

**Impact Assessments
- undertaken by Danish NGOs**

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Abbreviations

AIS	Architect's International Solidarity
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency;
ANR	Agriculture and Natural Resource (Project)
BDM	Brødremenighedens Danske Mission; <i>The Danish Moravian Mission</i>
BISU	Bistand-Internationalt Samarbejde-Udvikling; <i>International Cooperation-Development</i>
CP	Comprehensive Project
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DANTAN	Dansk-Tanzaniask Venskabsforening; <i>Danish-Tanzanian Friendship Association</i>
DGI	Danske Gymnastik- og Idrætsforeninger; <i>Danish Gymnastic and Sports Association</i>
DBF	Dansk Biavler Forening; <i>Danish Bee-keepers' Association</i>
DBS	Dansk Blindesamfund; <i>Danish Association of the Blind</i>
DCA	<i>DanChurchAid</i> , Folkekirkens Nødhjælp (FKN)
DEF	Dansk El-Forbund; <i>Danish Electricity Federation</i>
DMS	Det Danske Missionsselskab; the <i>Danish Missionary Society</i>
DHF	Dansk Handicap Forbund; <i>The Danish Organisation of Disabled People</i>
DMR	Dansk Missionsråd; <i>Danish Missionary Council</i>
DRK	Dansk Røde Kors; <i>Danish Red Cross</i>
DSI	De Samvirkende Invalideorganisationer; <i>The Union of Invalid Organisations</i>
DSM	Dansk Santalmission; <i>The Danish Santal Mission</i>
DUF	Dansk Ungdoms Fællesråd, <i>The Danish Youth Council</i>
DUI	DUI - Leg og Virke
ELIM	Den Danske Pinsevækkelse; <i>The Danish Pentecoste Church</i>
FA	Framework Agreement
FFH	Foreningen for Folkehøjskoler; <i>The Association of Danish Folk High Schools</i>
FKN	Folkekirkens Nødhjælp; <i>DanChurchAid (DCA)</i>
FSKN	Foreningen for støtte af kulturen i Nicaragua; <i>Association to Support Culture in Nicaragua</i>
FUS	Fagbevægelsens U-landsekretariat; <i>Danish Trade Union Council for International Cooperation</i>
GMH	Group Member Household
HID	Handicap International Danmark; <i>Handicap International Denmark</i>
HRD	Human Resource Development

IB	International Børnesolidaritet; <i>International Child Solidarity / Solidaridad Internacional Infantils</i>
IBIS	former World University Service
IDP	<i>International Development Partner</i>
IRDP	Integrated Rural Development Programmes
KAB	Knowledge, Attitude and Behaviour
KULU	Kvindernes U-landsudvalg, <i>Women and Development</i>
LC	Lions Club
LEV	Landsforeningen Evnesvages Vel; <i>The Danish Council of Organisations of Disabled People</i>
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
LM-F	Luthersk Missionsforening; <i>Danish Lutheran Mission</i>
LIFT	Local Initiatives of Farmers' Training
LWS	Lutheran World Service
MFA	Mini Framework Agreement
MS	Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke, Danish Volunteer Service (Danish Association for International Cooperation)
MK	Mellemamerika Komitéen; <i>Centralamerica Committee</i>
N-K	Nicaragua-Komitéen; <i>Nicaragua Committee</i>
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
RB	Red Barnet; <i>The Save the Children's Fund</i>
RDRS	Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service
SID	Specialarbejderforbundet i Danmark; <i>Specialworkers Union in Denmark</i>
SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SM	Spedalskhedsmissionen; <i>The Danish Leprosy Mission</i>
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
TdH	Terres des Hommes
TOR	Terms of Reference
U-1962	Ulandsforeningen af 1962; <i>Development Association of 1962</i>
U-S	U-landsforeningen Svalerne; The Swallows
ULD80	U-landsdebat 80; <i>Development Debate 1980</i>
UTS	Ulandshjælp til Selvhjælp; <i>Development Aid to Selfhelp</i>

Foreword

This Desk Study has been conducted as part of the preparatory work of the Danish NGO Impact Study. The Danish NGO Impact Study was carried out in 1998-99 on the initiative of DANIDA and the Danish NGOs with the objectives to

- C document and assess the relevance and impact - including the main strengths and weaknesses - of development interventions supported by Danish NGOs in Bangladesh, Tanzania and Nicaragua, and
- C to compile, develop and test suitable methods to assess the long-term relevance and impact of NGO supported development interventions.

The Impact Study produced a Synthesis Report, an Overview Report, three Country Studies and three In-depth Studies, which are all available on www.Danidango.dk

The Desk Study established the basis upon which the overall design, approach and methodology of the Impact Study was developed.

The Desk Study has been shortened and revised to be published as CDR Working Paper and is structured in the following way:

Firstly, the national context of the Danish NGO Impact Study is presented with a short introduction to Danish Development Policies, the Danish NGO Landscape and the Danida - NGO relationship as it has developed over the last decade.

Secondly, the Desk Study analyses and summarises the current Danish NGO experience and practice with impact assessment including an overview of the evaluation systems of the NGOs. The main analysis concerns an investigation of the methodology used to assess impact, the concept of impact applied and the substantive conclusions made with regard to impact. Findings and reflections pertaining to a number of thematic areas and sectors are presented; food security; integrated rural development; education and training; participation and human rights. An overview is established of the approaches to evaluation of sustainability, gender environment, partnerships and capacity building and the conclusions drawn regarding performance and impact in these areas.

Finally, the Desk Study places the Danish NGO Impact Study in an international context and presents the efforts of and similarities with other development actors in the search for documenting impact and developing methodologies.

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December 1999

Abstract

The paper gives an overview of the state of the art in the field of impact studies among Danish NGOs and within the international development community. It has been prepared as part of a study, entitled "The Danish NGO Impact Study", carried out in 1998-1999 by an international team of researchers and consultants on the initiative of Danida and the Danish NGOs.

The paper established the basis upon which the Danish NGO Impact Study was designed and gives an account of the national context including the characteristics and diversity of the Danish NGO Community. An account of the Danida - NGO relationship and an overview of the evaluation systems and approaches are presented as a frame for understanding the very limited experiences with impact assessments within the Danish NGO community.

The analysis of existing NGO project evaluation reports concludes that in general the Danish NGO projects are found to perform well, but the key issues of sustainability, gender, democratisation, participation, partnership and impact are generally not assessed and thus presently poorly documented.

The Context of the Danish NGO Impact Study

The Danish non-governmental development organisations (NGOs) play an important role in the overall Danish development assistance and the significance of the Danish NGO Impact Study should be seen in this perspective. The Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) amounts to around 1% of GNP equivalent to DKK 10,072 millions, of which, approximately 9% (DKK 920 millions) figured as bilateral aid through Danish NGOs.

The development assistance through Danish NGOs unfolds within the general policy framework of the official Danish Development Assistance. Poverty reduction is the overarching goal and fundamental principle of Danish assistance to developing countries. The Strategy 2000, adopted in 1994, stipulates that development efforts should be organised in a way that will promote:

- C sustainable economic growth, in which distribution policy constitutes an integralelement of economic policy
- C development of the social sectors, including concentration on education and health as prerequisites for developing human resources

- Ⓒ popular participation in the development process, building a society based on the rule of law and good administrative practice as prerequisites for stability in economic, social and political development.

The assistance is moreover to be governed by the following cross-cutting objectives;

- Ⓒ regard for women's participation in development
- Ⓒ regard for the environment
- Ⓒ promoting democracy and observing human rights (Danida, 1999b)

The role and recognition of the work of Danish NGOs have increased during the years concomitant with the increased importance attached to local ownership, participation, development at grassroot level and strengthening of civil society. During the last decade several changes have occurred in the relationship between Danida and NGOs which in general have aimed at more decentralisation and more involvement of Danish NGOs in the preparation and implementation of Danish Development Assistance.

The 1989 Danish NGO Sector Study

The first comprehensive Danish NGO Sector Study was initiated in 1989 by Danida and commissioned to the independent Center for Alternative Social Analysis. CASA undertook an evaluation of the Danish NGOs and gave an account of the diverse field of NGO development work at home and abroad. The Study encompassed an analysis of the constituency of the Danish NGOs, of the strength and weaknesses of the information and education work, of the models of cooperation with Danida and of the development work in six countries. Moreover thematic studies were undertaken of the link between emergency assistance and development assistance and of new development objectives like human rights support.

In particular the Evaluation assessed the so-called comparative advantages of non-governmental approaches to development and the basic assumptions about performance that prevailed in the support to the NGO Sector. The assumptions in focus were that (CASA, 1989):

- Ⓒ NGOs have local contacts suited to strengthening participation
- Ⓒ NGOs are qualified for reaching the poor
- Ⓒ NGOs are cost effective, flexible and creative
- Ⓒ NGOs are well suited to acting in politically controversial areas

And the following potential conflicts were put under scrutiny

- C conflicts between a “play it safe with donors money” and the need for forward looking experimental pilot projects
- C conflicts between independent NGO status and the need for NGO cooperation
- C conflicts between spontaneous NGO enthusiasm and lack of training and professional background
- C conflicts between donor ideologies and interests of recipients.

Among the interesting conclusions were that in general the NGOs work in a way justifying the above assumptions.

It was pointed out that working through local contacts not automatically meant working in partnership and that partnerships displayed both strenghts and weaknesses. Working through local contacts and partners made it possible for Danish NGOs to assist many locally initiated development efforts often with the involvement of the beneficiaries. However, the evaluation could not support the assumption that Danish NGOs were better than governmental agencies in fostering participation.

With regard to reaching the poor the evaluation point to the NGO's awareness of the difficulties in actually reaching the poorest or pursuing a propoor strategy. At the same time the overall conclusion is that Danish NGOs are almost all poverty oriented in that they try to reach poor individuals, groups, sections or poor geographical areas. Few charity oriented NGOs however work in order to remove e.g. children from poverty without tackling the root causes of poverty. (CASA, 1989, p. 95).

With regard to efficiency and effectiveness the evaluation found the Danish NGOs to perform well in comparison with other sectors of the Danish resource base and consultants and in comparison to normal Danida assistance. The smallness of the interventions making them easy to integrate in local environments increases cost-effectiveness as does the benefit from lower salaries, contributions from voluntary work and a good eye for simple and cost-effective solutions to problems. However, sometimes poor communication and unclear strategies reduced the effectiveness.

The NGOs were also found to have good opportunities for working in controversial areas - opportunities which they to a large extent have used, while at the same time being limited by factors as mentioned above; play it safe, imperative to show positive results, etc. (CASA, 1989, p.104).

The Evaluation came to serve as a ‘white paper’ for the development of the NGO sector years ahead and especially brought about changes in the relationship between Danida and the NGOs.

The Danida - NGO Strategy

This new modus operandi soon called for a further institutionalisation of the Danida-NGO cooperation and in 1993 Danida launched a Strategy for Danida's Cooperation with Danish NGOs. The Strategy was prepared in close cooperation with the Danish NGOs and the NGO Contact Committee between the Ministry and the NGOs was established at the same time where informal discussions between the Ministry and the NGOs could take place regularly.

The basic premise of the Strategy is that NGO development activities are complementary to the official development assistance and that the Danish NGOs will continue to concentrate on their areas of expertise and interest. Moreover, it is spelled out that the NGO assistance neither can or shall develop into a "shadow" of the official assistance.

The Strategy seeks to combine the increased requirements as to professionalisation and administration with the objectives of maintaining and developing the diversity and the popular basis of the NGOs.

In particular the Strategy stressed the need to find a balance to ensure

- C that the individual organisation as a whole stands out with its own popular basis, values, professional strength and aid objectives
- C that the Danida-funded NGO activities comply with the overall objectives
- C that the Danida-funded activities comply with the requirements with regard to design, monitoring, budgets and accounting
- C that the organisations are capable of implementing cost effective, innovative and experimenting projects actively involving the Danish and the local resource base
- C that the professional and technical experience and expertise of the different organisations are realised in the individual activities and in the dialogue with Danida (Danida, 1993).

In return for the increased decentralisation, devolution and handover of authority to the Danish NGOs, Danida required that capacity assessments be undertaken by the Danish NGOs prior to each renewal of the five yearly Framework Agreements.

The capacity assessments do not aim at evaluating the specific projects implemented by the NGOs. Rather, the assessments focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the NGOs regarding organisational visions and strategies, mode of implementation, technical and administrative capacity, popular foundation and cooperation pattern with Danida.

The Danida - NGO Strategy moreover call for dialogue concerning Danida's Country Strategies, where Danida will involve the NGOs in the formulation of the main elements of the Country Strategies to the 20 Main Programming Countries, and for a strengthening of the professional dialogue between the Ministry and the civil society organisations on various thematic issues and sectors. Finally the Strategy delineates the interaction and complementarity between Danida and the NGOs within the Programme Countries and highlights that the NGOs are not subject to the country and sector concentration applying to Danida.

Several of the capacity assessments have recommended changes and restructuring in the NGOs, upon which funding has been made conditional and therefore the capacity assessments have also nourished the on-going debate about the independence and integrity of Danish Development NGOs.

Impact on the Danida-NGO Agenda

While the NGOs welcomed the capacity assessments as a contribution to their professionalisation strategies they at the same time underlined that in reality it is the impact which the activities have in the local context among the beneficiaries that really counts. In the negotiations around the Danida-NGO strategy the need for undertaking impact assessment of the Danish Development NGOs materialized and was first put on the agenda.

However, the general development debate also increasingly focussed on the benefits obtained from development assistance. On the one hand a general aid fatigue and resignation as to which development approaches that really work started being felt in the mid-90s. The increase in the share of NGO assistance of total official development assistance combined with the reductions in ODA in a large number of DAC countries implied more interest in and more demands on the work of the NGOs and also resulted in calls for impact assessments.

On the other hand, the search for impact has been nourished by the interest by the organisations in knowing the ultimate and lasting changes achieved by the development assistance.

As evident from the developments described above, the relationship between Danida and the NGOs have changed and improved considerably during the last decade. The attention at changes in the funding arrangements, reporting formats, accounts procedures, disbursements according to plan, etc. may however have left less room and resources for the more qualitative and professional dialogue between the NGOs and the Ministry as stipulated in the Strategy.

The dialogue has been quite Northern biased in the way that the relationships between Danida and the NGOs have been the main preoccupation followed by the question of the relationship between the NGOs and their constituency. The production of evidence of rootedness in the Danish society by way of memberships, donations, involvement of volunteers, education of the public etc. has demanded many resources of the NGOs. Questions which do not directly relate to the performance of the NGO in the South nor to impact.

The dialogue around the overall strategies and number of countries and projects/partners, which the Danish NGOs engage in is frequently discussed between Danida and the NGOs and in particular in connection with the annual negotiations. At the same time, the establishment of a NGO-unit within the Ministry has implied that the dialogue and contact between the NGOs and the country desks and sector advisers of Danida have been somewhat reduced.

However, in general, impact has not been a main agenda item in the dialogue and no specific guidelines or demands from Danida relates to the issue of impact. E.g. the NGOs are required to undertake midterm reviews and evaluations, but similar to other donors, most attention has been paid to the overall performance and input, activities, output and effect - seldom reaching the issue of impact.

The call for an impact assessment thus signified a turn of the telescope and a preoccupation with the Southern agenda; do the interventions supported by Danish NGOs contribute to bringing about significant or lasting changes in the living conditions of poor people in the South. A focus which is new both to Danida and to the NGOs.

The Landscape of Danish Development NGOs

The Danish Development NGOs are involved in disaster relief and prevention, in long-term development assistance and in development education and information in Denmark. The 1989 evaluation found that several hundred thousand people are involved in the NGO activities in Denmark either as contributors, members or volunteers and the NGOs are known for their heterogeneous and composite constituency and multifaceted field of work (CASA, 1989).

The Danish NGO Community is made up of around 200 organisations, associations or groups which in some way or another are concerned with international development and co-operation. The organisations to be involved in the Danish NGO Impact Study with focus on Nicaragua, Bangladesh and Tanzania numbers 41 with a total project portfolio of more than 100 projects.

A description of the Danish NGOs may take departure in the combination of visions, mandate and constituency.

Missionary Organisations

Their development work dates back prior to the era of governmental support to development activities of private organisations and in that way represents the early history of Danish Development NGOs. Today, as previously, there is a strong engagement in the social sectors and in particular in health and education, but also within “niches” as renewable energy and indigenous peoples.

Development Organisations

The development organisations cover a wide spectrum of organisations. They are all engaged in development co-operation as their main mandate and activity and in general have a long experience in international co-operation. The church-related humanitarian organisations, the secular humanitarian organisations, the target group, sector and theme focussed organisations as well as the solidarity organisations and friendship organisations are all represented here.

Trade Unions/Interest Organisations

The labour movement and the trade unions have long experience with international co-operation and are represented by the following organisations. A number of interest organisations are also represented, which have development co-operation as one minor and often more recent activity along their main purpose to service the members.

Specialised Organisations and Institutions

The long tradition of association among professional groups and organisations has also provided platform for an international perspective to the mandate of the specialised organisations, whereby they make available professional and specialized knowledge in a development setting.

It is obvious that some of the organisations may be categorised within several categories and that perceptions differ as to the main characteristics of the organisations. Developments take place and the description in 1989 of Red Barnet as a child sponsorship organisation would no longer be precise. Likewise, the history of Ibis as a solidarity organisation may not today be the most appropriate term or characteristic of the organisation although among the members the ideology of a solidarity organisation may be quite strong. In 1989 DanChurchAid was mainly a humanitarian organisation and while the humanitarian work is still important the long term development engagement is the main trademark of the organisation today.

Form of Implementation

Most of the Danish NGOs work through or in *partnership* with local organisations/institutions in the recipient countries. The large majority is co-operating with NGOs with a tremendous diversity covering service delivery, enabling, support and advocacy NGOs.

A relatively small part work with local governments. The direct cooperation with governmental institutions has been more pronounced in the past than it is today. In particular Ibis and MS have had strong co-operation with local government institutions. Finally, a few work to a limited extent through their international organisational structures like International Red Cross Federation, Lutheran World Federation, Care International.

Initially, the review aimed at providing a typology of the local partners according to organisational orientation and constituency ownership, but this proved to be an immeasurable task due to the scarce analysis provided of partners in the evaluations.

The partnership approach has implied that most organisations have very limited presence themselves in the respective countries. When there is a direct presence it is generally in the form of project offices, country offices, regional offices or through various forms of seconded personnel.

The fact that the main mode of implementation is in co-operation with or through partners has great bearing on the evaluation practice of Danish NGOs and on the impact of their interventions.

While visions, constituency and form of implementation are crucial to an understanding of the Danish NGO landscape, the relationships with funding agencies and in particular with Danida is to an increasing extent having impact of the mode of operation of the NGOs. Thus the Danish NGOs are frequently grouped into three categories according to the main characteristics of the funding agreement with Danida: Framework Agreements; Mini-Framework Agreements; and Individual Project Agreements.

Framework Agreements (FA)

In order to achieve status as Framework organisation or be able to enter a Framework Agreement the organisation has to have both a certain professional and administrative capacity, be able to manage the project cycle satisfactorily and have a popular foundation in Denmark. Presently, 6 organisations have been subjected to a capacity assessment and 5 organisations have entered Framework Agreements with Danida entailing a decentralization of authority: DanChurchAid, Ibis, Care Denmark, The Danish Trade Union Council for International Development Assistance (FUS), Danish Red Cross with Framework Agreements totalling 349,4 millions DKK. in 1998 (Danida, 1999a).

Mini-Framework Agreements (MFA)

The MFA concern programme agreements between Danida and the NGOs for support to projects up to DKK 400.000. Danida undertook in 1996 an evaluation of the MFA and entered into dialogue with the NGOs with a view to develop new guidelines.

The MFA is an instrument to facilitate the financing of smaller development projects. The instrument is guided by the following policy aims:

- C To increase the popular support to and rootedness of Danish GODA and development policy through the involvement and participation of a wide range of popular organisations in development work.
- C To implement small development projects in cooperation with well-known-partners in the South, which can identify well defined development problems and launch solutions with a considerable effect compared to investment and/or which are aimed at “soft” areas of intervention such as networking or advocacy.
- C To test development strategies, methods and potential partnerships in new selected areas of intervention with a view to generate experience of use for a broad range of NGOs.

The requirements for obtaining an MFA are similar to the requirements for individual project, but in addition requiring more capacity to plan, implement and assess the interventions. As the NGO is often an umbrella organisation, high requirements are in place regarding their ability to advise and train member organisations.

Currently, the Danish Missionary Council - Project Department, KULU, DSI, DUF and Red Barnet have an MFA with Danida, which totalled DKK 8.6 millions in 1998. (Danida, 1999a)

Individual Project Agreements

Individual project agreement may be entered by organisations which do not have any Frame Agreement, but also by the MFA-organisations when the projects are above 250.000 Dkk annually. In the present study 30 organisations fall in this category. Individual projects receive around 20-25 % of the NGO budget.

The total overview is presented in annexes I and II.

In conclusion, in the design of the Impact Study efforts should be made to take into account the above characteristics of the NGOs with regard to vision, mandate and constituency, organisational capacity, form of implementation, sector profile and funding relationship with Danida.

Assessing the Impact of Danish NGOs

The Terms of Reference for the Impact Study call for a Desk Study summarising impact assessments undertaken by the Danish NGOs, with a focus on the three selected countries. The Desk Study has

been seen as a means to establish what evaluation material does already exist, how it addresses impact and which conclusions are made.

The main analysis concerns an investigation of the methodology used to assess impact, the concept of impact applied and the substantive conclusions made with regard to impact. Focus is directed at the cases where impact assessments are made followed by findings and reflections pertaining to a number of thematic areas and sectors; integrated rural development; education and training, participation, and human rights. Finally, a presentation is given of the approaches to evaluation of sustainability, gender, environment, partnerships and capacity building and the conclusions drawn regarding performance and impact in these areas.

Planning and Evaluation Approaches used by Danish NGOs

Focus will now be placed on the planning and evaluation approaches, with a view to give an understanding of the present state of the art with regard to impact studies of the development interventions described above.

Three factors are among the main determinants of the evaluation practice of the NGOs: a) Form of implementation; b) Organisational structure and capacity to manage development interventions; c) The size and duration of projects/interventions in the South.

The fact that Danish NGOs mainly work through partners imply not only that the monitoring and evaluation primarily rest with the partner organisation, so do the project preparation and implementation. When the NGO is the implementor the NGO may play a decisive role in all sequences of the project cycle, but when partners and their projects are supported, the Danish NGO is less directly involved. In the latter case emphasis is on partnerships through regular dialogue and the identification and design of the project are the responsibility of the partners, but the Danish NGO may conduct appraisals etc.

Some of the organisations having a *Frame Agreement* with Danida have project planning and monitoring manuals which in details describe and determine each stage of the project cycle, and which stipulates that monitoring and evaluation are integrated in the project cycle. In several organisations, mid-term and annual reviews are part and parcel of the project cycle. However, the level of institutionalisation and formalisation varies and in some cases the guidelines and procedures used are produced by the international federations or associations, which the NGO may form part of (e.g. Care Denmark, Danish Red Cross).

Apart from the project specific evaluation and monitoring, the Framework Agreement Organisations have a general budgetline for evaluation and studies and in most cases monitoring and evaluation guidelines exist. None of the organisations have an evaluation unit, but most have an evaluation officer.

The organisations having a *MFA* have recently obtained budgets for reviews of the MFA-Programmes, but so far only Red Barnet has had a review made. None of the organisations have developed specific evaluation- and monitoring manuals, and it is the impression that Danida guidelines are used when Terms are prepared and reports are drafted. The projects are mainly developed by the partner but the Danish NGO may be involved in design and planning, especially when local experience with project planning is inadequate.

Projects financed on the basis of *individual project applications* are evaluated depending on the *size and duration* of the project and depending on the evaluation culture within the managing NGO. However, Danida does not encourage evaluation of this type of projects and stress that the character and size of the NGO projects normally do not warrant an evaluation and that the close contact between the NGO and the target group facilitates adequate information regarding positive and negative aspects of project implementation (Danida, 1996, p.15). The smaller NGOs do find that it is difficult to obtain funding for evaluations. The main differences as to the role of the Danish NGO in the overall project cyclus relate - as above - to whether the NGO is the implementor or the supporter.

In all instances, the formalisation of the evaluation procedures is of a quite recent date and many organisations do not have a ready available overview of the evaluations conducted in the past.

A number of pertinent considerations shall be highlighted in the following.

- Ⓒ The situation described above inevitably implies that the small projects run by the small organisations are subject to little or no evaluation and thus poorly documented.
- Ⓒ The partnership approach and the co-funding practice imply that the evaluations undertaken by Danish NGOs only represent a small part of the total evaluations of a given project. In cases that the Southern partner, a co-funder or the end-donor, Danida, carries out an evaluation of the project, the Danish NGO may not initiate any evaluations of the project at all.
- Ⓒ The evaluation guidelines mostly place focus on mid-term reviews and on evaluation at the end of financement with emphasis on implementation according to plan. This inevitably creates the impression that the NGOs may be more preoccupied with the accountability to Danida and in securing new or extended financement than in investigating the lasting impact of a project engagement that ended years back.
- Ⓒ No guidelines exist for impact studies and thematic studies.

- C The manuals emphasise the importance of base-line studies and project appraisal, but as the manuals are of a recent date relatively few projects have been planned accordingly and even fewer have been subjected to an evaluation in which the base-line survey could be used.

Characteristics of Evaluation Documents Reviewed

The present Desk Study is based upon the documentation received from Danish NGOs following the call for evaluation reports of projects and programmes in the selected countries and other evaluations and studies of relevance to the Impact Study. The extent to which this is exhaustive is not to be known. The NGOs do not have a ready available record of evaluations and studies. The most outstanding and successful evaluations are likely to be best represented, while the less successful are likely to be least represented. There is furthermore a certain bias in relying on evaluation documents which do not favour the small NGOs with less formal evaluation procedures.

When the perusal of documents was to take place, 14 organisations had responded to the request for documentation of which some had only responded partially. Thus the documentation under review is far from complete, but it is not likely that the general trend with regard to impact and methodology will be significantly different in the remaining material.

In all, 46 reports have been reviewed of which 6 are project completion reports, 7 are thematic studies, 7 are programme reviews (2 regional programmes, 1 country programme) and the rest are project evaluations. The majority are mid-term reviews, 6 are evaluations upon completion and only one is ex post. The term 'evaluation upon completion' is somewhat misleading as in most cases it is evaluation upon the end of a financial period combined with an appraisal of extension of the financing.

Normally, the evaluation practice of the NGOs is considered to have moved from a strong and exclusive focus on project evaluation to initiation of more thematic studies, sector studies and programme evaluations. In the evaluation documentation received this tendency is not that clear, but it may be due to the fact that the NGOs have conducted studies which they have not deemed relevant for the present Study. Only one NGO has conducted a synthesis of evaluation results. The character of the evaluation documentation with the majority being mid-term reviews indicates that the expectations with regard to impact assessments should be modest.

This finding points to the importance that the Impact Study select a sample of projects which have ended and which will allow for ex-post study and which include smaller projects.

Coverage and Representativeness of Evaluations

As only 14 out of 41 organisations have forwarded evaluation documents the coverage and representativeness of evaluations vis-a-vis project engagements are presently limited. The tendency mentioned

earlier is confirmed as the small projects are evaluated the least, while the larger projects of a framework organisation may be subjected to several annual reviews. This has strong implications for the possibility to synthesise evaluation results and call for cautiousness in making generalisations.

The Quality of Evaluation Reports

The question of the extent to which the reports under scrutiny answers to the issues at front in the present Impact Study inevitably also implies consideration of the quality of the evaluation reports and the weight behind the assertions of the evaluation teams. The task is not to make a meta-evaluation of the evaluation reports, but it is in place to present a few considerations.

There are many very good reports fulfilling their particular purposes and generally a noteworthy effort is made by the evaluation teams under quite constrained conditions.

The present study has faced the same problems as the DAC and SIDA impact study (DAC, 1997; SIDA, 1995) in terms of the impossibility of making a neat and solid definition of an evaluation. All sorts of evaluative reports are present but most reports are mid-term reviews implying that they cannot properly address impact and implying that their statements with regard to sustainability are forward looking assessments rather than retrospective.

The evaluation reports reviewed here do not give any basis for reaching other conclusions than those reached by the DAC and SIDA studies. Namely, that the accuracy of the evaluations leaves a lot to be desired, that the assertiveness is low and that they often fail to document exactly how they reached the given conclusions. In very few cases is any particular method used consistently and seldom is the exact use of the method disclosed to the reader. “The general impression of the team... and the seemingly strong indications” are much used phrases to reach a verdict.

The success criteria are seldom spelled out and indicators are seldom subject of analysis. Due to a frequently superficial and non-reflective approach to the buzz-words, the reports contribute little to the rejection or confirmation of the so-called myths or comparative strengths of Danish NGOs. Seldom is the methodology presented, the analytical and conceptual framework discussed and few are the examples of methodological developments and reflection. Again, this is closely linked to the character of the evaluations being mainly technical and operational reviews and it is therefore not surprising that the thematic and programme evaluations provide the most in terms of methodology and analytical frame.

The recent use of SWOT analysis by the teams in many ways provides a good analysis of state of affairs, but often implies that the team does not make an independent assessment and the conclusions become very vague.

According to the DAC Report this picture is a general weakness across the evaluation practice within development aid and thus not a particular weakness of the NGO evaluations (DAC, 1997, p. 11).

From here follows the risk that the utility of the evaluations are reduced. The Swedish meta-evaluation of impact of evaluations concludes that due to the lack of scientific approach and mainly relying on information from involved, they tend to reproduce what parties already know (Baaz & Carlsson, 1998).

These interesting issues shall not be pursued further in this Desk Study, but should be considered in the design of the Impact Study: The Impact Study should be designed in order to be an example of best practices with regard to quality standards: Accuracy, feasibility, propriety and utility¹.

Analysis of Terms of Reference

As part of the study of evaluation reports, the TOR of the evaluation reports have been assessed, and the findings and observations are outlined below:

- C In the organisations where the evaluation process is standardized certain strengths are attained and certain weaknesses are attached. Terms are comprehensive and follow guidelines, but on the other hand there is a tendency to be too rigorous and standardized and the particular challenges facing the particular project are thus not reflected in Terms. The standardized procedure is in risk of making the evaluation a ritual and placing more importance on the objective of satisfying the accountability demand towards donors than learning or assessing long term impact. The external mid-term and annual reviews appear very ritualised and often reproduce the same knowledge about the intervention only adding little new insight.

¹ *Accuracy Standards* determine whether an evaluation has produced sound and trustworthy data, leading to valid and reliable conclusions.

Feasibility standards recognise that evaluations usually are conducted in a natural, as opposed to a laboratory setting and consume valuable resources. Evaluation designs must be operable in field settings and evaluations must not consume more resources, materials, personnel, or time than necessary to address the evaluation questions.

Propriety standards reflect the fact that evaluations affect people. These standards are intended to protect the rights of individuals. They promote sensitivity to and warn against unlawful, unscrupulous, unethical, and inept actions by those who conduct evaluations.

Utility standards guide evaluations so that they will be informative, timely and influential. They require evaluators to acquaint themselves with their audiences, define the audiences clearly, ascertain their audiences' information needs, plan evaluations to respond to these needs, and report the relevant information clearly and in a timely fashion (Programme Evaluation Standards, 1994) (Forms & Carlsson 1997, pp. 482-483).

- C On the other hand, the Terms drafted by the small Danish NGO with a large development project tend to be much more tailored to the particular intervention and the evaluation needs of the involved parties.
- C Some Terms do try to request reviews to investigate issues beyond the actual implementation, but the team often fails to address these issues as methodology, timing, resources etc. of a typical review are seldom conducive to more broad assessment.
- C In fact, the general picture is that the Terms of the mid-term reviews are far too ambitious frustrating the process for all parties involved and filling the reports with lengthy explanations as to why the requested analysis could not be undertaken. Likewise, the standardized Terms tend to exhaust the team with the obligatory basket of cross-cutting issues, gender, environment, human rights etc, with little guidance as to how the issues should be analysed or addressed.
- C The Terms seldom specify which type of sustainability or which type of participation in the project cycle that is relevant and therefore the analysis often reflect the individual orientation of the team leader.
- C The Terms are generally poor on methodology. Normally only the method of data-collection is outlined and the analytical and conceptual framework is very seldom elaborated nor the method of data-production. A recent trend is to request a participatory approach without specifying what type of participation and without allowing for planning, time and resources to achieve participation.
- C Terms seldom call for an assessment according to the overall principles and policies of the Danish NGO. Even evaluations of projects within a certain sector where a sector policy exist often fail to request analysis of performance in light of the sector policy of the NGO.
- C Terms always request analysis of achievements of immediate objectives and planned output.
- C Terms very seldom request analysis of cost-effectiveness.
- C Seldom is the evaluation purpose made explicit resulting in a not too fortunate mixture of audit, learning, communication and planning purposes.
- C Many Terms have an apparently standard request for an assessment of impact, which in many cases seem to be used in the meaning of effect/output instead of long-term changes in the living conditions of the target group and community.

Analysis of Evaluation Approach

The majority of the evaluations under review are external evaluations with a team of 2-4 people with in-country visit of one, two or three weeks. The composition of teams reflect a bias towards northern team leaders and towards male-dominance. In most cases one of the consultants is from the country in question. In a few cases participatory approaches or action research have been explored but the reports do not particularly bear witness of the participatory approach allegedly pursued. The participatory approach often amounts to information or consultation in the form of self-evaluation workshops with partner management and no examples of active involvement or self management by the target/user groups are represented in the documentation under review.

In conclusion, the evaluation approach is surprisingly conventional, but it should of course be borne in mind that the evaluations reviewed are to some extent historical and not fully representative of the practice of today where several of the organisations experiment with participatory approaches. For example, DanChurchAid has carried out participatory evaluations and has had a review of the evaluation system in place, but in general the desk officers find it difficult to accommodate the time and resource demanding participatory approaches in the relatively large turnover of projects.

Furthermore, the evaluations undertaken by the Southern Partners are said to employ more unconventional approaches. The more informal evaluations undertaken of smaller projects show several examples of joint self-evaluation sessions among involved parties. However, where involvement do take place it mainly concern project implementing partners and seldom the beneficiaries.

Synthesis of the Evaluation Results Regarding Impact

The most appropriate approach to making a synthesis of evaluation results is not as straight forward as it may seem, which the recent NGO synthesis studies show (DAC, 1997; SIDA, 1995). Moreover, while outlining the difficulties, the above mentioned studies actually do not account for the method of perusal of reports.

With regard to the conceptual and analytical framework to be applied for this study, the terms of references of the Impact Study are very open.

It goes with saying that, what actually constitutes impact varies according to whom you are talking to (Dawson, 1996). The review will thus explore the concepts and approaches used.

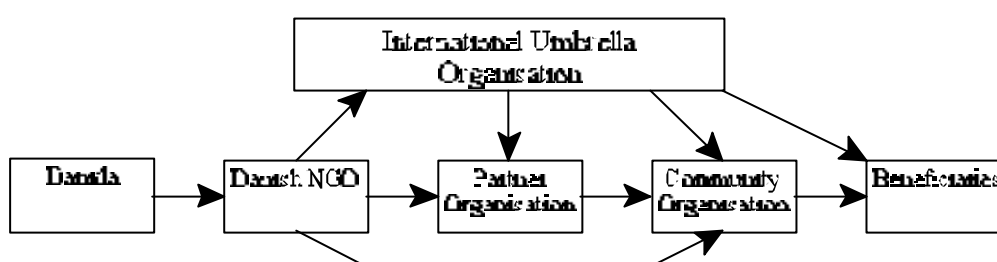
To make a synthesis is in some respects antithetical to the basic lesson that assessment of impact should not be divorced from the specific context, the type of intervention, type of partner and type of partnership.

With these precautions in mind an assessment will be made of the extent to which evaluations address the issues which are to be analysed in the Danish NGO Impact Study in order to establish what we already know. Focus will be directed at the methodology used to assess impact, the concept of impact applied and the substantive conclusions made with regard to impact. Moreover the issues of relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, sustainability and partnerships will be touched upon as well as the so-called cross-cutting dimensions: gender, environment, participation, human rights and democratisation.

The analysis of the Terms already indicated that the evaluation reports are not likely to address the questions of interest in the Impact Study to any great extent. This is confirmed by the findings of the perusal of the reports. At the same time it must be stressed that at the level of the individual project many interesting observations are made which however are not always of interest at the general level.

Level of Impact Assessment

Before moving on to the actual review of impact assessments it is paramount to revisit one of the main features of the mode of operation of Danish NGOs: The co-operation through or with local organisations and institutions and thereby also raise the question of the level/step at which impact assessments should or are being undertaken.



The majority of Danish NGOs have the possibility to appraise projects, influence partners in project planning, undertake ‘distance-monitoring’ and periodic evaluations, but the actual planning, implementation and evaluation rest with the partner. The minority of Danish NGOs have been project implementors with a relatively high degree of control of project design and implementation and thus control of the way in which impact was to be achieved.

The Danish NGOs have normally little direct day-to-day ‘contact’ with the beneficiaries and are only in a position to impact on the partner organisation. However, no studies have been undertaken of impact at this level. The focus of evaluation is normally on the project and the achievements of the project. The increased strategic orientation of partnerships has implied increased emphasis on capacity building of partners and strengthening of partnership relations. However, no evaluations focus exclusively on organisational assessment or partnership relations.

This finding alerts the Impact Study to discuss the various levels at which impact is assessed and the appropriate level at which the value added by Danish NGO aid is scrutinized.

Achievements

The achievement of immediate objectives is analysed in all reports and generally takes departure in an assessment of performance according to plan, implementation of activities and the realisation of the expected results/outputs.

The majority of projects get good scores in the achievement of immediate objectives and no direct failures have been identified. It appears, that performance and achievement do not seem to vary significantly between sectors.

The analysis of immediate objectives/outputs are not found to be straight forward by many teams. Unclear objectives, multiple project documents, lack of plans of implementation are factors which make many teams call for caution in the judgement. Most often the activities and objectives pursued in practice are found to be relevant and the incompatibility primarily lies in poor capability to draft project documents and keep them up-dated according to reality. An investigation of local partners' success criteria revealed that they often are not reflected in project documents (Red Barnet, 1998).

The small mini-projects generally perform well. They have straight-forward and simple objectives, they are demand driven projects, it is easy to verify the use and benefits of the project in the local community and they are executed due to the strong involvement of a local counterpart. With increased size, duration and complexity of the projects, the picture becomes more blurred, the question of ownership becomes more critical and the benefits and results become less transparent and visible to the evaluation teams.

However, at this level - the achievement of immediate objectives - the majority of projects get good scores and no direct failures have been identified. Moreover, performance and achievement do not seem to vary significantly between sectors .

Relevance and Efficiency

The issue of relevance is mainly addressed in two ways in the reports. Firstly, as a question of the extent to which the project/activity is relevant to and in line with the Danish NGO's priorities and strategies. The regional and country programme reviews particularly fall within this category.

The conclusions at this level are generally positive and confirm that the Danish NGOs actively seek to pursue the objectives of improving the living conditions of the poor and contributing to the changing of power relationships. However, little is said of the results of pursuing these objectives and criticism is often voiced of the lack of strategies and procedures in project and partner selection. The latter reflects the fact that even the larger NGOs only recently have developed a more consistent body of policies, strategies and procedures and that the reviews often have been initiated with a view to facilitating this development.

Secondly, relevance has been assessed as a question of the extent to which the project is relevant to local concerns. This entry is predominant in the project evaluations, whereas the project's concordance with the general or sector policies of Danish NGOs seldom is made subject of analysis. The analysis of correspondence with local needs generally concludes positively, while the picture with regard to local

concerns is more mixed. 'The concern of who' is a pertinent question to raise, but as the evaluations hardly employ stakeholder analysis, the complexity of local concerns remain unknown.

It is remarkable, however, that normally analysis is only undertaken to establish whether the intervention satisfies a local need and not whether it is *the most* important, crucial or strategic need to address in the given situation. At best it is established that the need analysis was not properly undertaken prior to project implementation.

This impression is reinforced by the very limited analysis of cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness. The very large projects may be subjected to analysis of cost-effectiveness and here the conclusions are very mixed ranging from an unsurpassed efficiency in integrated rural development in Bangladesh, to a very low efficiency in the commercialisation project in Nicaragua. But we know little of the very small projects and if there is a critical bottom line. However, the Child Rights Review of Red Barnet does indicate that the mini-projects in several instances are just too small to make ends meet if the NGO does not have the core expenses covered by other means. Adverse effects in the form of incoherent planning, organisational instability and ad-hoc interventions may occur (Red Barnet, 1998).

In conclusion, the interventions of Danish NGOs are generally found to be relevant according to local needs, but the basic premise of working in a certain sector with particular means and target groups is seldom subject to analysis or discussion.

Impact

Impact is probably one of the most commonly used buzz-words in the Danish development aid community that is subject of much confusion. The question here is how Danish NGOs define impact, which methods are used and what conclusions are reached.

The achievement of longer term development goals is seldom analysed for good reasons. While TOR often request impact analysis, it is most frequently taken to mean effect and as the bulk of the evaluations are mid-term reviews, the call for impact assessment is in that case beyond the scope of a mid-term review. A few try to assess the likeliness that the activities may contribute to an achievement of long-term development goals but it inevitably becomes projections rather than retrospective evaluations. Definitions of impact in Terms and in the reports are few and the actual impact assessments under review numbers five, at which we shall look a little closer. The lack of formalisation of impact definitions and methodology in Terms of Reference implies that the impact assessments under scrutiny tell more of the orientation of the team leader than of the Danish NGO.

The difficulties of impact assessments, which are thoroughly outlined in the DAC and SIDA Study are also found in the evaluations undertaken by Danish NGOs, which the box below exemplifies:

Difficulties with Impact Assessment

The few Terms which place explicit emphasis on impact assessment are in most cases not answered to as the teams find it impossible to meet the request of impact assessment under the given conditions.

“The lack of a useful baseline study has made it almost impossible to measure project impacts” (Care Danmark, 1996, p. 61).

“Conclusively, the economic impacts have been significant, but it is unknown to which degree they are sustainable, since no profound studies on cost-benefits and on marketing aspects have been made” (Care Danmark, 1996, p. 90).

“The lament or critique, as the case may be, turns around the lack of baseline data, the deficiency in recording and systematising data all along the project cycle, the lack of identified indicators, the difficulty in identifying qualitative indicators” (Ibis, 1995, p. 58).

“The assessment of the factual output of the projects has proved to be impossible due to lack of systematic registering of project result in most of the reviewed projects (Ibis, 1994, p. 8).

“The original project document does not provide clear quantitative and qualitative targets, combined with lack of baseline data and a documentation, reporting, monitoring and evaluation system it has been difficult to find coherent information to assess the degree of achievements and cost-effectiveness (Danish Red Cross, n.a. p. 5).

Finally, it may be noted that the problems of output and impact assessment are also related to lack of indicator development and the general inclination to ‘stick to the indicators’ rather than viewing change of indicators as an indication of positive/negative change. With regard to impact assessment methods, very limited application of the wealth of techniques developed in recent years has been found (Hopkins, 1995).

Generally, the perusal of the evaluation reports points to the importance that the Impact Study methodology is designed in a way which will not be hampered by the general lack of baselines and monitoring of impact. Moreover, the Desk Study confirms that the Impact Study is strongly validated.

Poverty Impact

What type of impact has been identified in the projects supported by Danish NGOs? Generally speaking most interventions have the intention to improve the living conditions of poor or disadvantaged groups. What does that mean? Well, the reports carry a lot - although scattered - evidence of improve-

ments of living conditions; improvement of access to health facilities, reduced workload, improved farming techniques and productivity, greater awareness and employment creation.

There is a tendency to apply a sector approach, and the link to improvement of livelihoods and reduction of poverty is not always made explicit. The reports reviewed do not work with the conceptualisation of poverty reach and poverty impact; Poverty reach being the question of reaching poor target groups and beneficiaries, whereas poverty impact is a question of the lasting benefits attained by the poor target groups. Target group analysis is clearly not yet “a must” and the evaluations thus do not carry a lot of evidence as to whether the NGOs reach the poorest. A ‘menu’ of findings are presented in the box below and they speak for themselves.

Poverty

“The high priority poverty orientation is a problem in itself in relation to the project as the poorest have most difficulties in participating because of life threatening economic limitations. To this part of the population the problem solving must be “here and now”. The LIFT project does not operate within this time horizon”. (LIFT, Bangladesh).

”LIFT can not be expected to reach the poorest of the poor as they would not have the human and physical resources to benefit from the project” (Care Danmark, 1995, p. 3).

“One could consider the landless as the most needy with the less stable economic situation, but then an ANR project is not the most appropriate type of project to address the problems of this type of livelihood” (Care Danmark, 1996, p. 93).

“The poverty focus is the hallmark of Rural Development. But the emphasis on reaching the poor, although apparently strong, seems more often to be weak. Empirical studies on the poverty aspect, however, are conspicuously lacking” (Ibis, 1995, p. 9).

“There is a need for the MS-Tanzania to be very specific in its analysis of exactly who are the poor in the on-going activities and how this corresponds to the objectives” (MS, 1993, p. 7).

And the positive example: “The significant improvement in general living standard of the GMHs (group member household) was confirmed....Even poor families seem to have embarked upon successful strategies which have resulted in remarkable improvements in their daily lives...The non-measurable impact on awareness and empowerment of the GMHs, however, may be the most important effect of the CP(project). The many examples of groups getting improved access to Government services and local resources clearly demonstrate the significant positive empowerment effect of the CP(project)(Danida,1994, p. 35).

With regard to poverty impact, the picture is much the same. While it is important to remember that

policies and strategies may be more vocal on this issue, it is thought-provoking that little is said about how impact on poverty should be assessed and the findings of this review support the conclusion of the Proxy Evaluation which stresses that “without a theory of poverty, it is largely going to be a hit and miss affair as to whether a project will address poverty” (SIDA 1995, p. 77). Other types of impact will be assessed in the following.

This situation is not particular to the Danish NGOs. The overarching aim of Danish Development Aid is poverty reduction, which has not been subjected to systematic strategy development or monitoring.

This point to the importance that the Impact Study consult Danish and Local NGOs in the development of indicators to assess the poverty impact of interventions and in particular attempt to unpack the ‘development and empowerment impact’.

Project Impact Assessments

In only one case is impact study the title of the report and the explicit goal of the study; Impact Study of Gonobidyalaya Project, Bangladesh. In the other 5 cases the impact assessment is part of a project evaluation.

The Impact Study of Gonobidyalaya Project, Bangladesh - a nonformal education and vocational training project modelled after the Danish Folk High School concept - employs the method of interview with target group and control group (in order to compensate for lack of baseline study) and is exemplary in the way that it gives presentation of the research techniques employed; field survey, focus group discussion, observation and desk research, gives presentation of data collection, verification procedure, sampling technique and questionnaire used (Danish Association of Folk High Schools, 1996).

Impact of the training project is assessed in terms of

- Ⓒ improvement of KAB (knowledge, attitude and behaviour) of the target group
- Ⓒ improvement of material living standard of the target group
- Ⓒ influence in local community

The conclusions are very positive regarding impact on KAB and improvement of material living standards whereas the influence in local community is positive in terms of creating skilled labour, local change agents and a centre of knowledge but conflicting in the sense that the project was conceived and controlled from abroad while the community was supposed to support and manage it.

Impact in terms of improvements in KAB is also the main focus of the impact assessments undertaken

of the *Health Care Project on Prevention of HIV/AIDS, Danish Red Cross, Tanzania, and WUS Health Project, Nicaragua*.

The former employed a participatory research process over several months, used four qualitative data collection methods; focus group discussions, key informant interviews, body diagrams and sexual terminology interviews. Presentation is given of study quality control and testing methods and ethical considerations and limitation of the study (Danish Red Cross, 1994). The latter concerned a questionnaire to beneficiaries and project personnel (WUS, 1988).

The WUS Health Project gets good scores with regard to KAB and firm indications of an impact in the actual health situation of the target communities are identified. The former, the Hiv/Aids project, finds that the impact of the project on knowledge and attitude is positive and significant, whereas the impact on behaviour is limited and thus reaffirms the lessons that it takes more than knowledge and attitude to change behaviour.

El Pital Agroforestry Project, Nicaragua, Care Danmark, is not subjected to a full-fledged impact assessment, but a preliminary assessment of impact along the following dimensions at both farm and community level is made:

- Ⓒ social impact - KAB
- Ⓒ economic impact
 - income stabilisation
 - income increase
 - employment opportunities
 - land value
 - household food security

The conclusion is a very positive impact on all dimension except household food security, which possibly may be negative due to introduction of cash crops at the expense of food crops for domestic consumption (Care Danmark, 1996).

The impact study of the integrated rural development project, RDRS, Bangladesh, is in fact not an NGO evaluation, but an evaluation undertaken by Danida (Danida, 1994). Nevertheless, short mention of the study is warranted here. RDRS undertook an impact assessment in 1992, which the evaluation builds upon in the analysis which takes departure in an impact survey of target and non-target populations.

Impact - economic, social and institutional - is analysed in terms of achievement, benefit and sustainability and the overall conclusion is very positive. However, the methodology is not disclosed and

as impact is indicated according to category of activity it is not certain whether we are talking of lasting changes or effects combined with a prognosis of future sustainability, which may turn the effects into lasting impacts.

As the exception, there is no doubt about the very positive poverty impact and reach of RDRS as the project has explicit 'poverty admission' criteria defined as owning less than 1.5 acre of land and selling labour for at least 90 days a year.

As the only evaluation, impact is termed 'development impact', which unfortunately is not elaborated further. This is however telling of the surprising lack of reflection about the basics- namely what constitute development and what type of impact is needed in order to set in move a process of development.

Thematic, Sector and Programme Studies

In the following a number of sectors and themes will be dealt with. Departure will be taken in the thematic studies, sector and programme evaluations supplemented with findings from project evaluations. The thematic and the sector studies distinguish themselves by being much more elaborate on methodology, on analytical and conceptual frame, on assessment of Danish NGO policies and on critical reflections in general.

The thematic and sector studies give indications of the main areas of interest and of a relatively large portfolio of the respective NGOs.

Food Security

The study of experiences with food security, DanChurchAid, reflects that DCA was in the process of preparing a DCA strategy for food security and represents one exemplary effort aimed at operationalising the poverty focus. The study examines how the food security aspects are currently handled within DCA funded development projects. The analysis of food security concepts and approaches results in the proposal that food security should be seen as a poverty approach related to the household's access to food and as an absolute concept identifying the ones unable to get sufficient food, which is related to poverty but not equivalent with poverty (IDP, 1997).

The study concludes that the 35 DCA projects which have been studied have generally not used a poverty oriented approach to food security, but this does not imply that they do not meet a food security objective. On the opposite, the majority appear to meet a food security objective and in particular RDRS, Bangladesh, and Singida Integrated Rural Development Project have had strong positive impact

on food security.

The decisive factors in achieving food security is one the one hand the identification of the most food insecure and on the other hand focus on women in production and nutritional activities. The report concludes that the targeting of the food insecure households is more important than the type of intervention.

The poverty concepts used by the Danish NGOs should be considered in the development of the particular poverty concept applied in the Impact Study.

Integrated Rural Development Programmes (IRDP)

The desk study of lessons from integrated rural development programmes, Ibis, reflects the large involvement of Ibis in integrated rural or rather local development programmes. The issue of impact is not in focus and the study summarises the following lessons (Ibis, 1995):

Deficiencies and critical elements of the IRDPs in general are:

- Ⓒ they are over-dimensioned (area, target group, funds, number of activities)
- Ⓒ they suffer from a lack of fundamental base-line and diagnostical studies and hence a lack of differentiated target group definition and identification of barriers to participation
- Ⓒ integrated planning is only meaningful when integrated implementation is possible
- Ⓒ there must be a long-term perspective and a high staff-ratio
- Ⓒ selection of local leaders play a crucial role
- Ⓒ participation is considered important but its scope varies
- Ⓒ empowerment of small groups of poor is a long-term process
- Ⓒ monitoring and evaluation is a major problem for most IRDPs

Observations particularly related to the IRDPs of Ibis:

- Ⓒ the gender and sustainability aspects seem to be addressed in a limited way, whereas other Ibis objectives and strategies are well taken care of
- Ⓒ baseline and diagnostical studies are, with the exception of Manuel Lopez lacking. Target group definitions are gender blind and defined in very broad categories making it difficult to target interventions in relation to gender and poverty aspects
- Ⓒ well established structures for organising the beneficiaries are found in all the projects
- Ⓒ a certain democratic deficit can be noted in some partners and most partners lack gender awareness, management skills and administrative capacity
- Ⓒ the level of participation in Manuel Lopez is high, both in planning and in activities

- C the level of participation in the other projects is difficult to assess due to deficiencies in reporting and monitoring
- C the tendency to have an overwhelming scope and diversity of components combined with dispersion and heterogeneity of target areas present a problem
- C the experiences with income generating projects are quite negative, due to what is called lack of financial sustainability
- C it is claimed that the Manuel Lopez, by far the most successful one, has succeeded not least because of its institutional setup with a project office
- C one major difficulty with IRDP is their attempt to achieve an integration of the economic, the socio-cultural and political aspects of such projects.

A desk review of 15 evaluation reports of IRDPs supported by DanChurchAid supports the above findings regarding difficulties with integration and scope, but at the same time caution is warranted due to diversity in approaches and partners. The RDRS is an example of an IRDP with a strong grass root involvement and success with income generating activities including the financial sustainability.

Other project evaluations of individual IRDP projects do not add anything of importance to the above picture.

Human Rights and Democratisation

The child rights review of Red Barnet (Red Barnet, 1998) and *the human rights review of DanChurchAid* (CASA, 1992) are falling on the borderline between programme and thematic studies. In both cases, the reviews are of an explorative character, assessing the potentials and barriers faced by local human rights and child rights NGOs and identifying the main characteristics of the types of interventions. In both cases the main aim is - besides the assessment of achievement of objectives - to contribute to the development of intervention strategies within the human and child rights area.

Generally, the two Danish NGOs are found to be innovative, pioneering and opening up space for interventions in hitherto neglected socio-political aspects of development. They have identified capable and progressive local NGOs, which work at improving the human rights and child rights situation through legal enforcement, social enforcement and public enforcement strategies. The projects, all in all, have performed well. They are strongly transformative in nature and the evidence of change is strong among target groups, within the communities and within power-relations as a result of the projects.

However, the issue of impact is found to be particularly difficult to tackle in the human rights field due to conceptual unclarity, to problems with indicators relating to power relations, conflict potentials etc. and negative impacts occur side by side a very positive performance: "The impact of human rights

activities is like the impact of democracy. It does not necessarily lead to a situation of greater comfort or tranquillity. On the contrary, human rights activities, just like democratic rules, may lead to turmoil and discomfort as they have the effect of spotlighting conflicts in society” (CASA, 1992, Annex).

Both reviews are of mini-project programmes and strongly indicate that the projects are too small and of too short duration to have any lasting impacts. The projects however are modest and sometimes significant contributions to the launch and continuation of local struggles that often results in attainment of rights and changed power relationships.

The perusal of other project evaluation reports disclose, not surprisingly, that the human rights aspects of main-stream development interventions are studied rather seldom. However, it also depends on the approach. Several organisations have previously not spoken in human rights terms, but spoken of democratic development, empowerment and the fight against oppression in their policies. Still, the link between project interventions and empowerment, democratic development and injustices is seldom established beyond generalities or very specific testimonies.

One example, however, is *The study of decentralisation and local organisation, Ibis*, which is a reflection of the thematic focus of Ibis on decentralisation and local organisation (Hansen, 1995). The study provides many interesting observations on the relationships between state and civil society, processes of decentralisation, democratic potentials of local NGOs etc., but the study does not encompass an assessment of the Ibis supported interventions in this respect. However, it does conclude that the formulation of projects follows the strategic focus on empowerment. The economic improvement of living conditions is found to be more emphasised than the political level - that is, the strengthening of groups to be able to gain influence at the local, municipal and national levels. In general, it can be noted that the assessments of human rights and democratisation tend to emphasise the organisational potential and profile as much as the individual project.

The above points to the importance to keep the dynamics of human rights and democratisation projects in mind when designing methodologies to assess impact in these fields.

Participation

The Study on Participatory Approaches and Potentials in Projects supported by DanChurchAid reflects the priority of DanChurchAid - as most Danish NGOs - to strengthen the application of participatory approaches (IDP, 1997).

The study gives an account of the concept of participation; the ambiguity, the instrumental and transformational version, operational and structural barriers, etc. and an introduction to participatory

approaches and methods. The latter is discussed according to five ‘families’ of participatory approaches; a) The Objectives Oriented Project Planning Family to which LFA belongs; b) The Consultative Family to which Rapid Rural Appraisal belongs, c) The Conscientization Family to which Training for Transformation belongs; d) The Participatory Rural Appraisal Family.

Five case studies are selected according to geographical representation, representation with regard to type of partner and participatory approaches. They all represent examples of best practices, but as the focus of the study is on the concepts, strategies and potentials for participation, little attention has been given to the participatory approaches’ impact on participation. Or of the actual results and impact of participation.

An important finding of the Study is that “indicators to monitor progress and evaluate effectiveness and impact [of participatory approaches] have rarely been developed. In the cases where indicators have actually been developed, they are by and large purely quantitative. Thus they may be used to monitor ‘if people participate’ rather than review and evaluate, ‘why they participate’ and ‘with what results’” (IDP, 1997, p. 92).

The lessons learned from the case studies are in brief that

- C analysis of context is crucial in order to devise participatory strategies that work
- C there is need for more structured attention to barriers of participation
- C commitment is important besides knowledge and skills
- C the balance between training, action, organisational development and service delivery is of key importance in projects performance
- C there is a risk that the rhetoric and the techniques take over at the expense of ‘real’ participation
- C the choice of structure (household, community, NGO) to which the project links up is decisive of the appropriate participatory approach.

Turning to the project evaluations it is remarkable that analysis of participation is scattered. The reasons are, among others, that some projects do not explicitly intend to be participatory and thus have no objectives or strategies of participation to be reviewed, that Terms of Reference for the evaluation often do not request analysis of participation and that teams during the typical two-week visit find it difficult to assess participation.

In the cases where participation is studied it is seldom clarified what form of participation we are talking about. Contribution in terms of labour often results in an overall positive conclusion regarding participation. Again the thematic studies are most informative like the desk study of IRDPs, which

ascertain that all Ibis IRDPs work with a participatory approach and the Child Rights Review, Red Barnet, which investigate the participatory approaches of partners. Most projects claim to pursue an empowerment strategy, but as it is very difficult to employ in practise, it often boils down to contribution.

In general, the perusal of reports gives the impression that the people centered development perspective is not very dominant - the project is seen as the centre of development in which people “ought” to participate rather than the project participating in the struggles of the people. The strength of the mini-projects from this viewpoint is that they are simply too small to take ‘possession’ of the development centre.

Many of the project completion reports comment on the participation of the target group in very broad terms. The above mentioned participation study noted the same problems: “The relevant Project Documents contained little if any information on participation. This is true both as regards objectives and strategies as well as planned outputs and activities. In consequence, there was very little concrete data to analyse and far too much space for interpretations and ‘guesstimates’. Perusal of project documents, e.g. review reports, was generally of little help” (IDP, 1997, p. 5).

Nevertheless, all the case studies gave evidence of participatory approaches, which leads to the conclusion that the present evaluation material does not give a satisfactory picture of the experiences with participation in projects supported by Danish NGOs.

Participation and Ownership

“...the application of a right principle in a wrong context. Though the concept of *Gonobidyalaya* is inseparably connected with the community, as a project it has been perceived, organised and funded externally, in which the community has had virtually no role to speak of. In these circumstances the recognition of the local committees as the “highest authority at the community level” gives rise to a series of questions (Danish Association of Folk High Schools, 1997, p. 16).

“ That most partners tried to work for people and not with people was noted to be a general problem. Not many projects and placements were growing out of community needs and developed by people themselves” (MS, 1993, p. 10).

The perusal of evaluation reports did however identify some projects which by the teams were found to be outstanding or examples of best practices in the three countries.

In the Impact Study it will be important to try to apply the perspective of the degree to which projects participate in the struggles of the people and the question of ownership. In the assessment of participation in projects the focus should be on why people participate and with what impact. Moreover, the Impact Study should seek to be learning examples of participatory evaluation and impact assessment techniques.

Training and Popular Education

The Thematic Review of Popular Education and Training in Ibis Supported Projects (Ibis, 1994) reflects the priority of Ibis - as many of the other Danish NGOs - to develop an education policy and strengthen the training and education components in all interventions. The thematic study was initiated in order to reach an improved understanding of the concepts and methods used, of the relevance and impact of these and covered study of six projects, of which one is the Manuel Lopez Project located in Nicaragua. However, the review does not manage to arrive at an impact assessment, but finds that the popular education methodologies are particularly successfully implemented in the Manuel Lopez project which represents an approach worthwhile to be replicated.

With regard to sustainability the review found that in popular education projects transfer of project responsibilities is an integrated part of the methodology and that the projects which planned the transfer of responsibilities at an early stage were most successful in assuring take-over. In general the interest for gender issues was limited to a WID approach and with regard to empowerment it was found that the projects applying a popular education methodology were most empowering to the target group. It was found that the popular education and training clearly contributes to an increase of knowledge directed at improving living conditions of the target group.

Turning to the other project evaluations there are many pieces of evidence of changes that have occurred as a result of the training given, but as mentioned only one impact study has been conducted (The Gonobidyalaya, Bangladesh). Training is generally perceived as more successful on the empowerment than on the poverty dimension, but this may be owing to the different ways in which empowerment and poverty manifest itself and are influenced by external factors.

The design of the Impact Study should reflect the thematic priorities and focus of the Danish NGOs.

The Cross-cutting Issues

Participation and human rights have already been dealt with and we shall thus turn to sustainability, gender and environment. Moreover the issues of capacity building and partnership will be addressed.

Sustainability

Sustainability is generally poorly defined in both terms and evaluation reports, but generally the financial sustainability is assessed and found to be very inadequate if not an illusion. Most of the social sector projects have no prospects of financial sustainability in the medium term perspective and if financial sustainability was to be achieved it would in many instances imply that the project would change drastically with regard to target groups and effects.

The demand for sustainability is also being questioned from other quarters. The human rights activists claim that “Human rights organisations do not have any marketable product...They actually perform a public service .. None of these activities will ever achieve a degree of self-sustainability. Human rights NGOs will depend for a long time, if not always, on donors.” (CASA, 1992, Annex).

Few are the examples of systematic assessment of the social, environmental and institutional sustainability. The institutional sustainability is defined both as a) the extent to which the objectives of an aid activity will continue after the assistance is over (DAC’s definition), b) the ability of project/NGO to take over or c) the ability of beneficiaries to survive/maintain level of improvement.

Generally, the institutional sustainability is found to be reasonable, but the assessments seldom entail an organisational analysis and frequently rest upon the existence of a seemingly strong NGO.

The evaluation of the Pital Agroforestry Project, Nicaragua is exemplary in the assessment of technical, environmental, economic, organisational and institutional sustainability (Care Danmark, 1996).

Concern regarding sustainability is apparently often linked to the social and cultural sustainability. The listing of factors contributing to success often indirectly mention the social and cultural sustainability factors. Several evaluations note the importance of cultural and social sensitivity in education, training and information activities and the importance of a socially acceptable image of the NGO. However, the cases of alienation of projects are found to be very few.

The above points to the importance that the Danish NGO Impact Study seeks to move beyond the conventional assessments of financial sustainability and includes other important dimensions of sustainability.

Gender

No thematic assessments of the gender aspects have been forwarded for use by the Impact Study but the proposal for a gender focus in Ibis’ programmes, ‘Una propuesta de enfoque de género en Ibis’ does contain an interesting and useful presentation of main perspectives and approaches related to women and gender (Ibis, 1997). The study stresses the need to move beyond the WID approach to

a gender perspective and finds that the Manuel Lopez project is a positive example of an applied gender strategy. Judging from the project evaluation reports, the general picture is characterised by gender blindness. Some projects have adopted WID approaches and very few have a gender strategy.

None of the reports bear witness of the use of gender impact assessment approaches. (Harvard Analytical Framework, Gender Analysis Matrix, Gender Sensitivity Check-list, Gender Audit)

Even a pronounced gender perspective may not contribute to a positive impact on gender relations, as illustrated in the MS Country Programme review: "It has been acknowledged by the country programme that a major problem so far has been approaching the gender aspect with Danish solutions... The country programme contains a high awareness on women's participation in most activities (MS, 1993, p. 12).

However, one should not jump to easy conclusions. E.g. the inadequacies of the gender perspective among the partners of Ibis and MS is highlighted in many reports, exactly because Ibis and MS request a critical review of this issue. Many of the other NGOs have not asked the team to look into these issues and many teams lack the gender perspective. At the level of policies and strategies the gender perspective is definitely much more at front and the present project portfolio is likely to be more gender sensitive than indicated by the evaluation reports of past projects.

The above points to the importance that the Impact Study carefully selects the appropriate gender impact assessment approaches and seeks to be a learning example.

Environmental Assessments

No thematic assessments of environmental screening or impact is available. The project evaluations generally do not consider environmental impacts or sustainability. The environmental projects are of course an exception. The MS Tanzania Review finds that environmental aspects are well considered in all MS activities.

Capacity Building

Judging from the dominant mode of implementation of the Danish NGOs - cooperation with local partners - one would expect that capacity building of local partners would be a frequent project intervention, subject to particular evaluation and that organisational assessments would be part and parcel of project evaluations. This is not the case. At hand, there is only one review of institutional development of a local partner following a project intervention on "governance reactivation" of the partner covering constituency building, management and administration, organisational reform, democratisation and transparency.

The programme evaluations do get closer to whether the activities may be seen as contributing to capacity building of partners. The Ibis regional programme review concludes positively, while the child rights review of Red Barnet reveals that capacity building has mainly been perceived as support to the increase of local capacities among the target groups and community organisations and much more seldom at the level of the recipient project implementing NGO (Red Barnet, 1998).

The assessments in project evaluations of capacity building among local target groups are generally positive, but have a tendency to speak of rather undefined processes of empowerment and increased independence, with few attempts to present the key factors in capacity building. That is, little is provided in terms of analytical approach and methodology in this field.

Several evaluations do however recommend that future assessments move from the project level to the organisational level and that project interventions to a greater extent directly target the organisational and institutional development of the partner.

Linked to the issue of capacity building is of course implementation capacity, which is frequently mentioned in TOR and subject to assessment in the evaluations where focus normally is directed somewhat narrowly at the project/activity implementation capacity.

Not surprisingly, a positive achievement of immediate objectives is closely linked to a positive assessment of project implementation capacity.

It is probably fair to say that the picture transpiring from the evaluation reports does not reflect the nature of partnerships very well nor the multiple types of assistance rendered to partners which aim at building up the capacity of partners. Many projects have staff training, but without being planned and evaluated in the context of organisational development. The support to networking has also been prominent. This situation is indicative of the dominant funding pattern in the past, where capacity building activities were not developed into particular projects but had the status of project support activities, often financed over the overhead and thus not subject to particular evaluation.

However, a number of distinct programmes do aim at building the capacities of the partner organisations. Depending on the organisation in question they are named development volunteer programmes, co-operant programmes, delegate programmes etc. and they are quite varied in objectives, scope and implementation form. Short mention shall be made in the following of the thematic evaluations in this field.

It will thus be an important challenge to the Impact Study to develop in consultation with Danish NGOs the conceptual frame for assessment of impact on capacity building - at the target group level and at the

organisational level.

Human Resource Development

The review of the co-operant programme of Ibis in 1992 highlights the difficulties in matching the qualifications and aspirations of Danish Volunteers, the policies of Ibis and the priorities and needs of local partners (Ibis, 1992). Volunteers sometimes find they are underutilized or put at irrelevant tasks, several partners find that a Nicaraguan could fulfill the job and would prefer financial assistance, while at the same time expressing appreciation of the expertise and participation of Danish co-operants. While the review identifies many institutional weaknesses in the co-operant programme, it is found that the co-operants have had a positive contribution to the partners, but the achievements in terms of organisational development or human resource development is not analysed.

The review of the Central America Regional Programme, Ibis, finds the volunteer programme to be a success. The positive assessment is closely linked to appreciation of the integration of the co-operant as part of a development project. Whether these seemingly contrasting conclusions are related to different opinions or improvements over time is not clear.

The thematic review of MS's human resource development in the South (MS, 1995) makes an effort to develop a conceptual and analytical framework for the review in a combination of UNDP Human Development Concept and Macro-Economic, Socio-Economic and Organisational Dimensions of human resource development. While pointing to many achievements with HRD (Human Resource Development) the overall assessment is rather critical and particular mention is made of the imprecise partnership relations, inadequate project design and preparation and insufficient HRD strategy.

The Review of Tanzania Country Programme, (MS, 1993) also finds that the volunteer - development worker - programme has had problems in terms of inadequate project preparation, poor participation and ownership, lack of awareness of sustainability and in several cases lack of overall justification, as the capacities and expertise of the development workers are available locally.

Partnerships

The above reviews of volunteer and co-operant programmes are the reviews, which most explicitly analyse relationships between the Danish NGO and partners with the general conclusion that identification and agreement on volunteer programme should to a much higher degree reflect a true partnership and take departure in local needs and priorities.

Both in terms and in the project evaluation reports, mention of the role of the Danish NGO and the role

of partnership is conspicuously lacking². Thus the evaluation reports offer poor documentation on the role of Danish NGOs and the significance of the partnerships.

In the cases where partnership and role is commented upon, the conclusions are most often that the partnership/role of Danish NGO is insignificant for the project (besides the financial contribution of course) followed by a moderate to positive conclusion. No assessments reaches a negative conclusion regarding the role of Danish NGOs, but in some cases the partnership has been too challenging, demanding and problematic to be continued.

The positive aspects cover the willingness to dialogue, few tough conditions and hidden agendas, progressiveness in funding patterns, risk preparedness, respect of the partners priorities and trustworthiness.

The apparently modest profile of Danish NGO may be seen as a merit. Yet, the partners strongly voice the need for a more visible profile of Danish NGO and a sharing of policies, strategies and programmatic decision making.

The recent strong orientation among most Danish NGO towards building and developing partnerships have as yet not been reflected in the evaluations, but the processes around partnership building is documented and could be made subject of study in order to inform the Impact Study.

Lessons Learned

The evaluation reports contain a wealth of lessons learned in spite of the fact that lessons learned are seldom synthesised in the reports. The lessons learned generally concern what we may call best practices or the lack of the same and do not relate much to particular types of interventions. Similarly, no major differences have been traced with regard to achievement, participation, gender etc. according to sector. That is, across sectors, type of partners and type of Danish NGO, the general lessons mainly concern the ten basic “do and do not” in development aid. The general lessons summarised below are at the same time expressions of factors of ‘success or failure’ of projects.

- Ⓒ Context is crucial
- Ⓒ Planning according to context with identification of local needs and concerns.
- Ⓒ Participation where relevant in all stages of project cycle.
- Ⓒ A legitimate and capable partner with proper implementation and management structures, target group sensors and strategic and analytical capacity.

² Only DanChurchAid has recently started systematically to request assessment of the Role of DCA, which is reflected in particular in the thematic studies of DCA.

- C Dedicated and professional staff.
- C Recognition of women as strong change agents and crucial in food security strategies.
- C Sustainability is increased with planning of take over.
- C Baseline studies, monitoring and evaluation are keys to project steering and improvement of impact.
- C Rigid requirements from donor, Danida, are often found to be counter-productive to sound project management reflecting realities of the project.

It will be key for the Impact Study to move beyond the obvious lessons and identify new areas in which lessons are to be analysed in connection with impact documentation and methodology development.

Impact Assessments within the International Aid Community

This review of Danish NGO evaluation reports has only scratched the surface of the top of the iceberg and has accounted for the numerous obstacles in synthesising the evaluation results of the interventions of Danish NGO.

However, the review do not warrant other conclusions than impact assessments are a rarity among Danish NGOs and thus strongly validates the purpose of the Impact Study.

The combination of evaluation practice among the Danish NGOs and the dominant mode of implementation through local partners imply that the evaluations undertaken in the past touch upon many of the issues of interest to the Impact Study but do not to any significant extent reach assertive conclusions with regard to longer term impact.

The present attention to the impact of NGO development interventions in Denmark is shared among many OECD countries. Since 1990 a number of donors have initiated studies and evaluations of the support channelled through NGOs and in several instances the specific objective has been to assess the impact of NGO development interventions.

Recent Studies

In 1995 three major NGO programmes were evaluated; the Finnish NGO Support Programme (Riddell, 1994); The impact of Swedish Government support to Swedish NGOs (Riddell, 1995); and the Norwegian support through NGOs (Tvedt, 1995). In 1997 the large OECD/DAC study "Searching for impact and methods: NGO evaluation synthesis study" (Riddell, 1997) was published.

In the following a brief overview of the methods and concepts of impact employed and conclusions reached in the above studies will be given.

The Norwegian Study evaluated the *Norwegian system* for channelling funds through NGOs and therefore touched upon the issues of impact to a very limited extent. Rather the character and role of the NGOs and the policy of the Norwegian government were in focus. In this way it had several similarities with the Danish NGO evaluation in 1989 - especially the discussion of the validity of assertions about the “comparative advantages” of NGOs.

The Swedish and Finnish NGO Impact Study both addressed the issue of impact more directly. The method used involved desk studies of project evaluations and country case studies. The large OECD/DAC synthesis study aimed directly at assessing impact, but did this mainly on the basis of existing evaluation documentation among donors and among the Northern and Southern NGOs.

In many respects the above studies confirm or are in line with the conclusions of this Desk Study of impact assessment undertaken by Danish NGOs.

In general it has been found that the achievement of immediate objectives has been positive, but that even the assessment of performance against objectives proves difficult for a number of reasons.

The difficulties of impact assessments found in the evaluations undertaken by Danish NGOs are also thoroughly outlined in the DAC Synthesis Study and in the SIDA Proxy Evaluation. These difficulties are closely linked to the overall evaluation paradigm and organisation of evaluations. The evaluation practice of Danish NGOs is no exception - they rather represent the typical picture. Despite the importance attached to sustainability of aid interventions, evaluations conducted *ex-post* are still extremely rare and the formal evaluations’s focus on activity and output indicators is not very helpful in understanding impact (DfiD, 1998, p. 20).

The findings of this Desk Study regarding poverty impact is supported by the conclusion of the Proxy Evaluation which stresses that there is relatively little evidence that NGOs reach the poor and that “without a theory of poverty, it is largely going to be a ‘hit and miss’ affair as to whether a project will address poverty” (SIDA, 1995, p. 77). If poverty is addressed it is still mainly through the targeting of poor rather than the assessment of the extent to which poverty is reduced. However, this finding should be compared with the objectives and mandates of the NGOs in order to conclude whether this is an indication of bad performance or in line with their goals. The traditional focus on poor does for example not necessarily rank very high in NGO interventions aiming at strengthening civil society, improving human rights respect, supporting trade unions etc.

Cost-effectiveness was seldom analysed in the Danish NGO Evaluation Reports, which is a general phenomenon. A key finding in Riddell's review of cost-effectiveness analysis practices is that very few UK NGOs undertake cost-effectiveness analysis or collect basic cost information (Riddell, 1996).

The findings with regard to the quality of evaluation reports and the low assertiveness of conclusions reached is according to the DAC Report a general weakness across the evaluation practice within development aid and thus not a particular weakness of the Danish NGO evaluations (DAC 1997, p. 11). From here follows the risk that the utility of the evaluations is reduced. The Swedish meta-evaluation of impact of evaluations concludes that due to the lack of scientific approach and mainly relying on information from the involved, they tend to reproduce what parties already know (Baaz & Carlsson, 1998). Most meta-evaluations of donors have shown deep scepticism about the past evaluation work (DfiD, 1998, p. 21).

The lessons learned from the Danish NGO evaluations are by and large similar to the lessons drawn from the evaluations reviewed by the DAC and SIDA study. A recent multi-agency review of evaluations conclude that the reports "present a variety of generic 'lessons' which are in effect truisms that could be found in any number of introductory guides to aid and development in the 1970s or earlier" (DfiD, 1998, p. 16).

In common for the mentioned NGO Evaluations, Synthesis and Impact Studies is a general lack of attention to the very subject they are studying; namely the NGOs. Terje Tvedt has posed the question: How can one most fruitfully analyse the character and role of voluntary or private organizations in a particular country and the manner in which this organizational scene affects and is affected by the NGO channel in aid"? (Tvedt, 1998, p. 57). He goes on arguing that there have been few efforts at developing theories and methodologies which could support such an analysis.

NGO interventions have mainly been analysed at the micro- level and narrowly focussed at the project output and little study has been undertaken of the roles which NGO are supposed to have as "crucial actors in advancing democratization, advocacy and development, not only at the local setting but even nationally and globally" (Tvedt, 1998, p. 57).

While discussing functionalist and national-style approaches, Tvedt argues in favour of analysing the NGO sector as one social system of a particular kind; The complex development processes shaping the NGO scene in the aid area can only be fully understood by combining a national-style approach and the international social system approach (Tvedt, 1998, p. 66).

The basic question of how to analyse the NGO sector will certainly deserve attention in the Danish NGO Impact Study.

Concepts of Impact

The concepts of impact have varied in the studies, but a common denominator has been the focus on the *longer term changes brought about by a certain development intervention*.

The scope of impact is elaborated by Blankenberg in the following way:

“Impact concerns long-term and sustainable changes introduced by a given intervention in the lives of beneficiaries. Impact can be related either to the specific objectives of an intervention or to unanticipated changes caused by an intervention; such unanticipated changes may also occur in the lives of the people not belonging to the beneficiary group. Impact can be either positive or negative, the latter being equally important to be aware of” (Blankenberg, 1995a).

The classical focus on lasting or sustained changes has very recently been challenged by the Oxfam/Novib Impact Study, which revealed that in areas experiencing rapid and unpredictable changes such as areas in conflict or state of emergency, the notion of sustained or lasting was untenable. This resulted in the definition that impact concerns the “*significant or lasting changes in people’s lives, brought about by a given action or series of actions*” (Roche, 1999, p. 4).

Regarding the various kinds of impact, i.e. the Swedish study looks particularly into the poverty impact following the Swedish criteria that programmes funded should have the aim of improving the standards of living of the poor and that improvement should in some sense be permanent. (SIDA, 1995, p.114).

In the donor initiated studies impact has been studied in relation to a number of issues:

- Ⓒ achievement according to objectives;
- Ⓒ impact on livelihoods and poverty status in particular
- Ⓒ sustainability and cost-effectiveness
- Ⓒ innovation and flexibility
- Ⓒ replicability and scaling-up
- Ⓒ gender impact
- Ⓒ environmental impact
- Ⓒ impact vis-à-vis democratisation and pluralism (OECD, 1997, 67)

Recent research and studies point to a number of crucial factors in impact assessment ranging from the question of *context* of the impact assessment to building a *time-scale* of impacts; the question of *level and target* of the impact; and issues of *external influences*. Finally, the importance of reflecting and building on the perspective of *stakeholders* perceptions of change is underlined in most studies and pieces of research. These factors will also need attention in the Danish NGO Impact Study.

In the methods of assessment of impact a strong focus has been on positioning *impact* as the last and ultimate stage in the monitoring and evaluation process; objectives, inputs, outputs, effort, effect efficiency, effectiveness and *impact*. Moreover it has been underlined that in order to effectively ‘measure’ the impact it is necessary to complete the previous stages of the process first (Oakley, 1998, p.33).

Likewise, Hopkins has stressed that “it is not possible to carry out impact assessment activities successfully if the more basic task of evaluating activities and their immediate effects is not done properly” (Hopkins, 1995a).

For this reason, the incompleteness of the one or other stages in the monitoring process will influence negatively the prospects of undertaking an impact assessment. Subsequently and in line herewith we find the frequent reference to lack of clear objectives, lack of monitoring of outputs, incomplete evaluation of effects as obstacles in reaching an assessment of changes.

While the impact chain is a useful way of distinguishing between different levels of change and provide guidance to the recording and reviewing of the process of change, it may be counterproductive to use it too rigidly as realities and stakeholders perceptions do not neatly categorize into the different stages (Roche, 1999, p. 8).

Most importantly, however, the Oxfam/Novib impact study shows that for the assessment of impact *it is not absolutely necessary to complete the previous stages in the impact chain prior to the ultimate assessment of the last stage; impact*. In other words, the Oxfam/Novib Study shows encouraging examples and lessons of how to surmount the obstacles to impact assessment which have been embedded in the incompleteness of the monitoring and evaluation of previous stages of the impact chain. The importance of base-line studies, monitoring of input-output relationship, evaluation of effect etc. is certainly not neglected, but it is not indispensable to impact assessment.

In the Oxfam/Novib Study, two main approaches were tested: Firstly, the classical assessment approach according to the impact chain and the assessment or reconstruction of previous stages; objectives, input, output, outcome, effect and ultimately impact was tested. For the present purpose it may be called the “project - out” assessment model, where departure is taken in the project and the impact is analysed in terms of the impact produced from the project.

Secondly, the Study tested an approach called “context - in” approach, which tried to “turn the telescope round”. The key in this approach is that “Rather than looking at the issue solely from the perspective of an organisation or the project it supports, it starts with looking at what change is

considered most significant in peoples lives, *irrespective of any project*. It then goes on to explore with those concerned what are the processes bringing such change about, amongst which NGO initiated projects and programmes may be one, and possibly minor, element” (Roche, 1999, p. 6).

Employing the “context-in” approach has a number of advantages: It avoids the typical indicator dilemma, which concerns that the project indicators by definition can only capture expected change. It avoids the overexposure and exaggeration of the projects’ importance vis a vis other causes of change and it is thus more authentic when it comes to deciding the attribution of change. Most importantly, it “jumps over” the many obstacles faced in the classical impact chain assessment with lack of data, baseline, monitoring of previous stages etc. It takes departure in the changes in livelihoods which the stakeholders identify and *traces* the factors and causes influencing the changes. It has been found successful in reconstructing meaningful baselines. And finally, it exerts no prejudism regarding order of relevance and importance and is thus in a sense more objective - especially when it come to the question of attribution.

One weakness, of course, is that it is not directly focussed on the project or on an assessment of particular anticipated impacts of a certain intervention. Another weakness is that as a recall method people look back at a certain situation and change with the benefit of hindsight (Roche, 1999, p. 32).

Both approaches could be applied and tried out in the Danish NGO Impact Study in order to fulfill the aim of methodological development.

The Problem of Attribution and Aggregation

Once the problems of identifying a significant or lasting change have been overcome, the next difficult question of what caused the identified change poses itself. To which degree can the identified change be attributed to a development intervention?

This classical problem has seldom been tackled in traditional evaluations of development projects. The multi-agency review concludes that: “benefits attributed to interventions tend to lack with/without comparison (and often also lack before/after comparison) and attribution of benefits tends not to be systematically compared with alternative strategies that could have been used to achieve similar results” (DFID, 1998, p. 24).

The Oxfam/Novib Study deliberately employed the with/without comparison as well as an exploration of alternative factors of attribution. This study of “interference effects” seeks to understand the contribution which the context has in promoting or inhibiting observed changes (Roche, 1999, p. 41).

While much emphasis conventionally has been placed on proving the “cause-effect” relationship the

Oxfam/Novib Study shows examples of a deliberate rejection of finding evidence. Rather the Study looked for confirmation of attribution by different stakeholders. Hereby the above mentioned crucial perspective of stakeholders' perceptions of change has been put in front even in the question of attribution.

However, in general the experimentation and exploration of issues of attribution in impact assessment is still in its infancy. So is the general state of the art within impact assessments of development interventions implying that the Danish NGO Impact Study has been given a unique task, which calls for the development of approaches and methodologies.

Concluding Remarks

The analysis of the national context of the Danish NGO Impact Study, of the state of the art in the field of impact studies among Danish NGOs and within the international development community, and of the substantive conclusions with regard to impact of the development interventions of Danish NGOs all points to the conclusion that the purpose of the Impact Study is strongly validated.

The main issues, emanating from this Desk Study, to be carried forward in the Impact Study and to be considered in the design of the Impact Study are the following:

- Ⓒ Due account of the NGO characteristics and diversity with regard to vision, mandate and constituency, organisational capacity, form of implementation, sector profile and funding relationship with Danida.
- Ⓒ Reflection of the thematic priorities and focus of the Danish NGOs in the design of the Impact Study.
- Ⓒ Inclusion of ex post studies and due attention to the impact of smaller projects.
- Ⓒ Overall design in order to be an example of best practices with regard to quality standards: Accuracy, feasibility, propriety and utility.
- Ⓒ Attention to the various levels at which impact may be assessed and to the appropriate level at which the value added by Danish NGO aid may be scrutinized.
- Ⓒ Design of methodology in a way which will not be hampered by the general lack of relevant

- documentation, baseline studies and monitoring of impact.
- C Moving beyond the conventional assessments of financial sustainability only and include the institutional, cultural, social and political sustainability also.
 - C Selection of the appropriate gender impact assessment approaches and efforts at demonstrating best practices within this field for the Danish NGOs
 - C Consultation with Danish NGOs in the efforts to unpack the ‘development and empowerment’ impact
 - C Consider the poverty concepts used by the Danish NGOs in the development of the particular poverty concept applied in the Impact Study.
 - C Keeping the dynamics of human rights and democratisation projects in mind when designing methodologies to assess impact in these fields.
 - C In the assessment of participation in projects focus on why people participate and with what impact. The perspective of the degree to which projects participate in the struggles of the people and the question of ownership should also be addressed. Moreover, the Impact Study should seek to learning examples of participatory evaluation and impact assessment techniques.
 - C Consultation with Danish NGOs regarding the conceptual frame for assessment of impact on capacity building - at the target group level and at the organisational level.
 - C The analysis of partnerships be informed by the various documentation on partnership policies, reverse roundtable etc. in the absence of evaluations of partnership relations.
 - C Identification of new areas in which lessons are to be analysed in connection with impact documentation and methodology development.
 - C Attention to the basic question of how to analyse the NGO sector and the appropriateness of applying the “social system” approach.
 - C Attention to the factors of context, timescale, level of impact, target of impact, external influences, stakeholders perceptions of change and the problems of attribution and aggregation.
 - C Operationalisation of both the “impact chain approach” and the “context-in” approach in the study of impact in order to fulfill the aim of methodological development.

- C Employment of an impact definition that will capture both the immediate and longer term changes, the positive and negative changes and the direct and indirect changes brought about by a given development intervention.

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Annex I**Number of operating Danish NGOs in the selected countries in the period 1988-97**

	Tanzania	Bangladesh	Nicaragua	TOTAL
NGOs with Framework agreements + MS	DRK FKN FUS MS	CARE DRK FKN FUS WUS	CARE FKN FUS IBIS MS	CARE Dansk Røde Kors Folkekirkens Nødhjælp FUS IBIS (WUS) MS
NGOs with Miniprogramme Agreements	DMR DUF	(DMR) RB	DSI DUF KULU RB	Dansk Missionsråd Danske Samv. Invalideorg. DUF KULU Red Barnet
NGOs with agreements on individual projects	ADRA BDM DANTAN DBF DSM DGI DHF ELIM HID LC LM-F NV UTS ULD-80	DBS DSM FFH IMCC LEV SM TdH U-S	ADRA (AIS) BISU (EH) DEF DHF DUI IB MK FSKN N-K SID VN-C	ADRA (AIS) BISU BDM DANTAN Dansk Biavler Forening Dansk Blindesamfund Dansk Missionselskab Dansk Handicap Forbund Dansk Santal Mission Den Danske Pinsebevægelse DGI DUI DEF(Dansk Elforbund) (EH, Egmont Højskolen) Forening til støtte af kultur i Nicaragua (FSKN) Foreningen af Folkehøjskoler HID IMCC Int. Børnesolidaritat Landsforeningen Evnesvages Vel (LEV) LC (Lions Club) Luthersk-Missionforening Mellemamerika Komiteen Naturfolkenes Verden Nicaragua Komiteen Spedalskhedsmissionen SID Terre des Hommes (Dk) Ulandshjælp til Selvhjælp U-landsforeningen Svalerne U-landsdebat 80 (VN-C)
	20	14	20	41 (44)

Annex II

Profile of the Danish NGO engagement in Bangladesh, Nicaragua and Tanzania

Bangladesh:

Danish NGOs in total: 14

Projects in total: 28

In Bangladesh the majority of projects are dealing with health issues - either disease control and treatment (leprosy, eye blindness) or preventive mother-child health care projects. Six Danish NGOs are involved in health encompassing both large NGOs as Danish Red Cross and small NGOs as Terre des Hommes and large projects such as the leprosy project undertaken by The Danish Leprosy Mission with a total grant of 36.9 mill during 1981-2000.

Integrated rural development is also represented with two projects administered by Red Barnet and DanChurchAid, the latter being the flagship of DCAs involvement in the country since 1997 with a total budget of 129 mill. DKK during 1977-2000 and a target group of more than 4 mill people.

More recent is the involvement in environmental projects, strengthening of trade unions and children's rights administered by Care Danmark, Trade Unions Developing Countries Secretariat and Red Barnet.

Finally, mention should be made of the small income generating and mobilisation projects for the poor carried out at grassroots level by The Swallows and the Danish Santal Mission.

Only a few projects dates back prior to 1980, but in 1989, 9 Danish NGOs were working in Bangladesh and only one is not operating there anymore. While completely new organisations have moved in and increased the diversity of the project portfolio it is also the case that organisations like Red Barnet has changed its mode of operation and focus considerably during the years thereby contributing to significant changes in the portfolio over the years. As mentioned above the direct involvement in children's rights is quite recent.

Nicaragua

Danish NGOs in Nicaragua: 20

Projects: 68

The NGO projects in Nicaragua are primarily concentrated on education and training, agricultural and rural development. Furthermore there are several postwar activities such as integration of refugees and soldiers, aid to victims of war and rehabilitation.

It is characteristic of the Danish NGO involvement that it is dominated by solidarity organisations, which is a reflection of the political history of Nicaragua. The involvement thus started during the Sandinist period and often in cooperation with local government institutions or popular movements with a strong political awareness.

The dominant Danish NGO in Nicaragua is Ibis. In the period 1981- 97 Ibis' Health project has an expenditure of 26.1 mill. DKK and the rural development project receives 45.8 mill.DKK (1989-99). Besides Ibis has a large number of other activities ranging from popular education and cooperative shops to fishery and forestry with a total of 28 projects.

Moreover, several smaller organisations have projects within their particular field of interest and competence i.e. cultural activities (FSKN), children (DUI & IB), women (KULU), disabled people (DHF), and labour movements (FUS, SID).

MS is present with 8 development volunteers in the field of human resource development.

The overall picture regarding type of involvement, type of Danish NGOs and type of co-operating partners is thus very composite.

Tanzania

Danish NGOs: 20

Projects: 73

As in Nicaragua the 73 project engagements in Tanzania are very composite in character, but the main involvement is in the social sector, with focus on health and particularly AIDS prevention and treatment, vocational training and school facilities and the agricultural sector with focus on integrated rural development and agricultural inputs.

DanChurchAid and Danish Missionary Council - in cooperation with Danish Missionary Society- are the heavyweight organisations in the country with regard to duration of involvement and project engagements. However, the majority of the projects are so-called mini-projects under 0.250 mill DKK ADRA too has had projects in the field of school renovation and water supply but only since 1993.

Danish Red Cross has a strong humanitarian profile but in the development field the involvement was initiated in 1989 and concentrates around AIDS prevention and Family Education.

A large number of organisations co-operates and keep contact with groups in Tanzania, which now and then materialize in a project co-operation. This is the case with the friendship organisation DANTAN, Indigenous Peoples World, Danish Beekeepers Association, Danish Youth Council, Danish Gymnastics and Sports Association, ULD 80.

NGOs with project activities of a very recent date are Handicap International Denmark and Danish Trade Union Council for International Development.

Finally mention should be made of MS, which is longtime active in Tanzania, presently with partnerships with approximately 40 partners and 36 development volunteers in the field of human resource development.

Annex III

List of Organisations

ADRA: Adventist Development and Relief Agency;
AIS: Architect's International Solidarity
BDM: Brødremenighedens Danske Mission; **The Danish Moravian Mission**
BISU: Bistand-Internationalt Samarbejde-Udvikling; **International Cooperation-Development CARE Danmark**
DANTAN: Dansk-Tanzaniansk Venskabsforening; **Danish-Tanzanian Friendship Association**
DGI: Danske Gymnastik- og Idrætsforeninger; **Danish Gymnastic and Sports Association**
DBF: Dansk Biavler Forening; **Danish Bee-keepers' Association**
DBS: Dansk Blindesamfund; **Danish Association of the Blind**
DEF: Dansk El-Forbund; **Danish Electricity Federation**
DMS: Det Danske Missionselskab; **The Danish Missionary Society**
DHF: Dansk Handicap Forbund; **The Danish Organization of Disabled People**
DMR: Dansk Missionsråd; **Danish Missionary Council**
DRK: Dansk Røde Kors; **Danish Red Cross**
DSI: De Samvirkende Invalideorganisationer; **The Union of Invalid Organizations**
DSM: Dansk Santalmission; **The Danish Santal Mission**
DUI: DUI - Leg og Virke
DUF: Dansk Ungdoms Fællesråd, **The Danish Youth Council**
ELIM: Den Danske Pinsevækkelse; **The Danish Pentecoste Church**
FFH: Foreningen for Folkehøjskoler; **The Association of Danish Folk High Schools**
FKN: Folkekirkens Nødhjælp; **DanChurchAid (DCA)**
FSKN: Foreningen for støtte af kulturen i Nicaragua; **Ass. to Support Culture in Nicaragua**
FUS: Fagbevægelsens U-landsekretariat; **Danish Trade Union Council for Int. Cooperation**
HID: Handicap International Danmark; **Handicap International Denmark**
IB: International Børnesolidaritet; **International Child Solidarity**
IBIS, former World University Service, WUS
KULU: Kvindernes Ulandsudvalg; **Women and Development**
LC: Lions Club;
LEV: Landsforeningen Evnesvages Vel; **The Danish Council of Org. of Disabled People**
LM-F: Luthersk Missionsforening; **Danish Lutheran Mission**
MS: Mellempfolkeligt Samvirke; **Danish Association for International Cooperation**
MK: Mellempamerika Komitéen; **Central America Committee**
N-K: Nicaragua-Komitéen; **Nicaragua Committee**
NV: Naturfolkernes Verden; **The World of the People of Nature**
RB: Red Barnet; **Save the Children's Fund**
SID: Specialarbejderforbundet i Danmark; **Specialworkers Union in Denmark**
SM: Spedalskhedsmissionen; **The Danish Leprosy Mission**
TdH: Terres des Hommes
U-1962: Ulandsforeningen af 1962; **Development Association of 1962**
U-S: U-landsforeningen Svalerne; **The Swallows**
ULD80: U-landsdebat 80; **Development Debate 1980**
UTS: Ulandshjælp til Selvhjælp; **Development Aid to Self-aid**