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THE EVALUATION OF PEASANT'S ENTERPRISES  
AS AN EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

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1. Introduction

The present paper which is submitted for the consideration of the International Meeting on Participatory Research, tries to illustrate an experience conducted in Santiago, Chile regarding a periodic evaluation of a group of peasant enterprises. The purpose of such an evaluation was to get an understanding of the functions and outcomes of those enterprises composed by peasants, and at the same time, it aimed at providing the participants with some training.

Undoubtedly, it is a unique experience due to the circumstances within which it took place and, as such, it is necessary to take them into account in order to understand the total experience.

In general terms, let's anticipate that the paper treats an experience conducted in the rural area of the Province of Santiago during the period between May 1976 and April 1978. Starting in 1975, small enterprises were established in the above mentioned area; this process had the support of the Catholic Church. An office of the archdiocese of Santiago structured a program which consisted of financial aid, technical assistance and training, oriented to the above mentioned enterprises.

The training program included, among its activities, the accomplishment of a quarterly evaluation of every enterprise by means of the so-called "Evaluation Workshops". These evaluations precisely constitute the experience analyzed in the present paper.

In the first place, we will give some general background pertaining to the characteristics of the peasants' enterprises.

Secondly, we will provide a general description of the training program.

In part three, we will explain in greater detail and depth, the characteristics of the Evaluation Workshops and we will analyze their outcomes and scope from both the research and the educational points of view.

At the end, we will provide some conclusions regarding the significance of this experience.

## 2. Background of the Peasants' Enterprises

We will briefly present some principal data in order to get to know the characteristics of the peasants' enterprises, that is the framework within which the experience took place.

2.1. Main Objective: such Enterprises were created with the purpose of solving the unemployment problem of a group of workers by means of community work.

2.2 Duration: the Enterprises began their activities on May 1975 and ended them on April 1978.

2.3 Number of Enterprises: considering the diverse modifications such as eliminations, fusions and re-structurings, the annual average was 11 enterprises.

2.4 Number of Partners: the annual average was : approximately 80 partners.

2.5 Characteristics of the Partners: the enterprises were integrated by unemployed agricultural workers, many of whom were unionist leaders.

2.6 Structure of the Enterprises: enterprises were constituted by a number of partners which oscillated between 5 and 10; all of them were heads of families. Among themselves, they appointed a delegate or administrative representative and a representative of production. In addition, they had their own form of inner-organization.

2.7 Functioning Characteristics: enterprises were established in rented farms which had an average extension, oscillating between 10-20 hectares. Annual plans of exploitation were structured and thus, the rents were usually set for the same period of time. The plans generally involved the cultivation of vegetables and small farms mainly according to their capacity for being used.

2.8 Financing: the enterprises were provided with : a credit which covered all their operating expenses including the equivalent to a wage for the partner-workers. The credit was granted to the partners depending on their programming of each enterprise. Credits were paid in an immediate form by the sale of the products. The credit did not involve an interest and was re-adjusted only in relation to the rise in the cost of living.

2.9 Management of the Enterprise: regarding this, there was a co-management system between the partners and the supporting institution. The former were responsible for the internal management of the enterprise; however, their decisions were framed within the programming that they elaborated together with the supporting institution

which was presented by the agronomist engineer who was in charge of technical assistance.

2.10 Economic Outcomes: salient, diverse factors are among the following: the general negative economic situation of the nation is agriculture and the reduced type of enterprise with annual programming and rented land, determined the negative economic outcomes which eventually resulted in the elimination of the financial and technical support.

### 3. General Background of the Training Program

As it has been pointed out, the Peasants' Enterprises had the opportunity to participate in a training program which was administered by the previously mentioned supporting institution.

One of the activities, accomplished in this program, the Evaluation Workshop of the Enterprises, constitutes the central topic treated in this paper. However, in our view, it is indispensable to provide some brief information on the principal actions involved in such a training program since the Evaluation Workshops can only be understood in terms of their relation to the complete program.

On one hand, the program aimed at contributing to the functioning of the enterprises by means of the training and improvement of their partners. At the same time, it aimed at contributing to the personal and social development of the participating peasants.

The training program involved activities in the following content areas: the technical-agricultural, commercial, administration,

finance, organization, and basic education. The means used for training in this effort included courses, seminars, workshops, didactic material and the educational action through technical assistance.

The Evaluation Workshops to which we will refer in particular constituted means for the integral development of training in all the described areas. In fact, all of the above mentioned content areas were somehow related to the Evaluation Workshops.

#### 4. Evaluation Workshops

4.1. Characterization: For the characterization of the Evaluation Workshops we took into account the following aspects: objectives, participants, duration and place.

4.1.1. Objectives: The objectives of the Workshops related to both the evaluation of the functioning and outcomes of the enterprises and to the training of all of the functioning and outcomes of the enterprises and to the training of all partners. Usually, the objectives were stated in the following terms:

a) To carry out, with the participation of the partners and the supporting institution, an evaluation of the outcomes achieved in a given stage by the respective enterprise. This implies that at the end of the Workshop we expected to achieve an objective picture of the reality, attainments and problems of the enterprises. At the same time, the statement of the mentioned objective assumes the conviction that the "participation" of the partner-workers and the technicians was the best way for getting some knowledge on the enterprise's situation.

b) To make the workers achieve: a wide knowledge of

the productive and financial situation of the enterprise; a capacity to analyze the development of the enterprise management; capacity to periodically evaluate the fulfillment of the objectives established in the land utilization plans; and an strengthening of the understanding and the nature and goals of the enterprises.

Thus, it dealt with the accomplishment of a set of training objectives which tended to reinforce responsible behavior towards participation in the enterprise.

This objective had special relevance since the main previous experience that the participant worker had was as an agricultural laborer, that is, one of a dependent man who does not participate in the planning and decision making of the productive process.

By means of these workshops as well as of the complete program, we aimed to develop the capacity to search the causes of a given result; in other words, the purpose was to create a scientific mentality for the knowledge of a reality and thus, to overcome mythological consciousness.

These training objectives were inscribed within the general purpose of the program in order to contribute to the strengthening of behaviors of responsibility and solidarity among the participant workers.

c) To make the relevant decisions in order to solve the identified problems and to improve future results.

This objective points out the idea that decisions were adopted in a collective form, that is, with the participation of the group of worker-partners and the technical team. On the other hand, it is convenient to state that the adopted

decisions could correspond, depending on the case, to many diverse aspects such as changes in the programming, the work systems, the expenses, the technical or commercialization issues and the group organization.

Finally, it is indispensable to point out that these objectives were inter-related in such a form that same activities allowed the achievement of both the evaluation and the predominantly educational objectives.

4.1.2. Participants: As it was previously stated the participants were agricultural workers participating in the Peasants' Enterprises. All of them had some experience in agricultural work; however in some cases, such an experience was in areas different to those covered by the enterprise. Ages and school levels were very different, the latter being relatively low in relation to the general situation of the Chilean peasantry.

In the Workshops practically all the partners of the enterprises, save in exceptional cases of work shifts, and the supporting institution's team, participated in a manner which will be explained later.

4.1.3. Duration and Periodicity: Each evaluation workshop lasted the whole day, taking an approximately average of 9 hours including collation and rest periods.

As previously stated, the workshops were conducted every 3 months, thus all the enterprises carried out four evaluation workshops during an agricultural year.

4.1.4. Place: Depending on conditions, the workshops were conducted in the respective farm or in the headquarters of the supporting institution.

4.2. Contents: The topics or contents treated in the evaluation workshops generally included the following:

4.2.1. Credit:

- annual budget
- granted credit and absolute expenses during the period: Comparison between budget and expenses.
- percentage distribution of expenses
- expenses analysis
- programming of credit

4.2.2. Production and Comercialization:

- the situation of all crops... fulfillment of tasks, identified problems, future tasks.
- achieved production; comparison to the land utilization plan.
- registered sales
- comparison between production, sales and non-comercialized production.
- non-comercialized production (self-consumption, solidary lasses)
- production programming
- comercializarion programming
- analysis of the general factors incident to the enterprises functioning: soil, weather, water, inputs, technical assistance, inner-organization and work discipline.

4.2.3. Economic Outcome and Projections: Comparison between a) granted credit and programmed credit, and b) absolute incomes and programmed incomes.

These contents varied up to a certain extent depending on the specific time of the agricultutal year. Thus, for instance, at the beginning of the year the emphasis was placed on the study of the budget and the productive programming. In intermediate workshops mainly the expense evolution, the state of the crops and the production and comercialization goals were stressed. In final

workshops, the analysis of the productive and economic outcomes and the incident of diverse factors on those outcomes was emphasized.

On the other hand, after two years of experience the program contents were somehow modified due to the observations made by the peasants and the technical team.

4.3 Methodology: the analysis of the methods employed is of great importance in the objective of the present work. Therefore, we will analyze, in the first place, the essential elements of the methodology used, and then, the concrete development of a specific evaluation workshop.

4.3.1. The objectives of the workshop greatly condition the work methods. In fact, the purpose being to accomplish an evaluation conducted by both the partners and the technical team, it was indispensable to stress the participation of the former. The workshops could not have consisted of a mere impartation of information by the technical team. Even though the evaluation could have been performed by a task given to the agronomist engineer or to the partner who is in charge of production, such a form was irrelevant to the objectives. Only the active participation of peasants and technicians could assure the attainment of the goals of the workshops.

Any deficiency in participation constitutes a degree of non-fulfillment of objectives no matter how zealous or complete the evaluative process turns out to be.

We have mentioned the participation in the workshops of the technical team which supported the enterprises' development. Let's give some

detail on the composition and role played by the team in the workshops. In all workshops, the following persons took part: an agronomist engineer who was permanently in charge of assisting the enterprises; a bookkeeper responsible for the financial support given to a group of enterprises; a commercial representative who provided assistance to the group of enterprises; and a training co-ordinator who was the responsible person for the pedagogical activities of the workshop.

the work method used in the workshops involved the development of certain informative lectures and discussions. For the lectures as well as for the gathering of some conclusions, especially of a quantitative order; visual supporting material was used consisting of statistical and graphic charts some of which were presented in a complete form while others were developed during the course of the workshop. For the preparation and development of the workshops, a set of evaluating tools was elaborated for the different aspects considered: financial and productive situations, commercialization, organization and final outcomes.

Finally, we would like to point out that participation did not only take place in the workshops but also during their preparation. In fact, prior to every workshop the agronomist engineer gathered from the partners on the land the principal data for preparing the information which was to be used for the evaluation.

4.3.2 With the purpose of giving a clearer picture of the methods used in a typical workshop, we will describe its development briefly. This development varied mainly over the course of the agricultural year.

#### 4.3.2.1 Introduction.

Presentation of the objectives of the workshop and their specific characteristics. In this part, the responsibility was assumed by the training co-ordinator.

4.3.2.2. Report and Analysis of the Granted Credit and Expenses. In this part, the bookkeeper provided general information about the credit and made reference to the annual budget, the credit granted expense by items and to the percentage distribution of the expenses. This presentation was complemented with the use of previously prepared charts and graphs. The partner participants, when necessary, asked questions. On the other hand, the agronomist engineer and the partners who were in charge of making some expenses gave explanations according to the formulated questions.

In this manner, by means of information elaborated by all of them, it was possible to achieve an understanding on the expenses made. An interesting aspect in this part was the analysis of the percentage distribution of the expenses since it allowed the partners to be made aware of the most significant items, and thus, to pay special attention to their respective expenses. Thus, for instance, partners duly realized the strong incidence of items such as remuneration, land and machinery and rents. This type of analysis, in general the whole development in this part, allowed the partners to be trained to master the economic and financial concepts and to become involved in some basic notions about the preparation of the budget and its administration.

4.3.2.3. Report and Analysis of Production and Commercialization. The agronomist engineer together with the commercial representative prepared and

presented to the group prepared charts which comprised the productive reality of the enterprises and the registered sales. Charts were presented and, at the same time, the analysis was conducted with the participation of partners. The latter, reported on the state of crops, the problems confronted, the achieved outputs, the conducted sales, the commercialized production, and all the aspects which formed a wide picture of the situation of the enterprises. The analysis in this area was conducted by taking crops as a unit.

Once the form of the productive unit was known, the programming of production for the remaining consisted of the establishment of production goals, and, in some cases of the modifications of the initial programming of crops and areas according to the previous analysis. Likewise, the sales to be accomplished during the rest of the agricultural year were programmed, and as well, the possible outcomes that could be obtained in the future.

This area constituted an important opportunity for technical training and for aspects of problems related to planning and, at the same time, it permitted the programming of the action of both the enterprise and the technical team.

4.3.2.4. Analysis of Factors Incident on Production. This part of the workshop implied a deeper analysis of the previous topic and had the special characteristic of considering general factors and not specific crops.

Here, the training co-ordinator or the technician consulted the partners about the influence caused by factors such as : soil, weather, water, inputs, technical assistance, inner organization and work discipline. Sometimes, these factors,

Anyhow, the purpose was, that in every workshop, after all the figures of expenses and/or programmed expenses and the achieved and/or programmed incomes were known to every body, to clearly appreciate the possible final outcome.

4.3.2.8. Conclusions. This part consisted on a systemization of the agreements made in the workshops; this was presented by the training coordinator and were taken from the records of the workshops themselves.

4.4 Evaluation of the Experience. At the end of the workshops an evaluation of their development was accomplished by means of a conversation in which positive and negative aspects were analyzed. Such evaluation allowed, at the end of a series of workshops corresponding to a given period of three months, to reach some conclusions which, in turn, were the starting point for introducing some modifications in the development of subsequent workshops.

In addition, the observations conducted by the technical team allowed it to classify the degree of participation and comprehension shown by both the individuals and the different partner worker groups. Through observations conducted during the different workshops which were stated in different reports, it is possible to ask how the established objectives were reached.

a) Regarding the participatory evaluation of the Enterprises.

Here, the following questions could be asked among others: if a real knowledge of the situation of every enterprise and of the set of enterprises was achieved; if an effective participation of the partner workers took place; if real causes for the identified problems or for the non fulfillment of programmed goals were discovered. With regard to these issues the following can be pointed out:

-at the end of every workshop it was possible to get an

objective and relatively wide picture about the reality of every enterprise, its financial situations, its productive attainments and the main problems encountered by it. One aspect which demonstrates the preceeding, lies in the fact that at the end of every series of workshops it was possible to elaborate a synthesis of the reality of the set of enterprises and, taking that picture as a starting point, general decisions were adopted, thus, some rectification of courses of action in certain aspects were made.

the degree of participation of the partners in the analysis of the diverse aspects of the evaluation was important. However, participation in some workshops was uneven due to both the different participants and the themes treated. Thus, for example, when dealing with the financial aspects, it was observed that some partners did not participate, probably due to a poor understanding of the subject. In other cases, however, a lower degree of participation in this theme showed a rather positive aspect: the knowledge possessed by all the partners on the flow of funds as a result of permanent and adequate communication. Some other themes, specially those related to production, allowed a higher degree of participation since all partners mastered them. The only aspect in which some difficulties were encountered was the one related to productive programming since some partners stated that they preferred simply to wait for the results. Here, an improvement was observed during subsequent workshops since those partners who at the beginning were reticent to participate in the programming, afterwards did it without inconvenience.

If participation not only considered in its expression during the workshops but the complete life of the enterprises, it would be possible to state that in many cases a previous knowledge of the data analyzed was manifested in the workshops; however, there were

times in which the workshop was an opportunity that the partners had to get some knowledge on certain problems. In the second type of cases, the workshop, no matter how well it accomplished its specific objectives, did not allow the whole group to reach an optimum level of knowledge and understanding.

In spite of the fact that the principal problems of the functioning of each enterprise were analyzed in the workshops, sometimes situations which have been previously hidden, subsequently appeared. This was due to the tendency that peasants have: to avoid the statement of problems which could have meant the determination of responsibilities or guilts to someone of the group. The presence of persons strange to the group or the desire to avoid conflict among themselves, inhibited the manifestation of some situations.

Due to the above, it could be pointed out that a less analyzed fact was the one related to the inner organization of the group. Many times the essential sincerity did not exist. Something similar occurred when the role played by technical assistance was analyzed since the presence of the agronomist engineer inhibited the partners' opinion. Nevertheless it was often the case that situations which were not made explicit by the peasants as the corresponding topic, came out during the analysis of the productive situation. Thus, for example, when treating a given problem on crops the root of some problems related to labour organization or discipline emerged.

b) Regarding the Mainly Educational Objectives. Here it may be asked to what extent the partner workers achieved a wide knowledge of the situation of the enterprise in all their aspects, capacity for analysis with relation to the fulfillment of the objectives

and to the whole development of the enterprise's operation, and a reinforcement of their understanding of the nature and goals of the enterprises.

With relation to these issues, the following can be pointed out:

The partners achieved knowledge with regard to the situation undergone by their enterprise and its confronted problems. Likewise, progress in the ability to analyze and on the value given to planning, control and evaluation within the productive process, were observed. Similarly, the partners reinforced their consciousness regarding the goals of the Peasants' Enterprises within the context in which they took place.

However these were relative attainments which were rather positive tendencies than absolute achievements of objectives. With regard to this, it must be pointed out that the Evaluation Workshops took up a day in the worker's life every three months. There were other training activities which contributed to reinforce the same behavior and attitudes, however, the group practice constituted an undoubtedly predominant factor. Those groups which practice participation, responsibility and solidarity found in the Evaluation Workshops an opportunity for making more secure their future tasks. On the contrary, those groups in which the roles were excessively limited and in which shared responsibility was not experienced, achieved some advances but the same difficulties were somehow repeated.

c) Regarding collective decision making

Here the central issue lies in knowing if the production, commercialization, investment and work programming in general was accomplished in a united form. Regarding this, in the first place we have to state that the evaluation Workshops acquired great importance in relation to the decisions adopted and that they implied changes (in some cases significant) of the

plans of the different enterprises. In general these decisions were adopted, with a sufficient degree of participation, but differences according to the groups existed. There were cases, as it has been previously mentioned in which the group had some difficulties in the programming and preferred to put all decisions in the technician's hands. However positive advances were achieved in those cases.

The other problem is the degree to which the established goals really committed the group. In this regard, some differences were again observed.

Such aspects were influenced on one hand by the difference among groups in relation to their degree of responsibility and consciousness about the goals of the programs in general. But on the other hand another limiting factor of the participants responsibilities with regard to decisions was the existing type of relations with the supporting institution since many peasants regarded it as a protecting unit which in the last instance would have assumed the risks of the economic problems that could emerge.

##### 5. Conclusions.

Here at the end of the present paper, we believe that it is important to state some general considerations with regard to the value of the experience of the Evaluation Workshops in the Peasant's Enterprises.

In the first place, it must be stated that such workshops were adequate tools for knowing a given reality: the productive, financial and organizational situation of the enterprises formed by peasants. Without prejudice to the limitations that this tool could have had, it is evident, from the resumes done at the end of the workshops, that it allowed know to be acquired as it was observed.

In the second place, it is necessary to point out that the workshops constituted a participation device

of the partner workers who integrated the enterprises. Consequently the research on the enterprises' reality was not conducted by strange personnel nor outside persons, but through the active participation of the protagonists of the experience together with the technical team of supporting institutions this technical team was not a completely strange element of the peasants since there was a nearly permanent relationship particularly with the agronomist engineer with whom they worked closely.

The peasants' participation as a central factor of the evaluations, determined on one hand, a fundamental contribution since it was evidently possible to establish a complete knowledge of the enterprise's situations not only without incorporating information from the partners but also their own ideas about the problems which they were facing.

Even difficulties such as approval on the part of the peasants of certain technological innovations were manifested in the workshops; and some other diverse situations whose knowledge was fundamental for the enterprise's development were likewise stated. On the other hand, however, the type of participation expressed during the workshops had some limitations due to the fact that the peasants hid some given problems or introduced subjectivity in their appreciation of the reality.

In the third place, it is indispensable to state that in addition to permitting and understanding of a reality, through their own participation, the formula of the evaluation workshops constituted a valid training form. In spite of the difficulty of an objective assessment in this respect, come out, from conducted observations and from the peasant's own opinions, especially during the final evaluation workshops of the enterprises, that real personal and social development took place. The partners are of the opinion that they have completed their experience with a different picture about community peasant work. A picture which will allow them to face new experiences

with greater solidarity. The value given to planning and programming, the knowledge of administration, the learning of group work, the greater technical knowledge and the social dimension of their activity, constituted as a whole the bases which will permit the participant peasants to assume new responsibilities.