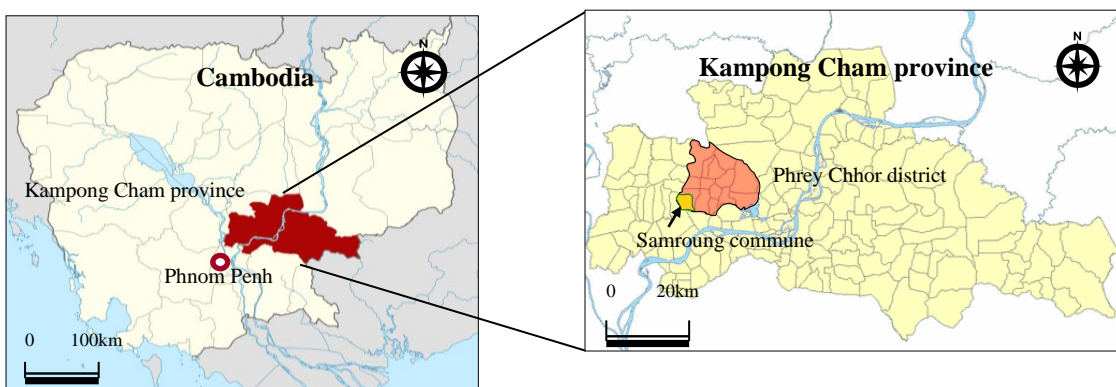


Fig. 1 Location of Samroung commune in Kamong Cham Province

METHODOLOGY

For achieving objective, the study was advanced through model participatory evaluation, focus group discussion, with 6 committee members of farmers' group and a school director on 27

September, 2013. In model participatory evaluation, definition of evaluation, criteria for evaluation, and basic information and activities of the project were shared in order to implementing adequate evaluation. Result of evaluation was answered by score on five points Likert Scale along the continuum of not satisfied at all to very satisfied. For avoiding conflict of interest, researcher acted just as facilitator encouraging participants to answer their opinions without hesitation.

In the project, 17 contents were implemented from April 2012 to March 2013, Japanese financial year of 2012. For evaluating activities in 2012, researcher explained contents under 5 activities briefly and form question with participants. Then, participants evaluated these activities based on OECD criteria for evaluation such as relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impacts and sustainability (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 Materials for explaining process of participatory evaluation (left) and model participatory evaluation with local participants (right)

Conventional Evaluation Approach and Results in 2012

From the 1st year of the project, implement organization named Institute of Environment Rehabilitation and Conservation (ERECOV) organize evaluation meeting as mid-term evaluation at the end of each financial year. The evaluation team comprised eight experts from Thailand, Cambodia and Japan having expertise in evaluation of international cooperation activities. The team visited project site in Samroung commune from 6 to 7 March, 2013. In the observation, meetings were held for direct interviews by evaluators to farmers, school teachers and concerned government officers in farmlands, elementary schools and market. The evaluation team also observed farmers group meeting as well as workshop on promoting sustainable agriculture. Through the observation in site, every team member evaluated project achievements by using evaluation sheets based on OECD criteria for evaluation. Finally, the team concluded “Summary of Evaluation” at the evaluation meeting on 8th March where 31 participants from collaborated organizations attended. At the end of the evaluation meeting, summary of evaluation was submitted from leader of evaluation team to representative of project implementer. Evaluation team evaluated the project as satisfactory in terms of activities for farmers, but could not evaluate impact of activities in elementary schools because they could not observe activities for this criterion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparing Results of Conventional Evaluation and Model Participatory Evaluation

Table 1 shows contents and evaluated activities done by evaluation team on March and local participants on September 2013. Contents of activities which has asterisk were observed and evaluated by evaluation team on March, 2013.

As Table 1 shows, project team could observe only 7 contents in 5 activities at project site because of the time limitation. They evaluated almost all of activities as satisfactory and few

activities were evaluated as the highest or the second highest score through observation.

Yet, local participants evaluated 17 contents. Besides, as different from evaluation team, they evaluated not only activities but also individual content as possible as they could.

Table 1 Result of evaluation by evaluation team and local people

Contents of activity in 2012 (From April 2012 to March 2013) * Activities which evaluation team observed	Criteria of evaluation	Evaluation by evaluation team (March 2013)	Evaluation by farmers (September 2013)
Activity 0			
1. Conduct evaluation meeting for 2011	1. Relevance	-	Very satisfied
2. Distribute materials for 139 farmers	2. Effectiveness	-	Very satisfied (For 2, satisfied)
	3. Efficiency	-	Very satisfied (For 2, satisfied)
	4. Impact	-	Very satisfied
	5. Sustainability	-	Very satisfied
Activity 1			
1. Set 33 model farms*	1. Relevance	Satisfactory	Very satisfied (For 2 and 3, normal)
2. Select core members for farmers' group in each village	2. Effectiveness	Satisfactory	Very satisfied (For 2 and 3, normal)
3. Form group on Samroung Safe Agricultural Products (SSAP) and select committee members	3. Efficiency	Satisfactory	Satisfied (For 4, very satisfied)
4. Conduct technical training at Thailand	4. Impact	Satisfactory	Very satisfied
5. Conduct workshop for local farmers who do not belong to the farmers' groups by SSAP*	5. Sustainability	Satisfactory	Very satisfied
Activity 2			
1. Establish Pellet Compost Center*	1. Relevance	Satisfactory	Very satisfied
2. 22 rear cars were distributed	2. Effectiveness	Satisfactory	Very satisfied (For 2, satisfied)
	3. Efficiency	Satisfactory	Very satisfied
	4. Impact	Satisfactory	Very satisfied
	5. Sustainability	Satisfactory	Very satisfied
Activity 3			
1. Hold meeting for project teams of surveying agricultural product market	1. Relevance	Satisfactory	Very satisfied
2. Hold meeting for project team of products with less chemical input sales*	2. Effectiveness	Satisfactory	Very satisfied
3. Register to Cambodian Organic Agriculture Association (COAA)	3. Efficiency	Satisfactory	Very satisfied (For 3, normal)
	4. Impact	Satisfactory	Very satisfied (For 3, normal)
	5. Sustainability	Satisfactory	Very satisfied
Activity 4			
1. Promote the food, agriculture and environment education through activities at organic farm*	1. Relevance	Highly satisfactory	Satisfied
2. Conduct rice growing experiment with different three formulas were conducted at each school as the food, agriculture and environment education.*	2. Effectiveness	Satisfactory	Very satisfied
3. Conduct training on the food, agriculture and environment education for school teachers	3. Efficiency	Satisfactory	Very satisfied
	4. Impact	-	Very satisfied (For 3, normal)
	5. Sustainability	Potentially satisfactory	Very satisfied
Activity 5			
1. Organize evaluation meeting on 2012*	1. Relevance	Highly satisfactory	Very satisfied
2. Publish and distribute newsletter which includes the contents of activities and the outcomes as well as project evaluation	2. Effectiveness	Satisfactory	Very satisfied (For 2, satisfied)
	3. Efficiency	Satisfactory	Very satisfied
	4. Impact	Satisfactory	Very satisfied
	5. Sustainability	Satisfactory	Very satisfied

Source: Summary of Evaluation for Year 2 and focus group discussion in 2013, ERECON

As same as Chambers (2000) mentioned, result done by evaluation team and local people showed some differences.

Firstly, local participants evaluated activity 0 which evaluation team did not evaluate. Also,

they recognized not completely satisfactory toward effectiveness and efficiency on distributing materials to 139 farmers. It is because that some farmers did not practice adequately even they received materials for practicing the learnt techniques such as compost and bio-pesticide making. Some farmers seem to busy with other tasks and less motivation for practicing the learnt techniques. Distributing 22 rear cars were also regarded low effectiveness and efficiency at the moment because some farmers not yet use for the intended purpose and just keep these at their house.

Secondly, local participants evaluate low on selecting core members and forming farmer's group. Forming farmer's group is not special for farmers. Reason of low evaluation was that the group was not registered as agricultural cooperative to the Cambodian government. However, registration of farmer's group to government is not included as project purpose.

Thirdly, activities at elementary schools were evaluated very high by both of evaluation team and local people. But participants especially teacher regarded impact of the rice experiment was normal. They regarded it was just beginning and they would like to continue experiment with vegetable in order to teach advantages of sustainable agriculture to students.

At last, it was also revealed through focus group discussion that some farmers did not know attached newsletter named Sustainable Agriculture in each village. It was attached on information board in each village in order to share result of activities and evaluation meeting on previous year.

Discussion

JICA (2001) mentioned participatory evaluation is needed in JICA project because sustainability of project will be improved, and beneficiaries can understand project and accept them more readily. It applied same in Samroung commune because local participants mentioned they could understand project design and activities well through model participatory evaluation. But, through model participatory evaluation, it was considered that farmer's tend to evaluate contents of activities positively. It may cause conflict of interest on result of evaluation. Facilitator needs to consider the way to prevent conflict of interest carefully.

Meanwhile, evaluation by experts did not evaluate the project properly because time limitation did not allow them to observe all of activities and process of implementation. Opinions of the entire range of beneficiary local people were also difficult to be involved because the evaluation team could discuss with only some of farmers who were selected by implementer. As Beatrice (2008) stated, proper information and feedback may only be obtained through interactive participation and required involvement of relevant stakeholders in the project at Samroung commune.

Normally, participatory evaluation was conducted with participation of experts and local participants at the same time. But, as same as JICA (2001) studied, not enough time and money can be considered as limitations for implementation.

So, this study would like to propose different approach of participatory evaluation for mid-term and terminal evaluation as experienced from the case of Samroung commune. In detail, local participants evaluate contents of activities through observation and focus group discussion with project implementer. It is similar to monitoring but its purposes are not only checking progress and adjustment points of the project activities but also its impact and sustainability based on OECD criteria. Tentative summary of the earlier evaluation should be shared with the evaluation team as their reference. Evaluation team conducts observation after checking tentative summary of earlier evaluation that is made by local evaluators. Under this approach, experts can understand voice of local people properly with shorter time and less expenses if they would read tentative summary of earlier evaluation before their observation. In addition, sustainability can be evaluated from contents of tentative summary because management capacity of local people will be shown on summary. JICA (2012) wrote some project conclude that they have sustainability if there were no problems when evaluation conducted. But, in fact, it seems not proper way to evaluation sustainability.

It was also considered that facilitator needs to improve knowledge related to evaluation and facilitation for improving effectiveness and efficiency of participatory evaluation. Their facilitation seems essential for conducting proper participatory evaluation without conflict of interest.

Besides, this study could not check possibility of improving ownership of local people through participatory evaluation because it needs to be studied by how their involvement changed, and how their participation level improved in future activities. It needs to be studied in future studies.

CONCLUSION

According to the result and discussion done in this study, it can be concluded that Samroung Commune has possibility of implementing participatory evaluation. Result of the study shows that conventional evaluation done by only experts seems not evaluate the project properly because of time limitation and less involvement of local people. In addition, result of evaluation done by experts and local participants has some differences. However, local participants seem to evaluate the project positively and they may evaluate some points which are not included as project purposes. From these points, evaluation seems better to be done not only by experts but also by local participants. So, this study proposes different approach of participatory evaluation for evaluating the project properly with more local voice in shorter time and less expense. This process also seems able to evaluate sustainability of the project properly. In addition, this study could not check possibility of improving ownership of local people through participatory evaluation. So it needs to be studied in future studies.

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