

Research and Methodology Discussion Papers 3

16th of April 2003

With Rick Davies, Monitoring and Evaluation

The Search for Evaluation and Methodology

Following the initial discussion with Rick Davies at DFID on March 25th 2003, it was agreed to have a one day meeting in Cambridge with Romi Khosla and Jane Samuels to explore ways of forming a common framework based on the freedom's approach. Of particular interest were issues relating to evaluations and how these were relevant to the exploration.

It was decided to structure the full day discussion into two parts. The first half of the day was taken up by questions related to evaluations.

The second half of the day was taken up by a discussion on the relationship between culture and freedom and whether it was possible to identify specific cultural issues within the community and how these would be placed within the Removing Unfreedoms framework.

Romi Khosla put some questions on the table for discussion:

1. How does one take a conceptual idea like unfreedom and begin to evaluate its relevance to a community?
2. Are there established methods for this?
3. Can one-measure conditions like Unfreedoms?
4. Does one need to work towards producing indices of measurements?
5. The human development index of the UN is a national level index. Can one think of eventually having city level unfreedom indices?
6. What kind of support can one get in one's enquiries from established databases such as the census and established evaluations?

7. At this stage we are exploring ideas and identifying specific areas of research.
8. The question is what should we be doing to further the exploratory nature of our research?

Rick began the discussions by pointing out that there was a need to consider and distinguish between a global level enquiry and a ground level enquiry. It was possible, he said, at the global level enquiry one may find that data and methods were inadequate. However the ground level the data and methodology has been considerably developed. There has been an enormous amount of attention paid to community led ground level participatory approaches.

Rick explained that it was necessary to look at the type of existing data and evaluation methods being used at the community level. One needed to determine whether they were adequate or weak. If they were weak then one would have to make out a case for alternative evaluations for approaching the community.

Ideas come and go in academic discussions and community practices. The point is what is the value one is adding to knowledge with one's enquiry?

What is a distinct and unique about an alternative approach to development? The real challenge to policy makers is whether a new approach to development is significantly adding value to what they are already doing.

What one needs to determine is how this will work on the ground.

Romi emphasized that the purpose of the current enquiry was not to design a new methodology but rather to explore the significance of the *freedom approach* to the policy makers and the community and a discussion about evaluations was very important at this early stage of the enquiry.

Jane explained that our primary contact for this enquiry was with Sparc and that the proposed workshop in Bombay during May 6th to 9th had been set up for that purpose. Rick pointed out that there were some inherent risks in confining the enquiry to just one community or NGO. These risks related to the enquiry going wrong and astray due to unexpected interchanges of human relationships that

might result in the validity of the concept being sacrificed. He said it would be more persuasive to have two or more field enquiries to ensure that irregularities of human relationships and circumstances at fieldwork level do not jeopardise the validity of the concept.

Romi explained that the speed with which this project was being carried out made it event driven. It was a really a pre-view event to gauge the potentials for support from a wider audience to take the work forward in the future.

Rick suggested one method to go forward for a future enquiry, if the validity of the freedom approach is accepted, would be to locate separate advocates for the *Rights approach*, the *Livelihoods approach* the *Poverty approach* and the *Freedom approach*. Each of these advocates could then take as a common reference point the existing Sparc data. This data can then be re-interpreted under each of the four headings to see whether there was any difference between the four frameworks. Each advocate would need to interview Sparc as well as rely on the documented knowledge about the Spark project. The results of this enquiry would reveal how the existing development approaches currently championed by DFID are placed within the wider freedom framework.

Rick indicated that in the current enquiry there is a chain of 3 parties involved. There are the researchers making an enquiry. There is Spark who knows and represents the community and then there is the community itself.

Sparc is the lead into the community and they are the clients for the Freedom Approach. Therefore Sparc's comments and reactions to the enquiry are the critical ones and determine, on the ground, what the freedom framework could potentially offer.

If, as a result of the enquiry with Sparc, Sparc felt that their existing M and E (monitoring and evaluations systems) could benefit from a *Freedom's* framework, then one could continue the enquiry with the objective of supplementing their existing M and E framework.

It would be important to determine in the discussions with Sparc, how their achievements on the ground link to the macro-goals such as the Millennium Development goals as well as the development as Freedom goals.

Rick suggested some background reading from three papers.

1. *The evolutionary approach to facilitating organisational learning: an experiment by the Christian Commission for development in Bangladesh.*

2. *Does empowerment start at home? And if so will we recognise it?*

3. *Guidance notes on increasing the participation of the poor in the assessment of the impact of development interventions.*

He suggested by holding that comparing the freedom framework to the framework of the Sparc data, the approach one took could be determined by asking certain questions.

1. Does the existing Sparc data cover all aspects of Freedoms?

2. If not which are the implications and which Freedoms need more attention?

3. Does Sparc agree that all five Freedoms are of equal importance or do they think that certain unfreedoms are more important than others?

4. Do they define unfreedoms in a different way or does the argument generate potential areas of unfreedom that have not been previously identified?

To prove the utility of the five freedoms framework each "freedom" must be made "observable". By breaking down the broad concepts into sub-categories one could begin to compare Sparc's understanding of unfreedoms to the notions put forward by Amartya Sen. One would also need to see the sub categories of the *livelihood, rights and poverty* approaches. Such sub categories would enable cross-comparisons to be made.

In this light further questions could be asked:

1. Is Sparc applying the freedoms as "we" would do in other words do we share the same understanding of the meaning?

2. Is Sparc prioritising the freedoms and, if so, do they have a strong argument to do so.

Rick noted that the Romi Khosla, Sikandar Hasan, Jane Samuels paper *Removing Unfreedoms (UN Habitat discussion paper)* had already attempted to identify the sub categories of the Five Freedom approach. But he felt uncomfortable with the definitions of "Alternative Evaluations" put forward in the paper that distinguished between *quantitative* and *qualitative*.

This he said was a dichotomous format that was not necessary or useful. Top down verses the bottom down evaluations are not alternatives but are a necessary interconnected components of the same evaluation.

Rick explained that it would be better to use the deductive and inductive approach to distinguish between the two kinds of categories of information required. The deductive category is the one generally derived from the theoretical academic formulation of a concept. While the inductive approach derives information from the ground level and is often generated by the community and its own concerns.

Both categories of information need to be compiled to arrive at a comprehensive picture. So in the *Freedom* enquiry it is quite possible that the deductive category of observable characteristics will be fairly clear from the theoretical formulations of Sen and others. However we would have to be prepared to define the inductive categories through a dialogue process with the community in which we would have to recognise the communities understanding of Freedom and their interpretations of it.

The post lunch session was devoted to a discussion on the issue of culture and its bearing on the *Freedom* approach.

Sen has dealt at considerable length with this question and Jane Samuels thought it would be pertinent to address this issue in the enquiry. Questions put forward for discussion by Jane focused on the relationship between culture and freedom and whether it was possible to identify specific cultural issues, within the community, and how these would be placed within the *Removing Unfreedoms* framework.

1. How does one determine what role culture plays in enabling a community to choose to live a life that they value?
2. Is it possible to identify cultural traits as a factor in development?
3. If so can such traits be evaluated?
4. Can one identify and evaluate cultural aspirations of a community?
5. Can one evaluate cultural constraints in a community and whether they form a part of Unfreedom?
6. How can one evaluate the elements of culture that contribute to human freedoms?
7. What analytical technique can one use to overlay a cultural issue template over the freedom framework template?

Rick suggested we need to consider cultural unfreedoms at two levels. At the macro-global level and at the micro-local level. Also one needs to know when culture is a constraint and when it is a resource. Other issues to consider will be what the NGO's understanding of cultural identity is and what the community understands by culture.

Specific views about the place of culture in the aspiration of people would need to be determined at Global and local levels.

When understanding the role of cultural traits, Rick suggested the use of evaluations techniques that used the concept of "difference" to generate information. When asked to distinguish between the different cultural traits in the community, the community should be asked to explain the differences rather than provide descriptive information about cultural traits. Rick referred to the work of the anthropologist Gregory Bateson on evaluating social and cultural differences. Informers at the local level should be asked not to define the quality of cultural traits but distinguish between how to measure significant differences when considering local responses to an event or situation.

Rick explained how this technique helps to generate useful knowledge and make observable the classification schemes that people always carry in the heads without being conscious of them. Different cultural traits can be entered onto different cards and can be sorted and grouped together according to the difference between them rather than the obvious similarities between them.

There is a need for both the deductive and inductive inquiry into cultural factors that influence a community's life. However a theory is required to inform the enquiry at the deductive level. It is important therefore to have a cultural theory that relates to the field of enquiry. There are a number of such theories and Rick explained it was important to be clear about the perimeters and goals of one's choice.

This will provide the justification for a further enquiry to the local community. In the first instance it would be necessary to speak to Sparc about their awareness of cultural constraints and aspirations. How well is culture understood? To what degree do the individuals of a community express their character and potentials through cultural identity and how does culture determine identity formation through the relationship to the community. Finally how would the responses to these questions view the role of culture with regard to the *freedom* framework?

The evaluations could begin to provide some way to encouraging more sensitivity to what is culturally local and particular and how it may provide an essential component when considering a *freedom* framework.

Jane explained that the overview of the cultural theoretical framework in this instance would be limited to enquiring into cultural blockages that Sparc has identified that stop people living a life that they value. Thus the larger global cultural theories are not necessary to take into consideration for the limited scope of the present enquiry. In this light the enquiry with Sparc, during the workshop in Bombay, will be confined to local cultural constraints as understood by Sparc. There will be no attempt made to re-define Sparc's understanding of culture.

Rick suggested that it was possible to draw up a template that would compare the cultural traits defined by Sparc to the *Freedom* framework. By linking the traits to the sub categories defined by the Freedom framework it may be possible to identify the relevance of cultural traits.

The afternoon concluded with a review of preferable ways of recording responses generated during the Bombay workshop. There was a choice between film, audio-recording and written note taking. Rick suggested that it would depend on the informers and which method they would feel most comfortable with. The combination of all three techniques would be ideal. However he felt it was essential to have an audio recording transcripts and written notes translated when one was aggregating the responses.