

**SEARCHING FOR IMPACT AND METHODS:  
NGO EVALUATION SYNTHESIS  
STUDY**

**A Report prepared for the OECD/DAC  
Expert Group on Evaluation**

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**PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

At the initiative of the Head of Evaluation and Internal Audit in the Department of International Development Cooperation of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs in Finland, and following agreement at the OECD/DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation meeting in October 1996, a team of five people from four European Institutes began work on this Study. These were the Groupe de Recherche et d'Échanges Technologiques (GRET), Paris, France (Mr Jean-Louis Vielajus); the Diakonhjemmetts Internasjonale Senter (DIS), Oslo, Norway (Dr Stein-Erik Kruse); the Institute of Development Studies, University of Helsinki, Finland (Mr Timo Kyllönen and Ms Satu Ojanperä); and the Overseas Development Institute, London, England (Mr Roger C. Riddell).

In brief, the twofold purpose of the Study was to gather and synthesise NGO evaluations of development projects and programmes in order, first, to present data and information on the impact of NGO development interventions, and secondly, to review evaluation methods used. This Report, prepared for the OECD/DAC Export Group on evaluation, was completed in early April 1997.

As is explained in some detail in the main Report, and as initially highlighted in the Study's *Inception Report* produced in December 1996, it became increasingly clear not only that the task set was a mammoth one but that it would be simply impossible to undertake a systematic and comprehensive analysis in the time available. Thus, while the overall project represents a unique attempt to address these issues on an international basis and notwithstanding the length of this Report and the wealth of data and information contained (especially in the 13 country-study appendices), the authors would like to emphasise that this Report presents little more than a partial view of the vast, and fast-growing, NGO literature on impact and methods.

In undertaking our work across four continents, we have been assisted by a range of institutions and scores of individuals who have given generously of their time, and have been willing to share a range of documents, many of which are not in the public domain. While it is not possible to express our appreciation to each and every one individually, we would like to mention a number of people for their assistance. Our first thanks goes to Dr Ulla Vuorela and her team from the Finnish Cooperative Centre whose preparatory work in gathering reports and related data was invaluable to us: without this source of data, it would have been simply impossible to undertake the study commissioned to us.

Secondly, we would like to thank Mr Kari Karanko and his staff at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, Helsinki whose support and encouragement ensured that the project was both started and completed. For financial support and encouragement, we would like to thank the Governments of Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, without whom it would not have been possible to undertake the range of case studies contained herein. Equally our thanks are due to Mr Hartmut Schneider and Mr Hans Lundgren at the OECD/DAC and to senior officials in the evaluation departments of most OECD donor agencies for providing us with reports and, in many cases, for facilitating contact with a range of key individuals and NGOs in their respective countries.

Thirdly, we wish to thank the many NGOs and NGO staff, in both the north and the south, who not only provided us with their evaluation reports and reviews and explained their attitudes and approaches to evaluation, but also encouraged us in our work. While this Report has been written for the OECD/DAC Evaluation Group, we hope that it will be circulated widely across the different NGO networks and communities.

Fourthly, we would like to express particular thanks to our three collaborators who joined us to undertake two of the 13 case studies. These are Anthony Bebbington and Denise Humphreys, who researched and wrote up the Chilean case study, and David Mansfield, who researched and wrote up the United States' case study. They worked under extreme pressure to produce some of the most interesting analysis in the Study, and early feedback suggests that their work has already been appreciated.

Finally, we would like to thank key support staff at the Institute of Development Studies in Helsinki and the Overseas Development Institute in London. Particular thanks go to Leena Saavalainen, Ellen Mustonen and Eva-Marita Rinne at the IDS and to Sandra Cox and Matty Thwaites at the ODI for the time and effort they put in to editorial work and ensuring that this Report was produced on time.

In undertaking the work for this Study, it has become clear not merely that there is considerable interest in the issues raised, but that the whole area of impact evaluation is changing fast. We hope that the Report will contribute to ongoing discussion and debate about impact and evaluation methods.

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## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

|      |   |
|------|---|
| AIMS | Assessing the Impact of Microenterprise Services            |
| CBO  | Community Based Organisation                                |
| CDIE | Centre for Development Information and Evaluation           |
| CEM  | Centro de Estudios de la Mujer (Centre for Women's Studies) |
| CHW  | Community Health Worker                                     |
| CIDA | Canadian International Development Agency                   |
| CIDE | Centro de Investigacion y Desarrollo de la Educacion        |

|         |  |
|---------|--|
|         | (Centre for Education Research and Development)  |
| CONGAD  | Conseil des ONG d'appui au développement   |
| DAC     | Development Assistance Committee   |
| DAI     | Development Alternatives Incorporated  |
| DANIDA  | Danish International Development Agency  |
| DCA     | DanChurchAid   |
| DFID    | Department for International Development   |
| DIS     | Diakonhjennets Internasjonale Senter   |
| EC      | European Commission  |
| EU      | European Union   |
| FVS     | Finnish Volunteer Service  |
| GAO     | General Audit Office   |
| GOM     | Gemeenschappelijk Overleg Medefinanciering   |
| GRET    | Groupe de recherche et d'échanges technologiques   |
| HPD     | Health and Population Division   |
| IDS     | Institute of Development Studies   |
| IEC     | Information, Education and Communication   |
| IEP     | Instituto de Ecologia Política (Institute for Political Ecology)                                       |
| INDAP   | Instituto para el Desarrollo Agropecuario (Agricultural Development Institute)                         |
| KEPA    | The Service Centre for Development Cooperation (Finland)   |
| K-REP   | Kenya Rural Enterprise Programme   |
| MBP     | Microenterprise Best Practice  |
| MIP     | Microenterprise Innovation Project   |
| NCA     | Norwegian Church Aid   |
| NGO     | Non-Governmental Organisation  |
| NORAD   | Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation   |
| ODA     | Overseas Development Administration  |
| ODI     | Overseas Development Institute   |
| OECD    | Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development  |
| OPVC    | Office of Private Voluntary Cooperation  |
| ORT     | Oral Rehydration Therapy   |
| PME     | Project appraisal, Monitoring and Evaluation   |
| PVO     | Private Voluntary Organisation   |
| REDESOL | Red de Instituciones de Solidaridad (microenterprise NGO network)                                      |
| REMAPP  | NGO Group on Research and Evaluation (UK)  |
| SEEP    | Small Enterprise Educational and Promotional Network   |
| Sida    | Swedish International Development Authority  |
| SIDA    | Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency   |
| SODECAM | Sociedad para el Desarrollo del Campesino Mapuche (Society for the Development of the Mapuche Peasant) |
| TOR     | Terms of Reference   |

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| UK    | United Kingdom                                     |
| UK/I  | United Kingdom and Ireland                         |
| US    | United States                                      |
| USAID | United States Agency for International Development |

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This Study was commissioned by the OECD/DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation in October 1996 and completed in early April 1997.

The agreed purpose was *to undertake a synthesis study of NGO evaluations, supplemented where easily accessible with related data and information, in order to provide an analysis and assessment of the impact, including efficiency and effectiveness, of NGO development interventions, and to provide an analysis and assessment of evaluation methods and approaches used.* Though NGOs are involved in a range of different activities, the major focus is on the impact of discrete projects, supplemented by some discussion of institutional and capacity-building initiatives.

The Report has been compiled from two types of data sources: evaluation and related reports, dominated by donor-commissioned studies, and information gathered (through reports and interviews) from 13 country/donor case studies, which widened sources to include data from southern and northern NGOs and some community-based organisations (CBOs).

## **SEARCHING FOR IMPACT**

A major component of this part of the Study (Chapter 3) is a summary of the impact of NGO development interventions drawn from studies commissioned by ten major donors. This review encompasses 60 separate reports of 240 projects undertaken in 26 developing countries. The Report points out that this is a minute sample of all evaluation studies conducted, and is likely to be biased towards more successful interventions.

An early and overarching conclusion, confirmed by data and interviews in *all* the different case study countries, is that in spite of growing interest in evaluation and growing numbers of evaluation studies, there is still a lack of firm and reliable evidence on the impact of NGO development projects and programmes. Most impact assessments rely on qualitative data and judgements and most are undertaken very rapidly. The majority have been content to report on and record outputs achieved and not outcomes achieved, or broader impact. It is within these constraints that the results presented need to be placed.

### **The achievement of objectives**

In broad terms, the donor studies provide a positive and consistent picture of the projects and programmes achieving their stated objectives; 90 per cent or more of projects had achieved their immediate objectives where quantitative data was provided.

### **Impact: livelihoods and poverty**

Some studies were reluctant to provide a firm view on wider impact, others warn against expecting dramatic results. Do NGOs reach the poor, and reach down to the poorest? Most studies argue that it has been rare for NGOs to undertake an analysis to determine precisely who is reached; nonetheless, a majority view is that most of the projects have been focused on poor people and a number clearly do reach down to very poor people. Assessment in terms of impact on the lives of the poor varied considerably, ranging from insignificant benefits to little evidence of making much difference. However, all agree that even the best projects are insufficient to enable the beneficiaries to escape from poverty.

### **Sustainability**

Most studies focus on financial sustainability, more recent ones also examine projects in relation to institutional sustainability, and a minority look at environmental sustainability. As with impact assessment, the data is poor, but an additional problem is that most assessments are based on judgements about future performance, many of which appear optimistic. Most projects examined are not financially sustainable, refined by the view that in most cases the poorer the beneficiaries the less likely a project is to be financially sustainable. However, some sub-sectoral differences were found. Some studies have tried to analyse factors enhancing or inhibiting financial sustainability and these are discussed in the Report.

### **Cost-effectiveness**

A consistent theme is that cost-effectiveness is far from easy to assess, and few studies provide accurate assessments, usually for lack of data. Yet there is plenty of comment based on more qualitative assessment, the dominant view being that for the majority of the projects examined the benefits were deemed to have exceeded the costs outlaid. Some crude comparisons with official aid projects are made, broadly favourable to NGO interventions.

### **Innovation and flexibility**

There appears to be confusion about what constitutes innovation which, in part, explains the divergence in results: some studies praising NGOs for their innovativeness and others arguing that there is little unique in their activities. Where innovations do occur (and a number are reported) they appear to be linked to close interaction with the beneficiaries and often arise following years of research.

### **Other factors**

Many donor-commissioned studies assess projects in relation to other criteria. These include replicability and scaling-up, gender, the environment, human rights and democracy. The evidence produced here is even more sketchy, though in some cases, most notably in relation to gender, some assertions are strongly made. The studies report wide differences in their assessment of project impact on women, though there was greater unanimity in relation to a comparatively great expectation of what might have been achieved and more modest outcomes in practice. What is clearly proving most difficult is to introduce processes which have a positive and more systemic impact on the status of women in societies and cultures perceived to be discriminatory.

### **Factors contributing to success and failure**

The donor-commissioned studies were examined in relation to the different factors said to influence project performance. Where these were examined, the main ones listed, starting with the most important, were:

- External factors and links outside the project
- Competent/professional staff
- Involvement of the beneficiaries, responding to local need
- Overall vision
- Good project design and good planning
- Institutional capacity: adequate management, finance and administration and local capacity
- The particular sector concerned
- Knowledge of other experiences, documentation and research, and the ability to network
- Sufficient funds
- The ability to 'stay small'
- Sufficient time to achieve objectives
- The heterogeneity of different NGO interventions
- Religious/membership or other affiliation

NGOs are focusing increasingly on the issue of institutional and capacity-building. The Report provides some data on the attributes of organisations likely to provide the context for project success, but notes the lack of data and analysis undertaken in this area.

### **The country and donor case studies**

Chapter 4 provides a summary of what the 13 country/donor case studies tell us about the impact of NGO development interventions, drawing where possible on studies undertaken by NGOs themselves. There is considerable agreement between the donor-commissioned about the gaps that need to be filled and current weaknesses, not least in relation to enhancing institutional and capacity-building initiatives.

- The paucity of detailed information on impact is confirmed, not least because of data inadequacies.

- The case studies confirm the view that NGOs are more successful when implementing social projects and delivering services, and considerably less successful when moving into the economic sphere. Relatedly, generalist NGOs often tend to be less effective at implementing more technical interventions than specialist ones.
- The lack of poverty analysis found in the donor-commissioned studies is generally confirmed, with some notable exceptions, as are trade-offs between poverty reach and financial sustainability. The lack of cost-effectiveness analysis is confirmed.
- 
- The credit studies reviewed are probably less optimistic than the thrust of the donor-commissioned studies, except for most of the USAID studies, in terms of sustainable increases in income and the sustainability of implementing agencies.
- The studies confirm the importance of the wider context in influencing project outcome.
- The importance attached to institutional and capacity-building is generally confirmed. Indeed, NGOs are often more self-critical than donors in relation to work in this area.

However, these studies also provide a number of new ideas, or give a different prominence or emphasis to themes and perspectives contained in the donor-commissioned studies.

- NGO studies tend to be more critical than donor-commissioned studies in pinpointing weaknesses. This provides one reason for which NGOs in some countries (Scandinavian NGOs are an exception) are reluctant to distribute evaluation studies and linked reports.
- The French study argues that beneficiaries are often not interested in financial sustainability; it is in their interest to seek to maintain the flow of external funds for as long as funders are willing to provide them. It also cautions against judging impact in relation to changes in socio-economic status when poor people are often more interested in risk-minimisation.
- The issue of individual leaders and leadership would appear to be given more prominence in these studies than in the donor-commissioned studies.
- The Bangladesh study notes that southern NGO evaluations tend to take more time than northern-initiated ones and are consequently often more in-depth analyses.
- NGOs appear to be keener to learn from what their current and past studies have said about impact, donors keener to commission new studies. However, there is little evidence to suggest NGOs are willing to share their discrete project evaluation studies even with other NGOs.

### **Thematic and sectoral studies**

Chapter 5 provides an initial overview of the impact of NGO development interventions through the lens of the narrower group of thematic and sectoral studies. These types of



analyses are becoming increasingly common; while many have been commissioned by donors, more are now commissioned by NGOs themselves. The chapter reinforces the view that much important data on impact, and work undertaken to analyse impact, is done through research and longitudinal assessments rather than from quick evaluation studies. The chapter focuses on two areas in particular: child survival and microenterprise programmes. It also looks briefly at capacity-building initiatives and the theme of partnership. It highlights data gaps and often the paucity of information with which to assess impact.

Nevertheless, if one can generalise from the two sectors studied, it would appear that there is far more information in these sectoral/thematic studies with which to draw conclusions about impact: the evidence points to major improvements in living standards and health status as a result of NGO projects. The child survival projects draw attention to problems about financial sustainability, the microenterprise studies providing a far more optimistic picture of advances in these areas, with some (United States) reports challenging the view that there is a trade-off between poverty reach and financial sustainability. Perhaps the most important conclusion to draw from the analysis is that there are still many areas where neither evaluations nor research have yet provided firm answers to questions about impact, not least in relation to impact on households in general and women in particular.

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## **Part A**

# **INTRODUCTION**

## **1**

### **Overview**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This Study was commissioned by the OECD/DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation at its Paris meeting in October 1996. The agreed purpose was:

*...to undertake a synthesis study of non-governmental organisation (NGO) evaluations, supplemented where easily accessible with related data and information, in order firstly to provide an analysis and assessment of the impact, including efficiency and effectiveness, of NGO development interventions, and secondly, to provide an analysis and assessment of evaluation methods and approaches used.*

NGOs are involved in a range of different activities.<sup>1</sup> One subset of activities involves emergency and relief activities. An early decision was that the synthesis should focus on NGO development interventions and not on NGO emergency and humanitarian activities.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, within the *development* umbrella, northern NGOs are involved in

development education, advocacy and lobbying work within their own countries, and in networking internationally. The research team also took the decision neither to trawl the literature to assess impact, nor to synthesise studies examining the methods of assessing the impact of this cluster of development interventions and initiatives. Thus, the main focus of this Study has been development interventions implemented within developing countries. In that context, and as discussed further in Chapter 3 below, because of the nature of such interventions and the availability of literature, the major focus of the Study is on assessing the impact and analysing the methods of assessing the impact of discrete projects. Additionally, some (though far less) attention is also focused on institutional and capacity building projects and longer term development processes, not least because it has only been in the relatively recent past that NGO development work has expanded into these increasingly important areas and types of activity.

## **1.2 Methods and approaches used in this Study**

How should the Study's purpose be achieved, and what methods and approaches should be used? Initially, it might be thought that this would be relatively straightforward: use a comprehensive database in order to gather all evaluation studies, or, if the numbers of studies are so large as to be unmanageable, obtain and make use of a representative sample of such studies. A late 1996 search of the OECD/DAC database of evaluation abstracts for the years 1986 to 1997 recorded a total of 74 entries using the category "NGO" and a total of 337 items using the keyword "NGO" from a total listing of 6,341 entries. Discussions with officials from almost all donor agencies during the course of this Study confirmed the initial view of the researchers that this database was incomplete and partial, and thus that it formed a wholly inadequate data set upon which to make a reliable synthesis of the impact of NGO development interventions. Indeed, an early conclusion of this Study, corroborated repeatedly throughout the research period, is that an international database of NGO impact evaluations simply does not exist. What is more, the case study work confirmed our initial hypothesis that there is not even a reliable and comprehensive database of all NGO evaluation studies at the country level in any of the 13 donor/country case studies.

The method of gathering evaluation reports was initially to ask the different members of the OECD/DAC Evaluation Group to gather together and send evaluation reports focusing on the impact of NGO development interventions, and then synthesise them in order to summarise what they were saying about impact and methods of evaluation used. It was the view of the researchers that for all its merits, this approach to data gathering would probably be deficient both in relation to impact data and in relation to evaluation methods. Their experience and knowledge of NGO development activities suggested that relying on donor evaluation departments to forward reports to the researchers would:

- i. run the risk of omitting evaluations and related studies undertaken by official aid agencies but not commissioned by evaluation departments;
- ii. be highly likely to omit evaluations undertaken and/or commissioned by northern NGOs; and
- iii. would almost certainly omit evaluations undertaken and/or commissioned by

southern NGOs and community-based organisations.

Additionally, it was the view of the researchers that such an approach would be unlikely to provide a rounded picture of methods of evaluation used to assess the impact of NGO development initiatives. This latter concern was rooted in the criticisms which have been voiced by NGOs of methods used to evaluate official aid interventions and, relatedly, because, in undertaking and commissioning their own evaluations, NGOs were unlikely to use methods of which they have been critical. Again, and as discussed in Parts B and C, these concerns were strongly reinforced in the evidence gathered in the country case study evidence.

As a result, it was decided that it would be necessary to try to supplement the data and information obtained from donor evaluation departments with data and information from NGOs within donor countries, and from NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) within developing countries. These data and information would focus both on evaluations of the impact of NGO development interventions and on evaluation methods and approaches. In short, the revised approach to be used aimed to gather data and information on impact and methods from three clusters of sources: from official donor agencies, from northern NGOs and from southern NGOs and community-based organisations.

The initial method of obtaining information from donors has already been described: it involved making contact with all members of the OECD/DAC Expert Group on Evaluation requesting them to send all relevant evaluation and related reports to the researchers. The initial request for studies and reports was supplemented in two ways: first by follow-up letters, and secondly by telephone/fax and face-to-face discussions as and when researchers went to different countries.

The attempt to fill gaps in knowledge about impact and evaluation methods by contacting northern and southern NGOs faced the major constraint of time and resources. The time set aside for the whole Study was only five months, of which the first six weeks involved reading the initial (donor-sent) evaluation reports, working out methods of gathering additional data and writing the Study's *Inception Report*, and the last three to four weeks were spent agreeing the Report's conclusions and finalising this document, including the Appendices. This left scarcely two months for additional data gathering. It was decided that the main additional data gathering process would involve the following:

- making postal and telecommunication contact with NGOs and NGO network and umbrella organisations explaining the purpose of the study and asking them to send what they considered were important evaluation studies and reports and manuals on evaluation methods;
- undertaking case studies in a selection of donor countries; and
- undertaking case studies in a (smaller) selection of southern countries.

In selecting countries for the case studies, the researchers were faced with a choice of undertaking a comparatively large number of case studies, but devoting only a very few

days to each, or undertaking far fewer studies, but undertaking a more in-depth study. As explained in the *Inception Report*, it was decided to undertake a relatively large number of case studies. In all, 13 donor/country case studies were carried out, more within donor countries (eight) than in developing countries (five). The case study countries are listed in Box 1.1.

**Box 1.1: Country/donor case studies**

| Donors/donor countries | Southern countries |
|------------------------|--------------------|
|                        |                    |
| Belgium                | Bangladesh         |
| France                 | Brazil             |
| The European Community | Chile              |
| Finland                | Kenya              |
| The Netherlands        | Senegal            |
| The United Kingdom     |                    |
| The United States      |                    |
|                        |                    |

The fourfold purpose of the donor-based country case studies was:

- i. To ensure that the donor-based evaluation studies sent to the researchers consisted of a complete set of recent donor-commissioned impact evaluations and, where necessary, to collect important additional studies.
- ii. To gather data on development impact from evaluations undertaken or commissioned by northern NGOs, focusing in particular on any synthesis, thematic or sectoral studies which might have been carried out.
- iii. To obtain information from NGOs on current attitudes, methods and approaches to the evaluation of development interventions.
- iv. To obtain data and information on linkages with southern NGOs in relation to evaluations undertaken or commissioned and interaction vis-...-vis methods and approaches.

The fourfold purpose of the southern-based country case studies was:

- i. To gather data on impact from evaluations undertaken or commissioned by southern NGOs, focusing in particular on any synthesis, thematic or sectoral studies which might have been carried out.
- ii. To obtain information from southern NGOs on current attitudes, methods and approaches to the evaluation of development interventions and, in that context, to assess the extent to which methods are influenced by northern or other southern NGOs.
- iii. To obtain information on the extent to which southern NGO evaluations are commissioned by northern NGOs vis-...-vis being home-grown southern-based initiatives.
- iv. To obtain data and information on self-evaluation activities of community-based organisations and the extent to which knowledge about impact and methods are

shared with southern NGOs, northern NGOs and donors.

The extent to which the Study was successful in meeting these objectives is discussed in Parts B and C.

### 1.3 Outputs and timing

Using the data gathered, the researchers carried out a number of tasks. The first was the production of the Study's *Inception Report* which was completed by the end of December 1996 and circulated to the members of the OECD/DAC Evaluation Group. It was discussed at a meeting of the Group in Copenhagen in February 1997. A second task was to undertake a synthesis of the main donor-commissioned evaluations of the impact of NGO development interventions. A third was to undertake and write reports for the 13 donor/country case studies. A fourth was to gather together some of the main/larger thematic and sectoral reports to analyse what data and information these provided on impact and evaluation methods. A fifth task was to use the data and information from the reports and country case studies to provide an analysis and assessment of evaluation methods and approaches used. A sixth task was to bring together all these different components and attempt both to provide some overarching reflective conclusions and to draw lessons from the data analysed. The final task was to draw together the threads in order to compile this Report and its appendices.

The timing of the work was as follows:

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| November-December 1996 | Initial reading of the (largely) donor-commissioned reports already gathered; discussion of methods and approaches to be used; carrying out the first (pilot) country case study (Kenya); discussion and preparation of the Inception Report |
| January-February 1997  | Carrying out the 12 other donor/country case studies and writing up the donor/country case study reports; analysis of the donor-based studies; and initial analysis of the main thematic/sectoral studies.                                   |
| March-early April 1997 | Finalising the country case study, donor-commissioned and thematic/sectoral reports; meeting of researchers to agree conclusions and recommendations; writing up of the main Report.   |

### 1.4 The structure of this Report

Following this introduction, the rest of the Report is divided into three parts. *Part B, Searching for Impact* summarises what is known about the impact of NGO development interventions. *Chapter 2, Data and Data Quality* discusses the sources and quality of the data used. *Chapter 3, Donor-Based Impact Studies*, summarises the impact results from the 10 main donor-commissioned studies, highlighting the areas of agreement and

disagreement between these studies, and ending with a summary of the factors these studies consider critical in accounting for successes and failures. With the conclusions of these donor-commissioned studies as a backdrop, *Chapter 4, The Country and Donor Case Studies* draws out the main impact conclusions from the 13 donor/country case studies, highlighting where these confirm or challenge the results and conclusions of the donor-commissioned studies. Finally, *Chapter 5, Thematic and Sectoral Studies of Impact* summarises some of the main conclusions on impact drawn from some key thematic and sectoral studies.

*Part C, Searching for Methods* switches from impact to a discussion of methods of evaluating NGO development interventions. *Chapter 6, Introduction* provides an overview of this part and draws a range of conclusions concerning the degree of consensus among donors and between donors and NGOs on methods to be used, the gaps in methods, and possible future directions. *Chapter 7, Methods and Approaches in Donor-Commissioned Studies*, looks more closely at methods used and discusses the ways in which, and the extent to which, donors and NGOs are approaching evaluation differently, and the gaps between rhetoric and reality. *Chapter 8, Methods and Approaches beyond the Donor-Commissioned Studies* briefly summarises the data on methods provided by the case studies, drawing in places on the wider literature.

Finally, *Part D, Lessons Learnt and Recommendations*, draws a number of overarching conclusions, points to continuing gaps in knowledge about impact and evaluation methods, highlights a number of lessons drawn directly from the Study and outlines a number of ideas for follow-up.

This main Report ends with *Annex A, References Cited*. This is split into two parts: the first lists the main donor-commissioned studies used in the synthesis chapters (3 and 7); the second lists only additional texts cited directly in the main Report.

The Report contains 14 separate appendices. *Appendices 1-8* consist of the eight donor-based studies commissioned for this Study and *Appendices 9-12* are the five southern-based country studies commissioned for the Study. While each appendix contains its own annex and listing of studies cited, *Appendix 14* brings all these references together, supplementing them with other texts used in the overall Study. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that some texts, especially some confidential evaluation studies and reports, were forwarded to the team on condition they would not be cited directly. In these cases, the works provided have not been referenced.

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<sup>1</sup> While the term NGO is used throughout this Report, the authors acknowledges that there has been considerable debate about the desirability of using the term 'non-governmental organisation' at all, both because of the negative connotations of the term and because it clearly fails to capture the range of different organisations outside government, private sector organisations and official donor agencies involved in the

voluntary organisation' (PVO) to describe United States' non-profit organisations.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>2</sup>This decision was influenced in part by the knowledge that at least one major parallel initiative was under way, supported by the former British Overseas Development Administration (ODA), to undertake a synthesis of NGO activities in emergencies. See Borton and Macrea, (1997). Following the British elections in May, the ODA ceased to exist and the Department for International Development (DFID) was created distinct from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

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## **Part B**

# **SEARCHING FOR IMPACT**

## **2**

### **DATA AND DATA QUALITY**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This part of the Report presents the Study's findings on the impact of NGO development interventions. Before these are presented, however, it is necessary to discuss the nature and quality of the data upon which these conclusions are based. This is important - and this introductory section needs to be viewed as a constituent part of the data presentation - because there is a risk that readers will interpret the results presented as '*firm*' whereas the thrust of this discussion is to suggest that they should be viewed more as 'initial and tentative'.

#### **2.2 Numbers of evaluations**

The impact evidence presented here is based predominantly on evaluation studies of NGO development interventions: some single, stand-alone studies, some themselves syntheses of individual studies. An initial major group of studies consists of analyses undertaken at the promptings of official donor agencies. As discussed in §3.2 below, these focus predominantly on a core block of studies from ten donor agencies. This core block of studies involved the assessment of some 230 separate NGO development projects and programmes. Discussions with donor agency officials indicate that even for these countries, the studies fall well short of the total number of donor-commissioned evaluation studies. Taking into account the donor agencies from which evaluation data and reports were not forthcoming, it seems safe to assume that the current sample of discrete and overview evaluations constitutes well under half the overall number of evaluations of NGO development initiatives undertaken or commissioned by official agencies.

Of perhaps greater significance is that it is *certain* that these discrete and overview evaluations constitute a tiny minority of all evaluations of NGO development interventions which have been undertaken in the last five, ten, 15 or 20 years - or ever. Besides evaluations which donors know about (often because they have commissioned them) there are evaluations which northern NGOs have carried out for their own purposes, evaluations which northern NGOs have carried out with southern NGOs, and evaluations which southern NGOs have conducted without reference to the north. Additionally, as the case study evidence shows, there are also self-evaluations undertaken by smaller NGOs and community-based organisations but which have no written documentation at all.

How many evaluations are 'out there'? This is a very difficult question to answer for three main reasons. Firstly, neither northern nor southern NGOs keep an accurate record of all the evaluations which they have carried out, sometimes (especially in the case of larger organisations) as evaluations are done 'in the field' which are not recorded at the 'centre'. Secondly, it is a strong characteristic of many (probably most) evaluations undertaken by NGOs that these remain *outside* the public domain: the vast majority have not been published and, as the attempt to gather evaluations during this Study confirmed, many NGOs are not willing to release them, though across Scandinavia there is a far more open attitude to sharing reports than is apparent in most other areas. Thirdly, and by their nature, evaluations, assessments and self-evaluations which are not written down cannot be gathered and collected.

Focusing solely on those evaluations for which there are written reports, the case study evidence indicates that these stretch well into the thousands. For instance, the UK study suggested that there are over 1,000 evaluation studies of development projects funded or executed by UK NGOs, the US study put the figure for US PVOs well in excess of 3,000, the Norwegian study judged that directly and indirectly Norwegian NGOs are involved in some 500 evaluations a year, while the Kenyan study suggested that currently there may be well over 600 studies currently carried out each year which address at least some impact questions. Building on and extending these sorts of numbers, it would not be surprising to find (if it were ever possible to count them all) that the total cumulative number of evaluation reports and studies of NGO development initiatives is in excess of 25,000 and could be double that number.<sup>1</sup>

The evaluation studies and reports used in this synthesis study are listed in *Appendix 14*. Excluding the donor-initiated studies these amount to some 350 reports.<sup>2</sup> If the population of all evaluation reports totalled 25,000, the selection used in the current study would amount to only 1.4% of this total.

### **2.3 Sample representativeness**

The absolute size of any sample matters less than the extent to which it is representative of the whole population. To what extent is the current sample representative? The short answer is simply that we do not know. However, it is possible to pursue the question further through different avenues.



Representative (statistically rigorous) sampling matters less where the results of the studies tend to be similar. To some extent this is borne out by the results discussed below: there would appear to be a core cluster of conclusions on different aspects of impact which recur frequently, though there are also other results around which far less of a consensual picture emerges. However, it is also important to bear in mind one potential caveat: the degree to which there is consensus among the different stakeholders that the conclusions contained in the evaluations are themselves broadly accepted. The Study found some differences of view on this matter, notably from the Australian study and from a recent Dutch study (GOM, 1995), though it found more discussion that there *might* be dispute than *evidence* of it occurring in practice.<sup>3</sup>

One area where there seems to be stronger evidence of potential bias in the cluster of evaluations reviewed concerns a high proportion of the donor-initiated evaluations and the reports which have been provided for review and synthesis. Thus, while most studies tried to make a representative trawl of projects in order to select those for closer scrutiny, there is no doubt that this group of evaluations is biased towards those development initiatives which the NGOs, at least, view as among their most successful.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, a number of the donor/country case studies use this fact to make the comment that NGOs tend to be harsher and more critical in their own evaluations of their development activities than are externally- and especially donor-initiated studies. To the extent that the views of NGOs are consistent with the assessments made, the results and conclusions summarised here would tend to give a relatively more favourable review of impact than a more random sample. Of course, these issues and the conclusions contained in the evaluation reports are only valid to the extent that one can be sure of the integrity and quality of the reports, an issue to which we now turn.

## **2.4 The quality of the evaluation reports**

The veracity of the conclusions on impact drawn here depends not merely on the representativeness of the reports surveyed. They depend also, critically, on the quality of those reports. To what extent can one be sure that the reports reviewed are of sufficient quality to convince one that they accurately portray NGO development impact? Though it has not been possible in the time available to answer this question scientifically, sufficient evidence has been unearthed to raise questions about quality, as the next few paragraphs try to explain.

An initial response is the simple but overarching one that the issue of quality matters. In some ways this whole study was built on the (unstated) premise that the synthesis of sufficient *numbers* of (hopefully representative) evaluations will tell us interesting things about impact. It is this assumption which needs to be looked at a little more closely.

Thus, if there is one consistent theme to come out of the majority of the country case studies it is that for the sheer numbers of evaluations that have been carried out, there are very few rigorous studies which examine impact: improvements in the lives and livelihoods of the beneficiaries. Most studies are dominated by a documentation of outputs, some merely describe a number of project activities. There are two types of

reasons why it is necessary to 'flag' the issue of quality. Firstly, a common feature of most (and until recently the vast majority of) NGO development interventions has been the failure to provide baseline data, the failure to monitor and assess projects and programmes on an ongoing basis against the original position, and the failure to try to disentangle the contribution of the project and/or programme inputs to the outcomes achieved. As a result, most of the 'better quality' impact studies which have included visits to project sites (and by no means all have done this) have had to use a variety of proxy techniques (focus-group discussions, recall, comparative static analysis) to try to assess impact. Relatedly, the bulk of impact assessment studies, often those with larger budgets and more professional evaluators, highlighted weaknesses caused by the shortage of time within which to conduct their analyses.

Though this conclusion that much of the evidence is likely to be weak might be viewed as depressing for a study one of whose main purposes is to report on impact, it needs to be viewed in broader perspective. Thus, a recent review of Norwegian official aid concludes that (Norbye and Ofsted, 1994: 47):

*Practically all evaluations and other reviews and studies of development aid projects also suffer from insufficient data material, and unclear statements of objectives, which make precise measurements of goal attainments impossible.*

The (varying) quality of existing evaluation studies leads to the second concern about quality, namely the skills and abilities of the evaluators, and thus the quality of the reports written and the reliability of the results reported. While a large proportion of the evaluation reports appear to indicate careful work and a genuine attempt to assess results and to ensure the accuracy of the conclusions drawn, there is no doubt that the reports gathered embrace an *extremely* wide variety in quality. In some cases assertions are made about impact, about the achievement of objectives, about cost-effectiveness, about relevance and about sustainability which are supported by no evidence whatsoever. As in a number of cases these reports appear to have been written by people with few apparent skills in undertaking evaluation, there are grave doubts about the extent to which one can make use of the conclusions drawn. In other words, the synthesis study has shown that it is extremely important not merely to analyse the results but also to be sure that the evaluation studies are of sufficient quality and integrity to be used at all.

An appreciation of these factors places many of the donor-commissioned studies in a slightly different light than one dominated merely by numbers and statistical sampling issues. Thus, one characteristic of most (though not all) of the donor-commissioned evaluation studies is that they have been undertaken by qualified (teams of) evaluators aware of the weaknesses of much of the available (and self-generated) data and information. While it is not being argued for one moment that evaluations undertaken by NGOs (north and south) are uniformly of a lower quality than the donor-initiated studies - many are of very high quality, undertaken sometimes by the same skilled evaluators, sometimes by more experienced evaluators - these factors do provide an additional reason for focusing on these donor-initiated studies.

Indeed, it is as a result of both these factors and the relatively easy access to donor-initiated studies that the method of presenting the impact results in the next three chapters of this Report has been to summarise what these donor-initiated studies have to say about impact and to use this information and these conclusions as a benchmark for comparing the results and conclusions of impact coming (largely) from the country case studies and the synthesis of some of the key thematic and sectoral studies from which information and data have been gathered.

A further assumption of the whole Study needs to be raised in this context: the link between evaluation reports and impact. If the assumption which lay behind the objective of reviewing evaluation reports was that these provide sufficient data and information from which to draw conclusions about impact, then another conclusion of this Study is that this assumption is incorrect. While it is certainly true that evaluation studies which are based on rigorous appraisal and continual monitoring are able to throw considerable light on impact questions, it is also important to note that evaluation studies by no means provide all the data and information which are available to inform the overall discussion on impact. Partly because of the paucity of good impact studies, an extremely rich source of data and information on the impact of NGO development initiatives comes from a range of research analyses and research studies. This is not a surprising conclusion: research tends to be an activity of longer duration than discrete evaluations and so is better able to assess longer term and wider factors influencing change.<sup>5</sup>

While it is relatively easy to draw a distinction between evaluations and research, a related problem the Study faced was deciding on a hard and fast definition of evaluation. One problem is that some 'evaluations' are little more than reviews which, as already indicated, merely report on activities undertaken or tasks completed. Equally, mid-term evaluations, especially, can be a rich source of data on impact, especially when undertaken in the context of ongoing monitoring. Additionally, very few of the evaluations reviewed were assessments made after project- or programme-completion; most took place during, but most commonly towards the end of, a funding cycle. One consequence of this is that *most* of the comments made about sustainability, both institutional and financial, tend to be forward- looking assessments of the future rather than accurate accounts of actual (historic) performance.

A final quality issue that needs to be highlighted concerns the process and methods used to judge how evaluations should be done, how impact ought to be assessed, and (of major concern to NGOs), the role of the beneficiaries in the evaluation process. These issues are of such importance that the whole of *Part C* of this Report is devoted to addressing and discussing them. For the purposes of this part of the report, however, they are set to one side. The focus of the next three chapters is on what evaluations say and have said about impact; the question of whether they were asking all the right questions will be discussed separately below.

## **2.5 A dynamic and changing picture**

For all the problems, qualifications and refinements made in this chapter, it is encouraging to end on a more optimistic note. A common conclusion from all the country case studies is that impact assessment is not merely an issue of great interest to both donors and NGOs, but it is one in which there is a large amount of activity. Fifteen, ten or in some cases even five years ago, there was very little rigorous or systematic evaluation activity initiated by NGOs, with the notable and important exception of North America. Thus, in Europe and Australasia especially, when donors began to talk about and commission evaluations of NGO development activities, this was in many respects a novelty and an initiative which on a number of occasions drew sceptical, and sometimes hostile, responses from NGOs.

Today, in contrast, most evaluation activity is undertaken by NGOs and not by donors, and most impact evaluation is undertaken because NGOs want to know what their impact is and how to improve on it in the future. As a result, many evaluations are framed not as one-off discrete initiatives, but as part of a wider process encompassing monitoring and, increasingly, some form of capacity building. Another related feature of contemporary NGO evaluation and linked work is that it is viewed by many as experimental, with different ways of evaluating and assessing impact being discussed and field- tested.

One consequence of these trends is that, over the past five to seven years, the number of evaluations which have been carried out has expanded rapidly. Additionally, there would seem to be little doubt that, especially in the case of larger and middle-sized NGOs, the quality of evaluations is improving, becoming more systematic and rigorous. The first implication of these trends is that the synthesis of evaluations of NGO development interventions undertaken for this Study is unlikely to provide a good guide to impact for very long and may well have a relatively short 'shelf-life'.

But what is the connection - if any - between the quality of evaluations and the data upon which these evaluations are based, and the impact of development interventions? Initially, it might be thought that better quality evaluations and a more rigorous assessment of the quality of the data upon which judgements on impact are to be made will tend to have a detrimental effect on the impact data produced and placed in the public domain. This is because a growth in the quality of assessment is likely to lead to the publication of fewer reports which confirm the apparent strengths and attributes of NGOs on the basis of assertion or flimsy evidence. What is, therefore, of interest is that some of the country case studies suggest that there is likely to be a more direct and virtuous link between interest and increasing rigour in undertaking evaluations and the development impact of the interventions being reviewed and assessed. More specifically it is argued that there seems to be a link between concern with and ability to appraise, monitor and evaluate and the quality and likely impact of NGO development interventions, not least because of a deeper appreciation of the complexity and difficulties of engaging in development and of the naivety of a number of earlier development efforts. Such a conclusion supports the decision taken in this Study not merely to report on what evaluations say about impact but to extend the discussion to a focus on methods used and evolving practices. It is in this context that we turn now to summarise what the donor-commissioned reports from the ten donors tell us about impact.

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<sup>1</sup> There are, of course, far more discrete projects and programmes underway at any one time. Accurate aggregate data of numbers are even less easy to guess. A recent Dutch study indicated that in the Netherlands in 1994 where 6,022 individual projects were supported by official funds, some 300 external evaluations had been conducted (GOM, 1995).

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that a number of these are themselves synthesis reports of a number of discrete project evaluations. It has not been possible in the time available to add up exactly the number of discrete evaluations encompassed in the listings in *Appendix 14*.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>3</sup> Initial findings from the study being carried out concurrently with the current study for the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) provide stronger evidence of disputes about the conclusions drawn in a number of Canadian evaluations of NGO development activities.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>4</sup> Some studies emphasize this bias very strongly. Thus Barclay et al. (1979:6) explain that

*... a deliberate effort was made to identify projects that were thought to be successful in producing such impact.*

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>5</sup> Some reports have gone so far as to argue that evaluations are less valuable than research (Sebsted and Chen, 1996):

*because they are less rigorous and do not cover the same variables, the findings are not as useful in addressing some of the bigger policy questions.*

[\[text\]](#)

## **3**

### **DONOR-BASED IMPACT STUDIES**

#### **3.1 Introduction and approach**

Over the last five to ten years (longer in the case of the United States), a growing number of individual donors have undertaken themselves or, more commonly, commissioned one or more studies of their major NGO programmes, or a sizeable selection of projects funded through these programmes, focusing broadly on impact. Though it would be wrong to lump all of these together and treat them homogeneously - for they all use different approaches and methods,

they differ in scope and intensity, and some are sub-components of wider analyses and discussions -there is sufficient in common to the majority of these studies to make it possible to group them and try to analyse them together in order to draw out common threads and differences. For the purposes of this synthesis study, the main studies and, where available and accessible, individual and country reports, were analysed for ten major OECD donors. The countries and the years when some of their major evaluations were published are shown in Box 3.1.<sup>1</sup>

These are not the only donors who have undertaken or commissioned substantive evaluation studies of their NGO programmes. Belgium, Germany and Switzerland, among the bilateral agencies, and the European Commission, the World Bank and various United Nations agencies have all undertaken or commissioned substantive studies either of NGO activities in particular countries or particular NGOs or clusters of NGOs. A number of these are referenced in *Appendix 14* and the findings of many are incorporated into the discussion.<sup>2</sup> Particular use is made of some key evaluations of the European Commission.<sup>3</sup>

The documentation produced for these ten donor evaluations/assessments and the other donor studies used in this synthesis consists of almost 60 separate reports, covering a large number and geographical spread of countries, and a significant number of project visits. Thus, between them, the main evaluation studies conducted by these ten donors have involved 60 country visits to 26 different developing countries, 11 in Africa, four in Latin America, two in Central America, three in South Asia, three in the rest of Asia, and three in the Pacific.<sup>4</sup> Seven donor studies also included separate country studies, at least three of which attempted a wider analysis of the projects visited in the context of the overall NGO effort. Within this cluster, 30 separate country studies were conducted, though these only covered 19 countries because of country duplication.<sup>5</sup> In all, assessments were made of 240 projects in visits to these countries. In addition, four donor studies involved desk reviews of project reports: in three cases these covered reviews of 492 projects.<sup>6</sup>

**Box 3.1: List of donors whose studies are included in this synthesis**

| Donor           | Year of Major Studies (publication date)         |
|-----------------|--|
| Australia       | 1995   |
| Canada          | 1992   |
| Denmark         | 1988, <sup>*</sup> 1989, 1994, <sup>1</sup> 1995 |
| Finland         | 1994, 1995 <sup>*</sup>                          |
| New Zealand     | 1987, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993                     |
| The Netherlands | 1991 <sup>2</sup>                                |

|                    |                               |
|--------------------|-------------------------------|
| Norway             | 1994, 1995                    |
| Sweden             | 1995 <sup>3</sup>             |
| The United Kingdom | 1992/5, <sup>4</sup> 1995     |
| The United States  | 1979, 1995, 1996 <sup>5</sup> |

Notes:

\* Evaluation of volunteer programmes.

<sup>1</sup> Evaluation of framework agreements.

<sup>2</sup> In 1995, the Dutch NGOs produced a report on measures taken in response to the 1991 report.

<sup>3</sup> From 1987, Sida has commissioned studies on the capacity of the 13 (originally 14) framework organisations.

<sup>4</sup> These was an early, very sketchy, UK study in 1986. The 1992 (ODI) study was published in book form in 1995, the year the second UK study's findings were published.

<sup>5</sup> Besides the 1979 and 1995 studies, USAID has conducted a succession of reviews of reviews - in 1988, 1994 and 1996 - many of which have also addressed the issue of impact.

For complete references to these reports, and their linked studies see the Annex to the main Report as well as *Appendix 14*.  
[\[box 3.1\]](#) [\[text\]](#)

How representative are these studies of the NGO development interventions? While it is not easy to give a complete answer, the following points provide at least a partial answer. The first point to be made is that this sample of studies focuses predominantly on the assessments of *discrete projects*, though some mention is made of other types of intervention, notably assessments of capacity building and institutional strengthening initiatives. The reason for this clustering is that until recently this was the dominant, in some cases the only, form of intervention *in developing countries* which was being funded. In recent years there has been a rapid expansion in funds given to NGOs for undertaking institutional strengthening initiatives; however, there has been quite a lag in studies focusing on assessing the impact of such initiatives. Additionally, this sample does not consider other NGO development initiatives, such as advocacy work and development education. However, within the project perspective, it does include a number of projects focusing on consciousness-raising and efforts to enhance democratic processes.

Secondly, a reading of the reports indicates that with the exception of the first UK study which focused on economic/income generating projects, a deliberate attempt was made to try to obtain a good spread of different NGO activities. Thirdly, however, it is apparent that the combined total of just 240 individual

projects is a small sample of total NGO projects and programmes funded by donors: aggregate figures from the Australian, Danish, Dutch and Swedish studies indicated that the combined total of projects assessed in their studies (100) accounted for less than 1% of the total then being funded by their respective donor agencies. Fourthly, if one takes the ballpark global figure of 25,000 evaluations referred to in Chapter 2, this cluster of some 240 projects represents a minute 0.9% of this total. Another point to stress is that the bulk of the projects assessed are those which have been funded through northern NGOs and exclude studies which have focused on southern NGO projects funded directly by donors.<sup>7</sup>

Though these ten sets of donor assessment studies have been grouped together because they are each trying (broadly) to answer questions about the impact of NGO development interventions, a number of more specific limitations need to be highlighted. Firstly, different approaches and methods of assessment have been used. Thus, while most have tried to undertake analysis with a high degree of rigour and focus on areas common to the main thrust of evaluation (relevance, impact, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability), others are more loosely structured in their approach.<sup>8</sup> A second methodological issue raised in over 80 per cent of the donor studies was the shortage of time in which to undertake the project evaluations. A number of reports argued that there was insufficient time to undertake rigorous evaluations, leading some to rephrase their efforts as assessments rather than evaluations. Thirdly, and relatedly, the purpose of some of these studies (such as the Finnish and Norwegian studies) was not so much to conduct impact evaluations of *individual projects*, but more to use projects to 'gain a sense of the overall structure and nature of Finnish NGO activities in each country' (Riddell *et al.* 1994: 105).

It is within this context that the remaining sections of this chapter attempt an initial summary of what these studies have said about a range of issues directly and indirectly linked to impact. Section §3.11 goes beyond the data and comments made in the reports about what has happened to summarise some of the main conclusions about *the causes for* the impact of NGO development interventions that have been found. It should be stressed that by no means all the studies address all the issues discussed.

It is no easy matter to try to cluster together these different explanations over the course of 20 or so pages of text. Thus, to repeat a comment made earlier in this report, what is written here is a *summary* of the findings and conclusions of the documents reviewed (in some cases this means a 'summary of a summary'). Inevitably, compressing the many qualifications which are made in the majority of these reports runs the risk of distortion. For those wishing to pursue the different issues raised here in more depth, there is clearly no substitute for reading the complete reports.



### 3.2 The achievement of objectives

A core question which almost all of the donor studies ask and attempt to answer (the New Zealand, Danish and Norwegian studies are exceptions here) is whether the projects and programmes for which donors have provided funds have achieved their stated objectives.

In broad terms, the answers are extremely positive, providing a consistent picture across almost all donor studies which have reported on the issue, and over a long time-period. Indeed, the majority of studies which provide quantitative data record that 90 per cent or more of projects examined had achieved their immediate objectives: Australia (Kershaw et al. 1995); Sweden (Riddell et al. 1995a) the United Kingdom (Surr, 1995); the United States (GAO, 1995, Jordan, 1996). The Canadian study produces the lowest aggregate figure (82 per cent) (Fortin et al. 1992), the first UK study producing a figure of 88 per cent (Riddell and Robinson, 1992), though the Zimbabwe country study produced for the Swedish study found that only 66 per cent (of 13 projects) achieved their objectives (Riddell *et al.* 1995b). While the Finnish study stated that the objectives, by and large, had been achieved, it failed to provide a figure for the share of projects examined which it judged to have achieved their objectives.<sup>9</sup>

However, another comment appearing in almost half the donor studies which, in some ways, would appear to contradict the extremely positive ratings just given, is the view that in many cases it is not easy to assess project performance against objectives. Three reasons are given: objectives are not cited; objectives are too vague; and there are too many objectives. These sorts of comments appear in some of the (confidential) German studies, in the Dutch study (GOM, 1991), as well as in the Swedish and second of the UK studies (Riddell *et al.* 1995a, and Surr, 1995).<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, no mention was made of failure to achieve objectives because they had been altered or because the original ones were no longer relevant.

Different elements of the Swedish study, in particular, pointed to the need to be cautious about placing too much emphasis on the achievement of immediate objectives, arguing that focusing narrowly on the achievement of objectives really said very little about impact and indeed, that it provided little guidance to the overall *development* impact of the projects in question when viewed more broadly (Riddell *et al.* 1995a: 12). The Bolivian case study is even more dismissive, arguing that (Bebbington & Kopp. 1995: 40):

*Assessing projects against their immediate objectives is more a description of what they have done than an analysis of the developmental relevance of what they have done.*

Finally, it is worth drawing attention to at least one comparison which these

studies made to official aid projects. Thus, in 1996, a British ODA study reported that 76 per cent of its projects by number and 65 per cent by value were judged successfully to have achieved their immediate objectives (Robbins and Modi, 1996). If this a fair reflection of the performance of other donors, then this batch of NGO studies would suggest that NGO development projects have performed as well as, if not better than, official aid projects.

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<sup>1</sup> The donor-driven nature of the evaluations conducted differed considerably from country to country. Some studies, such as the Danish, Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish studies, involved their respective national NGOs and NGO umbrella organisations in drawing up the terms of reference for these studies; other such as the UK and some of the main US studies did not. The 1991 Dutch study differed from most others inasmuch as the NGO umbrella group, the Gemeenschappelijk Overleg Medefinanciering (GOM) rather than the government agency played a prominent part on the whole evaluation process. However, it is included here for three reasons: first, it used a methodology strikingly similar to other donor-commissioned studies, secondly, the Ministry played an important role in drawing up the terms of reference for this Study; and thirdly, the Ministry broadly accepted the thrust, orientation and conclusions of the study.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>2</sup> Between 1989 and 1993, German produced six major reports. As these remain confidential, they are not quoted directly in this report.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>3</sup> The Commission's study on community-level development actions covered 72 NGOs in 18 countries (Beaudoux *et al.* 1990); its study on institutional development for grassroot organisations looked at 27 projects (de Crombrughe *et al.* 1993); its study of integrated development projects covered 22 projects and entailed six field trips (Debuyst, 1994); and it has recently published a study of its funding of NGOs in South Africa, covering 739 different funding contracts (SPM Consultants, 1996).

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>4</sup> One of two US studies (GAO, 1995) included Romania as one of eight countries visited.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>5</sup> Not all these country studies, nor a number of the sub-components of major evaluation studies, have been translated into English (for instance some of the Dutch and Norwegian studies) and so could not be incorporated into current analysis. Additionally, it should be noted that donors, and donors in cooperation with NGOs, have carried out country studies outside the framework of these main studies; indeed in the last five years there has been a rapid growth in country studies especially by large northern NGOs.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>6</sup> In the fourth case (Canada) the number of reviews surveyed was not given in the report

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>7</sup> Lewis *et al* (1994) and Hashemi *et al.* (1996) provided an assessment of projects directly funded by Sida in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka, while Davis *et al.*(1996) reviews the direct funding of NGOs using ODA funds in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>8</sup> For instance, the 1990 New Zealand evaluation did not address the issues of cost-effectiveness, poverty or sustainability, and made no comments on either gender or environmental issues (Rivers Buchan Associates, 1990: 17 and ff.).

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>9</sup> One of the Finnish country studies (Nepal) judged that 75 per cent of the projects examined had achieved their objectives (Riddell and Jha, 1994)

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>10</sup> It is particularly odd that these latter two studies can, on the one hand, report on the achievement of objectives, and, on the other, state that the objectives were not clearly stated.

[\[text\]](#)

### **3.3 Impact: livelihoods, poverty reach and alleviation of poverty**

What has been the overall impact of these NGO projects and programmes on the lives of the people assisted? The first point to make, and to repeat the comment made in Chapter 2, is that though most of the studies sought answers to this question, they found it *very* difficult to produce firm evidence. The study of Finnish NGOs in Tanzania provides one answer why, at least for health projects, namely that there was no data, and no monitoring took place (Nkya *et al.* 1995). Repeated references to poor or inadequate data meant that a number of studies failed to be drawn on the issue of wider impact, most providing qualitative rather than quantitative answers to the question. The rest of the comments in this section need to be viewed in this light.

#### **3.3.1 Impact on livelihoods in general**

Overall, and as noted, a reading of the studies suggests that there is some reluctance to provide a firm view on the wider impact of NGO interventions. Some, such as a number of the (confidential) German reports stated that it is not possible to derive firm conclusions on impact. More typical would be the Finnish study which stated (with little supporting evidence) that the projects examined had made a positive impact on the poor. Though little hard data was provided, the

summary report noted that in three of the four countries studied, some of the projects were rated amongst the best in comparison with the efforts of either the host country or bilateral agencies.

The earliest USAID study (Barclay *et al.* 1979) reported in broad terms that the participating populations were receiving at least some positive benefits in every case. In contrast to subsequent studies, it provided some quantitative assessment, namely that 18 per cent of projects had high impact, 47 per cent moderate impact and 35 per cent had low impact though without defining the boundaries of these categories.

More representative would be the Dutch study which warned against expecting any dramatic results in terms of improvements in livelihoods. Within this sort of perspective, the Zimbabwe case study for the Swedish study stated that the impact on the socio-economic status of the beneficiaries was exceptionally weak and that because the NGOs examined tended to work with existing structures, they tended to strengthen rather than challenge existing power and wealth relationships and to make it more difficult to narrow income differentials, a conclusion drawn in the Finnish Nepal study, too, for some projects examined. The earlier Zimbabwe case study done for the first UK study (Muir, 1992) states not merely that there has been little or no impact on livelihoods in some projects, but that the beneficiaries are more dependent upon the NGOs than they had been prior to the project, making them even more vulnerable than they were.

A related conclusion drawn in some studies (the Finnish and the Dutch) is that whatever the impact on livelihoods is, it tends to be confined, quite narrowly, to the direct beneficiaries. In other words, impact is localised and has limited reach. However the first UK study (Riddell and Robinson, 1992) disagrees, arguing that the projects they examined exhibited characteristics of both 'spread' and 'trickle down'.

Overall, discussion and conclusions about impact in the studies are far richer when discussing not livelihoods in general but the issue of poverty more particularly. Here we consider two aspects of poverty appearing in the reports: poverty reach and poverty impact.

### **3.3.2 Poverty reach**

One of the strong assertions made about NGOs is their ability to reach the poor. What do the studies conclude on this score? The Norwegian study (Tvedt, 1995) argues strongly that there is no basis for arguing that NGOs are able to reach the poor effectively, though it also states (p.114) that the poorest appear to have been missed. To some extent this is supported by a number of other studies (the Dutch, Danish,

Finnish, Swedish and British studies) which argue that one of the weaknesses of many NGO interventions is their failure to undertake any rigorous analysis of socio-economic status with which to be able to draw firm conclusions about who is reached and how much their lives are changed by NGO projects. In many cases, however, this has not stopped them from making some comments on the issues of poverty reach and impacts on poverty.

Most other studies are far more positive in one respect: arguing that most of the projects have been focused on poor people (see for instance the two UK studies, the US studies, the Finnish and Swedish studies).<sup>11</sup>; The Canadian study gave a score of 3.2 out of 4 for poverty reach, though the study reports that NGOs attribute greater success to their own efforts (88 per cent) than do independent evaluators (71 per cent) (Fortin *et al.* 1992: 45). The US studies, in particular, go further than this. Thus, the 1979 study states boldly that the poorest are reached,<sup>12</sup> while the 1995 study repeats the assertion (rejected by the Norwegian study) that '*PVOs have a comparative advantage in being able to work directly with the poor, or with organisations that represent the poor than major donors can*' (1995: 22).

In sharp contrast, most other studies are critical, or at least more sceptical about the ability of the NGO projects examined to reach not the poor but the *poorest*. Thus, the Danish study argues merely that the evidence on reaching the poorest is 'mixed', while the Zimbabwe case study produced for the Dutch study argues that the poorest are 'frequently missed' (de Graaf *et al.* 1991). The Swedish study states that in three out of the four case studies the poorest were not reached. The first UK study argues that many of the projects examined failed to reach the poorest. However, this Study is of some additional interest as it explains how/why the poorest are reached: either through rigorous targeting or through undertaking community-wide projects which include everyone in a geographical area. Two studies (the Swedish and the Dutch) note the apparent reluctance of many NGOs to get involved with the urban poor, preferring work in rural areas, even though urban poverty is a growing problem.

A few of the studies try to make comparisons about the ability of NGOs and official aid agencies to reach the poor. With the exception of (all) the US studies, where comments are made they tend to challenge the quite widely-held view that NGOs have a better poverty reach. Thus, the Danish study contends that one cannot say that NGOs are always better at reaching the poor than DANIDA, while the Zimbabwe case study undertaken for the Swedish study documents far from isolated cases where Sida has reached down to poor groups more successfully

than some Swedish NGO projects.

### **3.3.3 Impact on the poor**

What was the impact of the projects examined on the poor? The studies reveal a wide range of conclusions. Most positive is the second UK study, Surr (1995) which argues that the projects examined in general produced 'significant benefits for the poor'. However, this study makes a point confirmed by others (such as the Indian case study for Swedish study) that the relative gains of the not-so-poor were greater than for the poorest.

In contrast, the first UK study argued that the gains to the poor tended to be minimal, though it went on to add that though the gains were small absolutely, they might be quite significant for those concerned, for instance enabling them to create the space to take further action to enhance their socio-economic status in the future. Likewise, the Swedish study notes that each of the four country case studies concludes that there is little evidence that the projects examined made much of a difference to poverty.

Some studies have made distinctions on poverty status between types of projects. Thus, the Finnish study of Uganda argued that social impact on the poor has been positive whereas the economic projects have had little impact. Both the first UK's Zimbabwe case study and the EU study on integrated development projects stated that the impact on the lives of members of cooperatives has been particularly disappointing. More positively, a number of the studies (the Finnish and Swedish) argued that impact has tended to be greater if projects are more sharply focused on a smaller number of objectives than if they are wide-ranging.

How do NGO projects compare with official aid projects in improving the lives of the poor? The synthesis studies did not find much hard evidence to answer this question, but one recent (Norwegian) study which has analysed the impact of official aid projects concluded forcefully that '*the complete lack of any well founded studies*' means that there is no real basis for making an assessment (Norbye and Ofstad, 1994: xii). In other words, this selection of studies provides evidence which is certainly no worse, and in some cases better, than this assessment.

An important set of issues discussed in the reports is the extent to which, if improvements in the socio-economic status of the poor (or the poorest) *do* occur, they are 'adequate'. On this point there would appear to be unanimity among all the reports which address this issue that

whatever good individual projects do, they are insufficient to enable the beneficiaries to escape from poverty. The following comments from the earliest US study encapsulate this point well: they have not been challenged and have often been confirmed (Barclay *et al.* 1979: 87): <sup>13</sup>

*... Even successful projects which PVOs have played a pivotal role are rarely 'total solutions'. They are likely to represent the thin end of a wedge introducing a process of developmental change that will require other, complementary inputs from both inside and outside the beneficiary community.*

### **3.3.4 Expectations**

Taking up, in part, the strong warning in the Norwegian study of the dangers of generalising, the Swedish study argues that in some respects the whole NGO/poverty discussion is warped because of the unrealistic (and unachievable) expectations which have been raised about NGOs' ability to address problems of poverty. One sub-theme of this warning is highlighted in the Bolivian case study and the Nicaraguan case study undertaken for the Finnish study. Both argue that a major reason why the projects examined have had little impact on poverty is simply that poverty alleviation or reduction were not the objectives of the projects.

Another theme given prominence in the Swedish studies is the point that if one is serious about trying to solve the problems of poverty it is often necessary to look *beyond* the project. Indeed, one issue taken up by the majority of the studies (and challenged by none) is the importance of looking at the wider context: it is argued not merely that influences beyond the project often play a critical role in achieving impact but that NGOs tend to play down the importance of these influences. <sup>14</sup> Indeed, the Swedish study concludes that '*Swedish NGOs which have engaged in or supported more politically relevant work have had impacts on poverty, or have enhanced capacity within the popular sectors to have such impacts*' (p. 77).

More generally, the Swedish study argues that one of the reasons for which the impact on poverty has often been minimal, and usually less than expected, is that it is a common weakness of NGOs to fail to analyse the nature of poverty: what it is, what causes it and how to address it. '*The important point is 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*' (p. 77).

<sup>11</sup> There are exceptions: one project in the Swedish study of Zimbabwe was targeted very much a middle class, more affluent, group of people.

[text]

<sup>12</sup> This assertion is not based on evidence but simply on the fact that the NGOs worked in areas where the government did not.

[text]

<sup>13</sup> Thus the Finnish study argues that NGO projects cannot solve the problems of poverty.

[text]

<sup>14</sup> The first UK study makes the point that projects tend to perform best when the external environment is supportive and when the local economy is expanding. The point being made is not merely the more superficial one that living standards among beneficiaries will tend to improve if the local economy is doing well. but additionally, and more importantly when trying to analyse the link between project inputs, outputs, and outcomes, that the poor are often able to make (and hold on to) significant economic gains when richer people are also making gains.

[text]

### 3.4 Sustainability

Sustainability is an issue of increasing concern to donors and, consistent with this trend, there has tended to be more emphasis on this issue in the more recent studies, though again the US studies have proved the exception as even the first (1979) study focused on sustainability. However, while the earlier studies tended to focus mostly on the financial sustainability of projects, more recent ones have placed increasing emphasis on institutional sustainability. Additionally some studies, such as the Swedish one and the Finnish study of Ethiopia, have also discussed the issue of environmental sustainability.

First a word on data quality. Like the analysis of impact, discussion on financial sustainability, especially, has suffered from the overarching problem of the lack of quantitative data. But the discussion on financial sustainability has been additionally hampered by the fact that most of the projects examined in this group of studies were still running. As a result, the assessment of financial sustainability was commonly a look (projection) into the future based on current trends. Some studies (such as Barclay *et al*) appeared to be very optimistic about the ability of projects currently unsustainable to achieve sustainability in the future.

However, a more common view in these studies was that many projects are not sustainable and that one should not expect them to be in the short term. The Dutch study makes this point as does the Swedish study; the first British study argues that few of the projects could survive on their own without donor support. The Australian study is an exception here: it states that there was a 69 per cent success rate in terms of sustainability.<sup>15</sup> For its part, the Canadian study



states that 52 per cent of projects needed additional inputs to survive and that 24 per cent has little chance of survival without external funding. Finally in these overarching comments it is important to note that not all projects *are* executed with the intention of their being financially sustainable. For instance, the Finnish study of Nepal assessed a leprosy hospital one of whose objectives whose to be funded continually by the (international) Leprosy Association.

However, perhaps more interesting are the refinements and qualifications evident in some of the studies. The EU study of Ethiopia argued that water and agricultural projects were more likely to be sustainable, health and education projects less likely (Maxwell *et al.*, 1996), the 1994 EU study on training centres concluding that none can operate without subsidies. Some evidence is found to support the wider conclusions of the thematic studies (discussed in *Chapter 5* below) that credit and micro- finance projects have a good chance of achieving financial sustainability, though most evidence from these studies raises more questions than provides answers. Thus, the first UK study failed to find evidence in the NGO projects examined of funding institutions being able to cover the recurrent costs of administering their schemes, while both the EU and Belgian studies on credit provide evidence of weaknesses: the EU study of considerable failures and of high administrative costs especially in rural- based programmes (Dhonte *et al.* 1994).

The evidence tends to suggest quite a strong contrast, if not contradiction, between, on the one hand, increasing demands by donors that funds will only be provided if projects are likely to achieve financial sustainability at least in the medium to long term,<sup>16</sup> and the evidence that many if not most projects have little chance of being financially sustainable. It is in this context that one clear piece of evidence emerging from the studies needs to be placed. It is that financial sustainability is less likely to occur for projects the majority of whose beneficiaries are very poor: the less poor are the beneficiaries the greater the likelihood that it will be possible to recoup a larger share of the recurrent costs of running the projects. Two policy conclusions arise from this. If donors continue to insist that NGO projects will only be funded if they have a chance of achieving financial sustainability, then this will increase pressure on NGOs to veer away from helping the very poorest: the Finnish study of Ethiopia states explicitly that this has happened. If, however, donors wish to encourage NGOs to maintain, or even expand, their poverty focus, then either they must continue to demand financial sustainability and continue to turn a blind eye to much evidence which suggests this is an impossible demand, or else alter the demands they make to take account of the discrepancies between demands and practice.<sup>17</sup>

The Swedish study is particularly interesting in this regard as the consultants were asked not merely to examine the issue of sustainability but to come up with a new definition of sustainability which attempted to address these tensions. Box 3.2 summarises some of the main conclusions on sustainability drawn from this study.

### **Box 3.2 Sustainability: conclusions from the Swedish study**

The sustainability of projects and programmes needs to be understood in terms of their financial components, their institutional components, their human resource components and their environmental components, without exclusive focus on any single element. It is increasingly important to judge NGO projects on programmes within the context of their ability to stand on their own feet, in terms of achieving greater financial sustainability, in terms of achieving greater institutional sustainability and in terms of their influence and impact on the environment. Yet, there is an equally important need to focus all the time on quality of delivery and access, and to guard against an extreme view that those unable to utilise the market can be provided with basic needs, including productive needs, without the payment of any subsidy. But sustainability also needs to be seen beyond the narrow confines of the discrete projects and programmes funded. It must also include the notion of enhancing both the capacity of the executing NGO or agency and, ultimately, the capacity of the direct beneficiaries to take more control of their own lives and their development.

All NGO projects and programmes need to be drawn up with a view to assessing the extent to which they should attempt to achieve financial and institutional sustainability, wherever possible within an explicit time-table, and in relation to the direct and indirect impact they will have on the environment. This assessment will need to include reviewing the concrete steps that need to be taken in order to increase the likelihood that an appropriate level of benefits will continue to be delivered for an extended period of time after major financial, managerial, and technical assistance has been withdrawn.

Equally, however, the requirement to *review and assess* all initiatives funded against the achievement of sustainability does not necessarily mean that future financial or institutional sustainability should in all cases be a *necessary* requirement for funding discrete projects or programmes. In particular, financial and institutional sustainability need to be pursued only on condition that, especially for the poor and where basic needs or services are being provided, the quality of, and access to, the basic good or service provided will not be radically compromised. Where the good or service provided is considered essential to the basic well-being of the beneficiaries, and where alternative funding cannot be found, the inability to achieve either financial or institutional sustainability should not constitute an impediment to funding such NGO initiatives.

Some of the studies try to isolate those factors which tend to enhance and which might impede project sustainability. Thus the 1988 US study lists five factors which are likely to impede sustainability: pressures for achieving quick results;

inadequate attention to market forces; limited financial and human resources; limited organisational skills; and a humanist paternalism. For its part, the Danish study pinpoints three factors seen to enhance sustainability: local participation; institution-building and proper evaluation procedures. Like the US study, the Danish country study of Sierra Leone and the Kenya study for Sweden both argue that the presence of expatriates are often important impediments to achieving sustainability. The Zimbabwe case study for the Swedish report argued that the financial sustainability is likely to be greater if the project holders place major emphasis on the issue; if the beneficiaries are not among the poorest; and if they are very committed to the project in hand. Finally, and importantly, where the studies discuss institutional and financial sustainability they commonly make a direct link between the two, arguing that financial sustainability is more likely to be achieved in cases where there is also a focus on trying to enhance the capacity of the NGO executing the project. Thus, work to enhance institutional sustainability is likely to enhance financial sustainability.

Finally, and echoing the discussion in §3.3, above, some of the studies (such as the Swedish report) emphasise the importance of context. They point out that while there may well be very good reasons for seeking ways to encourage the financial sustainability of projects, it is always necessary to be aware of the dangers of viewing project sustainability in isolation. In short, there is little merit in working to achieve and praise the sustainability of discrete projects if these remain islands of development out of touch with and not linked to the wider context.

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<sup>15</sup> Discussions with the authors suggest that this might be due to the fact that the issue was not examined in very great depth.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>16</sup> A recent example comes from the United States where the current strategic plan for the Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation states that (OPVC, 1996: 51):

*US PVOs and their local NGO partners are expected to focus their efforts on the establishment of service programs which are sustainable over the long term without continuous USAID support. To this end, PVC encourages its US\_PVO partners to develop strategies and begin to demonstrate how they are increasing the non-USAID share of resources that support their programs and those of their local NGO partners.*

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>17</sup> The Finnish study highlight these tensions thus (p. 139):

*A number of the projects supported by the NGO Support Programme are better classified as welfare, rather than as development, projects: they are dominated by aiming to meet immediate (and pressing) need, often with little consideration given to different approaches... Most of these welfare projects, however, have neither hope nor intention of finding a means of being self-financing. Many would argue that they should not even try to achieve such an objective. Within a narrower context, this is a quite defensible position. However, it cannot easily be reconciled with the stated objective of the NGO-SP that projects receiving its support should be self-sustaining within as short a period as possible. Even those projects that have more potential for self-financing rarely achieve this objective within 3-5 years.*

[\[text\]](#)

### **3.5 Cost-effectiveness**

A consistent theme across the studies (at least those which address the issue) is that cost-effectiveness is far from easy to assess (Danish study) because of lack of data (US, Dutch, UK, Finnish and Swedish studies). As a result, few studies provide detailed data linking together costs and benefits: of the 28 studies undertaken by the two UK projects only one produced detailed quantitative data. The Finnish and Swedish studies provide little assessment of costs and benefits.

Nevertheless, some of the studies drew their own (more qualitatively-based) judgements on the balance between costs and benefits. When comments have been drawn, the dominant view was that for the majority of the projects examined, the benefits were deemed to have exceeded the costs outlaid. Typical would be the first UK study which made some general comments thus: in five of the projects, the benefits clearly exceeded the costs of achieving them. In five others the objectives were achieved, but at a high cost of staffing and resources. In the two projects which failed to meet their objectives the costs far exceeded the benefits. For the remaining four projects, it was difficult to make precise judgments, either because the project was relatively new or because the data was insufficient.

Most bullish is the Australian study where assessments by the NGOs themselves indicated that only 3 per cent judged their projects to have had costs which were excessive in relation to the benefits achieved. However, this was one area where the independent assessors disagreed most often with NGO personnel, though overall only two out of 25 projects were judged to have produced benefits insufficient in relation to the expenditure outlaid. Uniquely, the first US study drew (generally adverse) comparisons between cost-effectiveness and sustainability, arguing that projects ranking high in terms of direct benefit/cost relations did not necessarily have high scores for benefit continuation or for benefit growth (1979: 45).

Some of the studies made comparative comments about NGO and official aid projects in terms of cost-effectiveness. Overall, the comments were favourable to NGOs, though they tended to focus more on explaining why NGO projects were more cost-effective than on providing evidence to confirm that they were! Thus, the Danish study stated that NGO projects were cheaper than Danida projects because professional staff were cheaper to hire, a point confirmed in the Dutch study. Additionally the Dutch study pointed to two

other factors: greater commitment to projects by NGOs and what was termed 'high involvement'. Some of the Swedish country studies drew comparisons between the NGO projects examined and host government interventions: in one case in Zimbabwe, it was pointed out that an NGO project to provide clean water cost only one tenth a comparable government project. The Danish study argued that one reason by NGOs were more cost effective was because their projects were smaller in scale and thus less vulnerable to making big mistakes. For its part, the Dutch study concluded that multi-sectoral programmes tended to be less cost-effective than single/smaller projects because of far lower overheads.

What about comparisons with official aid programmes? According to the review of Norwegian official aid, it was not possible to analyse the cost-effectiveness of 40 per cent of projects analysed and the study concluded that only 25 per cent were cost-effective (Norbye and Ofstad, 1994: 58). The NGO data contained in these studies, crude and qualitatively though most of it is, certainly provides no worse a picture than this, and probably one that is far better.

The studies made the point that cost-benefit analysis appears novel to some NGOs, and that overall costs are usually higher than NGOs believe them to be. For instance, the Dutch study concludes that most NGOs have no clear sight into the relationship between costs and benefits of what they undertake, and that interest in these matters is small and it is not appreciated when further questions are put on matters of costs and benefits. While a number of studies suggested that NGOs needed to focus more on cost/benefit issues, little guidance was given or recommendations made about what should be done. However, both the 1988 US and the Dutch studies advised against imposing a monolithic approach on all NGOs, insisting that the methods selected needed to be tempered to each PVO/NGO: what was stressed was more for NGOs to undertake country-based effectiveness studies for themselves than for donors (or others) to impose methods on them.

### **3.6 Innovation and flexibility**

A strength attributed to NGOs involved in development is that they are characterised by flexibility. Relatedly, NGO interventions are claimed to be innovative. These characteristics were discussed in a number of the studies, though the US studies did not really address these issues. What conclusions were drawn?

Not surprisingly, the Norwegian study cautions against making generalisations on NGOs' flexibility not least because organisations develop over time. In strong contrast, the Canadian study argues that NGOs are generally innovative shown by their ability to apply original low-cost solutions and their ability to adapt, though few firm examples are provided. The area under discussion was another of those, however, where NGOs tended to disagree quite markedly with the view of external assessors: 92 per cent of NGO personnel rated NGOs high in relation to innovation, but half the external assessors disagreed.

Between these two more extreme positions, the first UK study maintained that over half (nine out of 16) of the projects examined contained some features which could be described as innovative, though no definitions of innovation were provided in the study and it was acknowledged that most innovations tended to consist of applying tried approaches to new (different) situations. This was also a point raised in the Canadian study. In general, the Finnish and Swedish studies are more critical: the Finnish study argued that there was little evidence of innovation in the projects examined while the Swedish study argued that most NGO interventions tend to follow prevailing trends in development.

However the view that most NGO development interventions tend not to be innovative itself needs to be put into context. Thus the Swedish study provides a rich crop of examples of NGO interventions which were innovative, suggesting that not a few NGO interventions are innovative. The innovations which were encountered included the development of sign languages for deaf people in Kenya; the creation of a written alphabet for indigenous people in Bolivia; the elaboration of therapies for mentally handicapped young people in India; and a new approach to providing clean water and sanitation at the village level in Zimbabwe. A common feature of these examples was the manner in which they were all grounded in some form of participation with the beneficiaries. As for the reasons for the innovations, the Zimbabwe country case study argued that a major contributory factor was the prior research which had been undertaken: in other words the innovations did not 'just happen'.

A final point to note is that two studies (the Danish and the Australian) expressed some concern about potential negative effects which donor funding of NGO development initiatives might have on their ability to innovate and be flexible. Thus the Danish study argued that Danida funding already constrained innovation, the Australian study that greater official aid funding would in future reduce NGOs' ability to innovate.

### **3.7 Replicability and scaling-up**

The issues of potential replicability and the scaling-up of NGO development initiatives did not feature very prominently in these donor studies: many did not address these issues at all and the level of discussion was far more shallow and superficial than has been evident in recent NGO and linked research initiatives (see Edwards and Hulme, 1992 and 1995). Five separate points are made, almost all of which are negative or pessimistic in tone. Thus, it is argued that

1. NGOs have a limited ability to scale up their development efforts (Australia).
2. Where scaling-up has occurred it has tended to lead to an acceleration of management problems because of a failure to adapt to the demands of a larger organisation (second UK study).
3. NGOs often have a poor record of replicability because NGOs have few links with other organisations (Swedish study).
4. NGOs have little intention of replicating their development activities and so replication tends to occur mostly by using the same approach in a different area

without much assessment of whether this is necessarily a good thing (first UK study).

Fifth and finally, the earliest US study contends not merely that NGO development projects are not suited to replication but that in general they should not be replicated. Thus it is argued that most projects were small and most would not be suited to massive duplication in terms of comparable size in numerous other communities. The ones that work best and generate most impact tend to be well adapted to specific environments. Furthermore they are often shaped and led by individuals with unusual if not unique qualities.

*... recognising this, it makes little sense to attempt a carbon copy of one project in a different setting. This is equally true of attempts to introduce a multiplier factor, increasing project inputs, without allowing for the need to modify their content and relative weights (1979: 85).*

### **3.8 Gender**

With the exception of many of the US studies, the issue of gender features in all the studies examined. Discussion tended predominantly to be based on qualitative assessments.

Did the NGO projects examined lead to improvements for women? There seemed to be wide differences of opinion in relation both to improvements in living standards and to the more difficult task of enhancing the status of women in societies which discriminated against them. Greatest unanimity of view related to what was predominantly seen as a large gap between a comparatively great expectation of what might have been achieved and what turned out to be more modest outcomes in practice. This was the view of both the British studies, the Swedish and the Canadian study.

Most studies concluded that in spite of strong articulation of the need to incorporate a gender dimension into NGO development projects, the results have been extremely modest. The Dutch study argued there was little hard evidence with which to draw firm conclusions. Where successes were recorded, they were most commonly found in relation to more immediate and tangible gains for women; what clearly was proving most difficult was to introduce schemes which had a positive and short term impact on the status of women living in societies and culture which were perceived to be discriminatory to them.

Within this overall context, the studies produced quite a wide range of assessments. At one extreme was the Kenyan case study conducted as part of the Swedish report; this concluded that the results were 'impressive' going beyond the mere targeting of women. Relatedly, the Australian study recorded 63 per cent of NGOs believing the results had had a 'very beneficial' impact on women. In contrast, the Ethiopian/Finnish study (led by Finnish female evaluators) concluded that gender issues were 'severely neglected', while the Zimbabwe/UK study (also led by a female evaluator) judged that in some cases (perhaps by focusing on traditional activities) the projects tended to reinforce inequalities

and this makes it more difficult to address wider issues, a conclusion also reached by the (male-led) Zimbabwe/Dutch study. For their part, the (confidential) German studies tended to support this conclusion.

The Danish and Australian studies examined the planning stages of projects. The former concluded that there was very little evidence of incorporating gender issues into projects at the planning stages while the Australian study judged that in (only) 61 per cent of projects were women directly involved: a number of NGOs deemed the issue to be 'not relevant'. Yet the Australian Review Team concluded that in many cases projects had a positive impact on women despite their lack of involvement in project planning.

### **3.9 Environmental impact**

Like gender, the environment has evolved to become a prominent cross-cutting issue in development in the last decade and this has led a number of donor studies of NGO development impact to ask about environmental impact. Like gender, too, it is an issue which NGOs are eager to state is important, in some cases central, to their developmental endeavours. The majority of donor studies reviewed here addressed environmental issues, mostly asking questions (like the Australian study) about whether the projects examined protected and/or enhanced the environment. In almost all cases while answers were provided there was little depth of analysis, the exceptions being in some of the country case studies.

Five clusters of answers were given. One (given in the Dutch study) maintained that environmental impact was satisfactory or (put more negatively) that *'the NGO programmes do not seem to constitute an additional burden to the environment'* (p.72). A second answer was that there was little environmental analysis undertaken (at any stage of the project cycle), not least because environmental impact was considered largely irrelevant to the project(s) in question. However, thirdly, some studies (for example the Canadian and the Finnish ones) argued that a major reason why the environment was considered so 'lightly' by NGOs was not merely because of the marginal importance of the issue but both because an environmental assessment was not considered and because there was not sufficient knowledge about how to incorporate environmental factors into appraisal and monitoring. The Kenya/Swedish study included two projects which had been established to respond to environmental degradation but even here no environmental impact assessment had been carried out (Sinclair and Abuom, 1995: 35).

This leads to the fourth type of evidence which was that, largely because of this ignorance, evidence was found of projects which had a negative effect on the environment but which had not been sufficiently noticed by the project implementers: an income generating project in rural Zimbabwe (in the Swedish study) burnt firewood from a depleted forest without much thought about replenishment. However, these environmentally worrying projects constituted a minority (two out of 19 in the Dutch project) and largely because the projects were small the environmental damage was minimal.



Fifth and finally, however, the studies did find examples of projects (again a small minority) which were exemplary in terms of environmental analysis or environmental impact, for instance dam construction in Zimbabwe as documented in the Swedish case study.

### **3.10 Democracy and pluralism**

Even more recently than concern with gender and environmental issues has been donor interest in democracy issues. However, even in post-1992 studies, by no means all studies have included an attempt to assess NGO development projects in relation to democratic benchmarks and civil society strengthening: the Swedish study included an attempt, the Australian study did not. Thus, the issue is only addressed by a minority of studies: the Dutch, Canadian Swedish and Norwegian studies.

The Dutch study aptly sums up the extent and depth of knowledge to emerge from the studies as a whole: that NGOs have a positive commitment to the issues, that the impact is modest, but that there is little hard evidence and no indicators with which to judge progress or performance. The Canadian study argues that NGOs do help to strengthen civil society but that an in-depth study is needed to analyse this in more depth. For its part, the Norwegian study maintains more sceptically that there is no evidence that as a group NGOs further democracy or pluralism.

Moving from the general to the particular, and in strong contrast, a number of the country case studies maintain quite strongly that NGO projects which have been put in place specifically to encourage the democratic process or to challenge undemocratic features of society and the polity have been remarkably successful. Examples would be the Nicaragua/Finnish study, the Bolivia/Swedish study and, more recently, the EC's special programme on South Africa (SPM Consultants, 1996). However, the latter study illustrates the wider difficulty of assessing the contribution of this particular programme to the wider objectives. Little concrete evidence is provided to support the conclusion that *'there is a consensus amongst all the people involved... that it has had a significant positive impact on political development in the country'* (1996: 39).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> These sort of issues are discussed more fully in the Chilean case study to this report see *Appendix 11*.

[\[text\]](#)

### **3.11 Factors contributing to project success and failures**

For some (donors and NGOs), an understanding of those factors which contribute to project success and which impede project performance are often seen as equally, if not more, important than simply analysing impact. This is because recording what has happened is viewed as mere history, trying to analyse why things happened is seen as

some guide to enhancing future performance. What is particularly interesting about this group of donor-commissioned studies is not merely that many of the studies are packed with views about those factors deemed to be important for achieving success in development or responsible for failure, but an eagerness to attribute reasons for differing performance contrasts sharply with a general reluctance to provide a firm view on impact. The purpose of this section is to summarise the more general factors seen as important influences on impact; lack of space prevents a fuller discussion of different types of intervention or different sub-sectors.<sup>19</sup>

There are many different ways in which it might be possible to gather the information contained in the ten donor studies in order to identify the different factors said to contribute to project and programme success. For the purposes of this synthesis, the simplest approach was chosen: namely, to produce a list of the different factors which the different studies deem to be important, and count the frequency with which these different factors are mentioned.

Before the analysis is presented it is important to note that the studies are not consistent in relation to the prominence they each give to seeking explanations of differing performance. Thus, some studies, most notably some of the United States studies, place *major* emphasis on trying to understand and seek answers to differing performance. Others - examples would be the Canadian and Norwegian studies - devote little space to identifying specific causes for differing performance. Most of the rest are more open-ended: drawing attention to and discussing different issues if they are deemed to be important. Hence, it should be noted that the `pscores` recorded are not necessarily a wholly accurate guide to all possible factors influencing performance: they thus need to be viewed within this context.

[Box 3.3 provides](#) a listing of 15 different factors which the reports record as the specific factors mainly responsible for NGO development interventions performing well or performing badly. These 15 factors are sub-divided into three clusters. The first cluster consists of eight factors which are mentioned in more than three donor studies. The second cluster consists of just one factor which was mentioned in two donor studies; and the third cluster comprises the remaining six factors which are only mentioned in one study. The next few paragraphs discuss these in turn.

### **3.11.1 External factors and links outside the project**

The first of the two most frequently occurring factors attributable to project success relates to factors outside the project. Two sorts of issues are mentioned here. The first is the context or setting of the development project or programme. A number of more specific factors are mentioned as elements which will contribute to project success. These are: the country in which the project is located; the overall level of development, and the level of development of the beneficiaries; the region in which the project or programme is located; and the general development background, most particularly whether the area, region or economy in which the NGO project or programme is located is

expanding and growing or contracting. Thus, the Australian study identifies the lack of a strategic perspective as a weak reason for failure while the Swedish study argues that insufficient attention is often placed on thinking strategically and realistically about the development opportunities in the areas where the NGOs work, adding that (p. 95)

*one of the most critical factors in determining the outcome of the project is the context within which it is being implemented, and in particular the extent to which the project is coherent and relevant within that particular context. Projects that do not build on processes of economic and social activity and change that are already underway, nor on priority concerns of the people with whom the project is ostensibly working, stand less chance of making much of an impact, far less a sustained impact.*

Two related conclusions can be drawn from highlighting these external influences on project performance. The first is that one should be careful about comparing the performance of NGO development projects in different geographical locations, and in different socio-economic and political settings, and even in different time periods. The second is that the fact that external factors are so influential clearly provides insufficient information with which to draw overarching policy conclusions. For example, that fact that it is more difficult, more costly and less easy to provide clean water to villages in hilly Nepal than it is in south India is unlikely to lead to the conclusion that villagers in Nepal should not be helped.

The second contextual factor of importance concerns the links which the NGO establishes with institutions and organisations beyond the project or programme boundaries. What needs to be noted here is that these links can affect the project in many ways: they might enhance overall and longer term impact, but equally they might hinder performance. Thus it is argued that poor project performance can arise if the NGO fails to make contact with relevant government officials, other NGOs or other donors working sometimes with the same beneficiaries but at least within the same locality. Relatedly, the Uganda/Finland study records an instance where one project (manufacturing and selling cement tiles) was seemingly successful because the project beneficiaries were the main purchasers of the tiles, but sales dropped markedly when the project met, and failed to compete with, the external market. However, the studies also cite instances where links made with individuals and institutions outside the project impeded rather than enhanced project performance. This was because these linkages restricted the ability of the project to challenge the prevailing power structures.

### **3.11.2 Competent, professional staff**

he second of the two most frequently occurring factors attributable to project success relates to the skills of the people in the organisation executing the project or programme. The point made is self-evident: it is very difficult to implement a project without the necessary skills and, by implication the more complex the intervention being attempted the greater is the need to ensure that the staff are adequately qualified. The Canadian study argued that the quality and competence of the NGO staff were *the* key to success; more common was reference to staff motivation which the studies confirmed tended to be far stronger than in government departments.

However, there are some linked implications which need to be noted. The first is that when NGO project failure occurs, this has not infrequently been associated with organisations switching from emergency to development work without adequate skills or sufficient training. Second, and relatedly, project failure has been associated with generalist NGOs trying their hand at a number of activities without adequate training. Thirdly, as NGOs (and donors) have become increasingly aware of both the complexity of the development process and the importance of beneficiary participation (see below) the range of skills necessary has tended to expand and become more demanding of both individuals and of organisations.

### **3.11.3 Involvement of the beneficiaries and responding to local need**

The importance of involving the beneficiaries and responding to local needs is high on the list of attributes for successful development intervention mentioned by NGOs.<sup>20</sup> It is, therefore, of interest to note the importance given to this factor by the donor-commissioned studies. At one level, the policy implications are simple and clear: become involved in development programmes which are responding to clearly articulated local need and which involve the beneficiaries, not least because such projects are far more likely to be sustainable.

However, the studies are less clear in outlining precisely how the beneficiaries ought to be involved, that is, the nature of their involvement and the intensity of it. Part of the reason for this imprecision would appear to lie in the gap between donor studies which conclude that the beneficiaries need to be involved in projects and some quite strident criticism of NGOs because of failures in relation to participation. Thus, the Danish study argues that NGOs are no better than official aid agencies in establishing 'real participation' (p.191), the Finnish study that there was really no evidence of beneficiary

participation in the pre-project phase, the Swedish study that the extent of participation was 'disappointing', with the rhetoric commonly exceeding the reality and 'little or no evidence of community-based planning' (p.80). Indeed, the Nepal/Finland study and India/Sweden country studies found evidence of top-down non-participatory projects and an attitude of paternalism (we know best) among some implementing NGOs. Nonetheless, it is also important to point to examples of extensive participation leading to significant successes, such as the UBV project discussed in the Bolivia/Sweden case study.

What is also interesting is that some of the donor studies appear critical, or questioning, of too much participation. Thus most of the Nepal and Indian projects criticised for their non-participatory nature appear to have at least a satisfactory impact. Relatedly, the Swedish study argues that a form of partnership with a local organisation which involved it making all the decisions would be far from ideal and that if Swedish NGOs expressed their views more strongly, the quality of projects could well increase (p.82). Equally, the second UK study argues that however great the degree of participation in a project, if the project management is poor and the external circumstances unfavourable, no amount of participation will overcome these constraints (Surr, 1995: 29).

A final, and important, point which needs to be highlighted was the extent to which the term participation was used, and usually referred to in positive terms, without much discussion - in many cases no discussion - of what beneficiary participation precisely meant. It is certainly odd that so much stress should be laid on a factor whose meaning was often quite obscure.

#### **3.11.4 Overall vision**

A cluster of closely linked factors are included under the term 'overall vision'. Thus it is argued (in the first US study for instance) that NGOs which have a clear view of their purpose and how it might be achieved tend to perform better than those which do not, not least because they are likely to spend more time on pre-project planning. Equally, the Dutch study argues that NGOs which focus on a small number of specific tasks or issues tend to perform better than NGOs with a wider remit, while the Swedish study appeals for greater coherence in projects and project design. Similarly the Canadian study identifies too broad objectives as a key weakness of many projects: the external assessors judged that less than half (43 per cent) the NGOs were clearly focused on what they did and had a clear mission statement.

### **3.11.5 Project design and good overall planning**

In many ways vision and narrow focus are linked to the importance placed on project design and planning. Major weaknesses of projects can often be traced back to poor design, projects put together hurriedly or even to projects commencing which should either have not been implemented or ought to have been implemented in different ways. The Danish study refers to the lack of capacity in project preparation as a *most* urgent problem. Clearly this point also links in to the issue of participation: a feature of most of the studies (Finnish, the first UK study, the Dutch, Australian, European Commission and Swedish studies) has been the failure of NGOs to discuss potential projects with beneficiaries. This array of weaknesses at the planning stages led the first UK, the Dutch and the Finnish studies to propose that more funds at the pre-project/appraisal stage should be made available to address these weaknesses.

### **3.11.6 Institutional capacity: adequate management, finance and administration and local capacity**

Linked to the need to think clearly about what to do, and the importance of having staff competent to execute projects comes the institutional capacity of the organisation executing the project. Thus, it is not surprising that the studies place emphasis on the need to ensure that there is sufficient ability to manage and administer projects and ensure that funds are used efficiently: these issues are stressed in the two UK studies, most of the United States studies, the Canadian, Danish and the Australian study. For instance, the Canadian study identifies limited management competence as one of four key weaknesses. The Zimbabwe/Norwegian study pinpoints weaknesses in what is termed second tier management personnel (Moyo, 1994).

As noted above (§3.1), institutional capacity-building is increasingly considered not merely a factor influencing the success of individual projects - stronger capacity leading to more successful projects and weaker capacity contributing to poorer project outcomes - but has been held out as an objective of NGO development assistance. However, the studies reviewed provide little firm and consistent evidence across donor countries of the main characteristics of institutions which are important beyond the labelling of issues of importance such as management, administration and finance. A more focused exception is a United States study, *Accelerating Institutional Development* (Bureau for Food For Peace and Voluntary Assistance, 1989). This notes that analysis of institutional development is highly complex, though it feels able to list the following attributes which were repeatedly present in

stronger affiliate organisations (p.2):

- charismatic leadership and the ability to attract and retain good senior staff;
- a community base for support;
- a communication and connections network, nationally and internationally;
- an institutional vision, goals, strategies, coupled with a flexible management information system;
- a diversified portfolio of financial sources of income.

The Canadian study also mentions the importance of community-based support. However, what is perhaps most interesting about the Canadian study is the extent to which it challenges the increasingly popular view that northern NGOs are eager to involve themselves in capacity-building initiatives. It both challenges the view and argues that NGOs are not particularly good at it, though providing little firm data to support the conclusions drawn (page vii):

*the contribution Canadian NGOs make toward reinforcing institutional capabilities of their southern partners is small. In fact NGOP (the NGO programme) is not designed to do so... many Canadian NGOs are incapable or hesitant to undertake institutional development programmes aimed at their southern partners... In many instances, Canadian NGOs have indicated it was not their policy to provide this type of support or said they did not have the resources to do so.*

### **3.11.7 The sector**

A number of studies suggest that success is more likely to occur with NGO projects in particular sectors or sub-sectors. Most broadly, the studies suggest that the likelihood of success is likely to be stronger in sectors in which NGOs have had longest experience, frequently pinpointed as the social sectors, with specific mention made of education and health projects. Poor marks are received for NGO projects involving integrated rural development projects, not least because of their complexities, projects with cooperatives and training projects. Income generating projects tended to score well in terms of raising incomes, and extremely poorly when the benefits were assessed against the often substantial costs outlaid. Credit and micro-finance work scored well when executed by specialised groups, though repayment problems occurred here especially with young and experienced staff. However, it was also far from uncommon for exceptions to be cited to these broad trends.

### **3.11.8 Knowledge, research and networking**

Three studies - the Danish and the first UK and Swedish studies - argue that performance will be likely to be enhanced to the extent that NGOs are aware of the successes and failure of other NGOs and that they have the funds and capacity to undertake or learn from recent or ongoing research. These two points are linked to networking: the relative isolation of NGOs and lack of knowledge due to relative and absolute isolation is pinpointed as significant causes of project weaknesses.

Relatedly, a number of studies (such as the Finnish and Swedish) discuss the linkages and networks established, or in most cases not established, between NGOs and donor agencies. The Swedish study in particular argues that mutual ignorance by both NGOs and donors about the development work of the other means that potential gains and synergies are constantly missed and overlooked.

### **3.11.9 Sufficient funds**

As noted in Box 3.3, two donor studies mention a shortage of funds as an impediment to further project success. Thus both the Dutch and the first UK study argue that an absolute shortage of funds can and sometimes does impede impact, implying that if donors were (cautiously) to provide additional funds in some circumstances this would enhance impact. In the case of the Dutch study, specific mention is made of the need to increase organisational costs.

### **3.11.10 The ability to stay small**

Uniquely, the first United States study (Barclay, *et al*) argues that NGO successes in development are linked to the small size and scale of their activities. It contends that growth reduces the flexibility of NGOs which it is assumed is a necessary ingredient for success. A more common view is that when they grow, NGOs need to ensure that they have the institutional capacity to implement more and/or larger projects.

### **3.11.11 Other factors raised by studies of one donor**

Five other factors are mentioned by different donors. The Danish study argues that often project failure is due to the shortage of time given to achieve project objectives. It also maintains that one of the reasons for NGO successes lies in the heterogeneity of NGOs which increases the likelihood of a better fit between development needs and an NGO able to meet that need. Two of the Swedish country studies argue that



religious affiliation and/or membership of a particular grouping such as a trade union can often be factors which contribute to success of projects, although the point is argued negatively. More specifically, it is stated that common membership or religious affiliation especially between northern and southern NGOs adds an additional layer of 'binding' helping to maintain links if or when relationships become strained.

Finally, the first US study argues against replication thus: *'reproducing carbon copies of successful small PVO projects is not a realistic option, nor a defensible use of scarce human and material resources. Equally important, it will not produce comparable impact in most of the new settings where it is attempted'* (1979: 6).

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<sup>19</sup> These issues are discussed further in Chapter 5.

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<sup>20</sup> See *Chapter 4*, below

[\[text\]](#)

## 4

# THE COUNTRY AND DONOR CASE STUDIES

## 4.1 Introduction

The major purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of what the 13 country and donor case studies tell us about the impact of NGO development interventions. In some cases, the information contained in these studies is supplemented by data and comment from studies undertaken beyond this literature. Before these summaries are presented, we draw attention to some of the major areas where there is either agreement or an indication of some differences between the findings from the country and donor case studies and the findings of the donor-commissioned studies discussed in Chapter 3, above.

The predominant impression gained from reviewing the donor/country case studies is the degree of consistency and overlap between the donor-commissioned and other studies in terms of impact and reasons for successes and failures. There is also considerable agreement about the gaps that need to be filled and current weaknesses, not least in relation to enhancing institutional and capacity-building initiatives. The following provide some of the main examples of these common themes.

- Many of the reports are of varying quality, with fewer in-depth studies. Most would appear to be light on analysis, light on rigour and light on explanations for how the conclusions were drawn. Yet, in contrast, some are outstandingly good.
- As with the donor-commissioned studies, there is a paucity of detailed information provided on impact, not least because of data inadequacies.
- The donor/country studies tend to confirm the view that NGOs seem to be more successful when implementing social projects, delivering services, and considerably less successful when moving into the economic sphere. Relatedly, generalist NGOs tend to be poorer at more technical interventions than specialist ones, linked especially to staff competence: generalist NGOs with sufficiently qualified staff do achieve similar impacts. The Belgian, French and Chilean studies focus on these issues, confirming the conclusions of an influential in-depth study by Thomas Carroll (1992).
- Trade-offs between poverty and sustainability are generally confirmed.
- The lack of poverty analysis is generally confirmed, with some notable exceptions arising in Bangladesh.
- The paucity of data on cost-effectiveness is strongly confirmed.
- Credit studies reviewed are probably less optimistic than the thrust of the donor-commissioned studies, at least than the USAID studies. While poverty reach is generally seen as good, especially for women, there are clear exceptions, confirmed by a recent study by the Asian Development Bank (1994). Weaknesses highlighted include high administrative costs, and possibly firmer evidence to suggest a trade-off between poverty reach and financial sustainability.
- The studies confirm the importance of the wider context in influencing project outcome, also supporting a view expressed in Carroll's study (1992). The Bangladesh and Brazilian studies argue for an extremely wide contextual assessment, while the UK study quotes one major study as arguing that insufficient attention is still given to the external context. A major international study on NGO involvement in sustainable agricultural development maintains that NGOs have to try to influence government policy if they wish to have a significant influence on income levels (Farrington *et al.* 1993).
- The importance attached to, but often the lack of information about, precisely how to enhance the institutional strength and capacity of implementing organisations is generally confirmed. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that NGOs are often more self-critical than donors in relation to work in this area.

In addition to the confirmation of these conclusions, the donor/country case studies provide a number of new ideas, or give a different prominence or emphasis to themes and perspective contained in the donor-commissioned studies. The following summarise these main areas and issues.

- A number of the country studies (Kenya, Norway, the Netherlands and the UK) argue that NGOs tend to be more critical than donor-commissioned studies not so much in assessing impact but in highlighting weaknesses or down-playing strengths of NGO development interventions. This is largely to be explained by the fact that historically NGO evaluations have tended to take place for

operational purposes, so there is usually a greater imperative to address deficiencies in order to enhance future impact, rather than simply to report results 'for the sake of it'.

- Relatedly, it is apparent that a major reason why evaluations (especially those known about by donors) are commissioned is that current contracts are expiring and/or projects are entering into a new phase. Yet a growing number of NGOs expect evaluations to lead to improvements in impact and in their capacities to intervene.
- A number of the country studies state that it is often difficult to get hold of evaluation studies. An important general reason for this is that for many NGOs there has been little imperative to bring them all together, itself an indicator of the absence of a *general* learning use of evaluations. In some cases, too, there was a reluctance to share what were perceived as internal evaluations with people outside the organisation. This, however, was more common in some countries (Britain) than in others - and not even an issue in others (such as Norway). The evidence from the south was more mixed.
- The French study raises an issue not seen in the donor-commissioned studies in relation to financial sustainability. Thus, it is argued that often beneficiaries are not interested in financial sustainability as it is in their interest to seek to maintain the flow of external funds for as long as funders are willing to provide them.
- Another comment made in the French study is that one needs to be wary of too readily assuming that impact should be judged in relation to improvement in living standards, especially in the case of very poor rural people. This is because poor people are usually more interested in risk minimisation than in income-maximisation.
- The donor/country case study evidence would appear to give more prominence to the importance of NGO leadership as a factor influencing project success than do the donor-commissioned studies. The difference is probably one more of degree than anything else: thus donor studies often group the issue of leadership with management, whereas it would appear more common for NGOs to focus on leadership as a distinct and different attribute influencing project outcome.
- The Bangladesh study observes a major difference between many southern evaluations and those commissioned from the north in terms of the time spent evaluating. As southern evaluations tend to be longer processes, it is argued, and supported by evidence from Bangladesh, they tend to be more substantive studies.
- Another (more perverse) finding is that the country studies would appear to give less prominence to networking and learning from others as a factor influencing project outcome than many of the donor-commissioned studies. However, the issue is not entirely absent: it is mentioned in both the United States and Kenyan studies. It may be that the issue is considered so obviously important that its absence should not be assessed as an omission at all.
- The roles of groups such as F3E in France (a joint initiative of the French Ministry and several leading NGOs) and REMAPP in Britain need to be highlighted as important focuses for promoting interest in and sharing information on impact and methods.

- Finally, there is strong evidence in a number of countries, largely northern countries, of growing interest by NGOs in undertaking synthesis studies in order to learn more about impact. What is different with donor-commissioned studies is that NGOs appear to be keener to learn from what their current and past studies have said about impact, donors keener to commission new studies. However, while NGOs are certainly willing to share the results of their own synthesis and thematic studies with other NGOs, there is little evidence to suggest NGOs are willing to share their discrete project evaluation studies even with other NGOs.

#### **4.2 France, Belgium and the European Commission**

Though these three studies used a range of material with which to try to form judgements on impact, lack of time and an inability to assess the representativeness of the sample of studies examined caution against making wider generalisations beyond the projects and programmes reviewed. The French study estimates that in the past five years some 500 evaluations have been commissioned. While a number of thematic studies have been carried out which might have had the potential for deriving firm conclusions, there have been serious problems with the quality of a number of these, providing another reason to be wary about the conclusions drawn. A particularly striking feature of the studies undertaken, notably the French ones, is the lack of any significant action taken as a result of the analyses undertaken or recommendations made. In general, and consistent with other donor and country case studies, the reports examined are exceptionally weak in coming to firm judgement about impact, not least because of the lack of data with which to form judgements. Though greater attention is given to efficiency and effectiveness than to impact, their focus is mostly within an accountability, rather than a development, perspective.

The interests of both NGOs and donors in evaluation processes is illustrated by the creation in France in the 1990s of a trust fund, F3E, co-financed by the French Government and NGOs to promote assessment and assessment methods across larger and smaller NGOs, and by the agreement between the Belgian Government and the NGO umbrella organisation jointly to commission evaluations. The case of the *Foundation de France* needs to be mentioned as well, as several years ago this organisation began an initiative to encourage evaluation in the south, directly under the control of southern NGOs.

The following points summarise the main conclusions drawn in relation to particular themes and issues raised in the donor-commissioned studies.

- While some studies analyse projects through the prism of their poverty reach, the overriding conclusion is that very few NGOs undertake any analysis to determine which groups are poor and whether the project beneficiaries are among the poorest. It remains, still, the *assumption* that the NGOs are working with the poor. Some evidence indicates that wealthier groups are being assisted, though not even these would be termed 'rich'.

- The studies tend to confirm the wider view that NGO interventions are more successful when focusing on social service provision and least successful when attempting to promote economic and more productive-type projects. While income-generating projects are usually successful in terms of creating additional income, there is often a sense that the project costs were considerably in excess of the income gains resulting.
- This cluster of reports throw an interesting light on the linked issues of risk, poverty and the rise in socio-economic status. Specifically, the reports suggest that it is frequently wrong to judge the impact of projects for poor people in high risk areas on the basis of tangible and quantitatively- observable improvements in their living standards. This is because the poor people themselves have a far greater interest in the reduction and thus diversification of risk rather than in income maximisation. This confirms the views expressed in some of the donor-commissioned studies, such as the UK/Zimbabwe and UK/Bangladesh studies (see Muir, 1992 and White, 1991).
- Thematic studies on (rural) credit have been produced by both Belgium and the European Commission. Overall, the results are disappointing especially in terms of financial and institutional sustainability, notwithstanding the increase in the incomes of some which have often resulted. Reasons for failure include a lack of skills of those running the programmes, poor management within implementing agencies and too high expectations that sustainable results in terms of maintaining increased income levels could be achieved in only a few years.
- Beyond credit programmes, this group of studies confirms the wider view that NGOs are faced with a trade-off between choosing to work for poorer groups or choosing to introduce a project which has a greater chance of being financially sustainable. Relatedly, and confirming the view of the Swedish donor-commissioned study, it is argued that projects have little chance of being financially sustainable unless the issue of such sustainability is addressed right at the outset - at appraisal. A final issue raised in relation to financial sustainability concerns a potential, and not infrequently a real, tension between the beneficiaries and the implementing agency and funder. Thus, while it may be the desire of the funder to achieve medium to long-term financial sustainability, this is often not the aim of the beneficiaries. Especially if the NGO is providing funds over and above the level received by non-beneficiaries in the locality, a priority for the beneficiaries is often not to seek to *reduce* their financial dependence on outside funders, but rather to try to *maintain* (and capture) the flow of 'surplus' funds for as long as possible.
- The studies include critical comments on the impact and effectiveness of institutional building initiatives, providing evidence to conclude that sometimes there remains a gulf between the intensity of the arguments made by northern NGOs that capacity building is important and the need to encourage it, and their abilities to achieve tangible gains. Yet it must be made clear that the evaluations providing these types of comments are from 1993 or earlier, analysing programmes and projects from the late 1980s. At this time, NGO initiatives in relation to capacity-building were relatively new. This raises a more general point about this, and other sorts of synthesis studies: they risk giving too static a picture

- and not providing sufficient understanding of processes and change, not least in relation to innovative practices.
- Finally, the studies address the issue of participation. They suggest that there is a large gap between a strong verbal commitment to the principles of participation and what happens on the ground.

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### **4.3 Finland**

There exists little in-depth experience in Finland in the field of NGO evaluation, notwithstanding efforts by both the Department for International Development Cooperation and KEPA (the Service Centre for Development Cooperation þ Finnish Volunteer Service, FVS) to encourage activities, and a number of initiatives taken by large and a few small NGOs. However, there is considerable eagerness to know more about different kinds of NGO evaluations. The future is likely to see an expansion of NGO-initiated evaluation studies.

There are no accurate data on the number of NGO evaluations that have been carried. One reason is that the term 'evaluation' is used to encompass activities ranging from internal auditing to more rigorous assessments done by independent, external evaluators. There seems to be growing tendency to make greater use of external, mostly local, evaluators. However for smaller projects, of which there are many, informal 'evaluations' are more common, often using unpaid, voluntary, evaluators, notably students. As for the projects themselves, there has been a tendency for Finnish NGOs to spread out beyond their initial focus, for instance from tree planting to income-generating activities.

The more significant evaluations usually examine projects in relation to efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, and gender, but in many cases the approach appears rather vague. Cost- effectiveness issues are seldom addressed. Perhaps most surprisingly, there does not seem to be much focus on poverty (reach and impact); but this is probably because it is taken for granted that NGO development activities help those who are poorer. Local evaluators, especially women, have frequently been employed in evaluations.

The impact of Finnish NGO development interventions are broadly consistent with those of other donor and NGO studies. However, the small scale of many of the projects is probably one reason why the issue of cultural impact is often given prominence. Additionally, there appears to be a feeling that evaluations should not be carried out at project completion: it is argued that if they are carried out earlier they would have a more positive impact on performance. Some (critical) conclusions have come as a shock, not least because they raise questions about the quality and relevance of voluntary work undertaken especially in small NGOs. The evidence suggests that small organisations are innovative in their approaches and open to suggestions both to change project

thrust or to change ways of assessing projects. There is considerable discussion in Finland on evaluation methods and practices, going on in a context in which it is keenly felt that approaches for small and large projects and NGOs need to be very different.

#### **4.4 Norway and the Netherlands**

The case studies from Norway and the Netherlands provide clear evidence of a rapid expansion in the numbers of NGO-initiated studies. The total number of new evaluation and linked reports produced over the last few years in each country may come to between four and five hundred. The number for all NGO-related reports produced over the last 10 to 15 years is unknown, but the investigation points to a much higher figure than expected. However, the quality of the reports varies enormously: a large group are often brief and of varying quality, and should not really be called evaluation reports at all. On the other hand, an increasing number of reports are of high quality, prepared by competent international and national experts. As with the donor-commissioned studies, the orientation of most reports is strongly coloured by the perspective of the evaluation team. It is often difficult to trace and follow through the consequences of the evaluation process, notably how the reports are used and linked to project improvement and policy development.

Another feature of the review of the Dutch and Norwegian studies is the growing diversity in the *different types* of evaluations. Stand alone project evaluations are increasingly carried out locally by southern NGOs with financial support from northern partners, leaving northern NGOs to focus increasingly on broader evaluations of thematic or geographic (country) reviews addressing policy and strategic issues.

Within the time limits of this study, it proved impossible to review and synthesise trends and issues from this large and expanding number of reports. The works cited in the annexes to these two country case studies (Appendices 5 and 6) represent only a fraction of all the different reports and documents made available to the study. In these two countries, all reports are in principle available and often listed in their respective Annual Reports, but the NGOs do not have databases or libraries where reports can be accessed easily. The Dutch NGOs have many more technical and financial resources available for their studies and evaluations compared to their Norwegian colleagues. All the Dutch co-financing agencies (CFAs) have separate evaluation units and staff; none of the Norwegian NGOs has a special evaluation capacity.

The following points summarise the main conclusions drawn in relation to particular themes and issues raised in the donor-commissioned studies.

- NGOs in these two countries have been both reactive and proactive vis-à-vis messages from their funding ministry. They have reacted and

adjusted to demands for evaluation and new types of evaluations (impact assessment), and there have usually been few differences between official and NGO approaches in terms of addressing issues such as gender, participation, environment and sustainability.

- The large 'grey' literature often focuses on managerial issues (finances, organisation, leadership), paying less attention to technical, policy and strategic issues. Leadership is often highlighted as an important factor contributing to success, and this is itself often linked to a discussion of potential tensions between democratic and autocratic leadership styles, and the religious/cultural context in which projects and partners are situated.
- The reports surveyed tend to be more process than impact oriented, providing more accurate descriptive information when it comes to implementation processes. A frequent complaint is simply the lack of information with which to measure and assess impact. Most reports are descriptive in nature, focusing on activities undertaken and outputs achieved, with few if any rigorous assessments of impact.
- Nevertheless, and consistent with the thrust of most donor-commissioned studies, the Norwegian and Dutch studies reviewed provide a relatively positive assessment of achievements and impact, with two qualifications. First, the assessments are admittedly subjective and impressionistic, based largely on interviews with project participants, project managers, and 'local experts'. Secondly, the success described is usually the success of the implementation process and immediate outcomes, and not a rigorous assessment of the long term effects and impact of development efforts.
- Most reports produced are mid-term or end-of-contract evaluations, frequently undertaken not to assess impact *per se*, but to provide justification for project extension or a renewal of the contract.
- Where the issue of sustainability is addressed, problems in terms of achieving both financial and institutional sustainability are readily acknowledged - particularly in relation to the poorest groups of society and in the least developed countries.
- The studies also suggest that NGOs are fully aware of the importance of contextual factors influencing project performance, with most providing detailed information and critical analysis of the external environment's influence on projects, and how these factors impede and/or support successful project implementation.
- While most of the evaluation reports do address the issue of beneficiary participation, many are noticeably self-critical. This is generally the case, too, for other cross-cutting issues such as gender, the environment and human rights.
- An increasing number of NGOs, more in Norway than in the Netherlands, have switched their focus to institutional development objectives as a central thrust. However, thus far there are very few, if any, evaluations which assess the results of capacity-building or new



partnership alliances. Nonetheless, a number of key institutional development and partnership evaluations are now in preparation in both countries.

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#### **4.5 The United Kingdom**

The country case study argues that UK NGO evaluation studies are of extremely *varying quality*. Indeed, most UK NGOs would probably agree with the conclusions of recent synthesis studies commissioned by leading UK NGOs that most are of poor quality and thus do not provide an adequate database with which to attempt to draw conclusions about development impact. One reason for this is simply that a number of these studies were not undertaken with this (broad) purpose in mind: many will have been commissioned to help answer particular, and often more narrow, questions. Relatedly, the bulk of 'evaluation studies' are not impact studies at all: predominantly they tend to focus on describing the actual or intended outputs of development projects.

Overall, UK NGO studies tend to confirm the conclusions of the first UK donor-commissioned studies. Thus, many NGOs do not differentiate between beneficiaries, though they find it difficult and more expensive to reach poorer people; gender analysis and impact is weak and little attention is paid to environmental assessment; very few of the projects are likely to be either institutionally or financially sustainable if unaided by the sponsoring NGOs. Additionally, UK work in terms of institutional strengthening would appear to be having only limited impact.

The following points summarise the main conclusions drawn in relation to particular themes and issues raised in the donor-commissioned studies.

- Many studies undertaken by British NGOs for their own purposes which have tried to analyse issues of impact, have frequently tended to be harsher in their judgements of what have been achieved (impact) than donor-initiated studies.
- UK NGO studies not only suggest that the wider context in which projects are placed is important to impact, but (confirming the ODA/NGO study conclusions) assert that NGOs are 'very vulnerable' to the environment in which they work and to external influences. Influences beyond the immediate project (the external environment) are not only very influential in determining impact but they tend to be underestimated by the NGOs concerned.
- Project management was also found to be critically important to success, indeed that strategic planning needs to be considerably improved. A specific management problem seemed to occur when NGOs tried to scale up their activities.
- In relation to participation, one synthesis study shows a clear change

over the past 10 years towards a more flexible and innovative process approach to project design, involving project participants at each stage to maximise project impact. Yet it is also suggested that the term participation is widely used without sufficient attention paid to its precise meaning, even if, interestingly, it has been argued in a few studies that increased participation increased project costs. One synthesis study argued that participation with the beneficiaries was a clear factor in project success, though where projects fail, no amount of participation will overcome weak project management or a hostile external environment.

- Many NGO studies tend to acknowledge difficulties in terms of achieving both institutional and financial sustainability. In particular, they highlight what is often a very real conflict between trying to enhance the financial sustainability of development projects and reaching down to the poorer groups in society. Doubts in the donor studies about difficulties of reaching the poorest groups and the lack of attention to gender issues appear to be confirmed by UK NGOs' own studies.
- The British NGO studies confirm the need to devote considerable time and resources to project (or programme) preparation with intended beneficiaries.
- The importance of NGO leadership, effective management related to the size of the organisation and development programme, and staff competent and skilled in the intricacies of the project being promoted are all confirmed as important factors contributing to project success. Some evidence supports the view that specialised NGOs are better at achieving impact than many generalist NGOs, but it is rather sketchy.
- The view, propounded most strongly in USAID literature, that project impact is critically related to the attributes of the organisation (NGO) implementing the project is also confirmed.
- A number of British NGO studies are self-critical in terms of participation: they also point to major weaknesses in terms of participation at pre-appraisal and appraisal stage, and participation in evaluation often appears to be more a wish than common practice.
- In relation to credit programmes, the evidence from one UK synthesis study suggests that the NGO credit programmes evaluated are extremely costly to administer, with running costs rising to as high as 30 per cent of loans disbursed. Additionally default rates were also high, averaging 40 per cent. The evidence from a second synthesis study concludes that it is *not* possible to come to firm conclusions about the activities financed by credit because very little information is collected on them.

#### **4.6 The United States**

In order to synthesise data on impact a total of 54 evaluation reports, 27 commissioned by USAID and 27 by members of the PVO community, and other related materials, were reviewed. This country case study found that the number

of evaluations that provide an assessment of the impact that PVO interventions have had on the lives and livelihoods of beneficiaries is currently sparse due to the absence of baselines and inadequate monitoring arrangements. Where impact was assessed it was frequently found to be impressionistic, based on the judgements of external 'experts' rather than on rigorous analysis. However, more rigorous studies were found, particularly in the area of Child Survival and Microenterprise, giving a clear indication of the beneficial impact of PVO interventions.

Thus, there is evidence that PVO Child Survival interventions can succeed in significantly reducing child mortality in selected developing countries within a three to six year period. More impressionistic data support this claim, indicating that a number of PVOs have monitored substantial reductions in mortality and morbidity in project areas during the lifetime of their interventions. However, the case study found that there is a need to develop consensus over the definition of impact and the importance of its measurement before USAID and the PVO community will be able to report on impact across the range of interventions within the Child Survival sector.

On the whole, increases in income, output and the value of fixed assets could be attributed to PVO microenterprise interventions. However, changes in employment were found to be negligible, absorbed by family members or existing employees. Household income, assets and consumption were also found to increase due to microenterprise initiatives, although evidence of the sustainability of these improvements and subsequent reductions in vulnerability remains illusive. Improvements in women's well-being have also been documented in response to credit initiatives; however, serious questions remain over women's control over loans and the income derived from them.

Synthesis reports suggest that there is a broad consensus amongst evaluators with regard to the major determinants of project and programme success. These were: the active participation of communities throughout the project cycle, particularly over project design; the use of appropriate technology that has a proven demand; partnership with existing local institutions; flexibility in project design and implementation; and high quality staff and project management. The absence of these factors, plus an insufficient analysis of the needs and priorities of beneficiaries, as well as inadequate monitoring arrangements, were found to be characteristics of those projects and programmes that faced difficulties in achieving their objectives.

The case study also found that evaluation reports are not the only source of impact data on PVO interventions in the United States. There are increasing numbers of research papers that provide a rich source of material on the intended and unintended impact of PVO interventions.

The study concluded that evaluations commissioned by either USAID or PVOs

have not systematically addressed cross-cutting issues such as poverty, gender, participation and cost-effectiveness. It has been individual evaluation teams that have determined whether these issues are analysed in any depth. Indeed *ex post* evaluations were found to be particularly rare, limiting analysis, for example, of sustainability to that of prediction. The absence of guidelines regarding methodology, key issues and terminology has led to inconsistency and considerable variation in the quality of analysis. Moreover, this piecemeal approach has constrained organisations from undertaking comparative studies in order to improve the quality of programme design and inform policy development.

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#### **4.7 Bangladesh and Brazil**

Two major themes emerged from the Brazilian and Bangladesh case studies. The first concerned context, not least the wider agenda and aims of many NGO initiatives which extend well beyond a focus on the socio-economic needs of discrete groups of beneficiaries. The second concerned discussion of precisely how one measures impact.

In both countries, NGOs have been extensively involved in development issues for decades. They have seen their role as strong advocates for a democratic civil society; consequently they view the replacement of authoritarian regimes by democratically elected governments as events for which they can claim some merit, indeed a number would argue that this is one of the greatest indicators of their impact. Advocacy for democracy and against social exclusion continues to be a central plank of NGO initiatives in both countries, particularly in Brazil, where a prominent role of NGOs focuses on support and advice activities to local organisations. However, it is very difficult to find firm evidence of the impact that NGOs in Bangladesh and Brazil have had in their current work of helping to strengthen democratic organisations and processes.

Traditional methods and tools of evaluation are not felt to be adequate to assess the impact of these types of interventions, and of linked initiatives focusing on influencing public policy. Consequently, new methodologies and indicators are being sought. Indeed, the discussion is often far wider than merely looking for specific indicators to assess discrete activities: debate has broadened to look for ways of incorporating not merely the nature of particular interventions, but the whole cultural, socio-economic and political complexity of the local reality. NGOs express concern with the very term impact and its usage. What does the concept really imply, how is it used and how does it influence activities? What is the time perspective to use in assessing impact, the Brazilian NGOs ask? They point to the need to distinguish between evaluation and impact assessment, and highlight the need to go beyond merely the measurement of quantified results using only standardised methods.

While NGOs in Bangladesh have also a strong advocacy role, they are more involved in socio-economic (including income generating) activities than Brazilian NGOs. These

provide greater opportunities to try to obtain data on impact than for interventions focusing on conscientisation, empowerment and mobilisation. The largest NGOs in Bangladesh have their own, often huge, research and evaluation departments, staffed with qualified professionals. This enables them to build knowledge of the programme area and the changing socio-economic status of the beneficiaries. However, it is not only these larger NGOs which have a record of undertaking rigorous studies; middle-sized NGOs, too, carry out studies and evaluations of their interventions within the limits of resources they have.

The following points summarise the main conclusions drawn in relation to particular themes and issues raised in the donor-commissioned studies.

The locally initiated impact assessments and studies reviewed for this study reveal a high concentration and focus on credit programmes, poverty impact, and the empowerment of women. Wider policy issues and sustainability are also addressed to a more limited extent, while cost effectiveness, innovation and flexibility and replicability are either not addressed or else raised rather haphazardly.

A major difference of these analyses compared with evaluations initiated by donors or northern NGO evaluations has been the time factor, leading often to far more rigorous and in-depth analysis. Relatedly, some of the most ambitious impact assessments have been undertaken by local NGOs.

The evidence tends to support the view that NGO programmes are having a positive impact in terms of improvements in socio-economic status: increased incomes, greater employment opportunities, more household assets, a reduction of vulnerability. What is also important is that these studies provide strong evidence of an ability to reach the poor, and even the poorest, often female-headed households. Nonetheless, these positive results are not universal across all NGOs and all projects.

The studies point to significant improvements in the status and material well-being of women. Participation in decision-making is also considered to have been enhanced as a direct result of NGO interventions. However, no evidence was found of significant changes in gender roles occurring or of structural factors which contribute to gender inequalities being challenged.

Though Bangladesh has been praised for a number of its major credit programmes, the evidence reviewed suggested that the impact of NGO credit programmes on the institutional sustainability of village and group organisations with whom the NGOs are working was found to be quite limited, as were the wider impacts of these programmes.

#### **4.8 Chile**

What is known about NGO impact in Chile? At one level, relatively little. As evaluations explicitly concerned with impact assessment have been few in number, key informant

assessments and more academic forms of research provide some of the most insightful sources of information on impact.

One area in which NGOs are often deemed to have had an impact was the political arena in the period of dictatorship: NGOs' own work and the international and national networks they helped build were important in ensuring that democracy was restored. Additionally, NGOs provided livelihoods and homes for people who were active not only in resistance, but in piecing together agendas for the 'democratic-government-to-be.' This, though indirect, is an important impact.

In the period since democracy it has been far harder for NGOs to define a clear role for themselves, and difficult for many of them to adapt to contemporary development challenges. As the emphasis has shifted from resistance and democratisation to challenges such as poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability, many NGOs have found themselves less well equipped in the necessary skills. Those with clear technical specialities have perhaps had greater impacts on policy thinking and on poor people's livelihoods: environmental NGOs, agro-ecology NGOs and so on. But in general, as NGOs have been drawn to financial services, enterprise formation among the popular sectors, marketing, etc., their impact has probably been limited (though again information is scarce).

The public sector is one arena in which there is an emerging body of information about NGO impact, and a body that will almost certainly grow in the coming years. While these public programmes that work via contracted intermediaries have not evaluated NGOs separately from other intermediaries, those close to this monitoring and evaluation are able to draw certain informal conclusions about the performance of NGOs. In general, these conclusions emphasise the great diversity among NGOs as regards their quality and impact. There is perhaps greatest impact in training/education/technical assistance, and in social and local development. The results from the evaluation of the organisation INDAP, for instance, suggested positive farmer opinions about programme impact - a programme in which over 30 per cent of farmers are attended to by NGOs. Opinions were positive among both women and men, even if they seemed greater among the middle peasantry rather than the poorest. Interestingly, similar results are emerging from a 'within NGO evaluation' of the impact of NGO agricultural technical assistance in a micro-region in the central-southern part of Chile. Early results from that evaluation appears to show NGO impact on farm technology and productivity.

If these have been the areas of greater impact, the sense from professionals in public programmes that deal with NGOs is that their impact has been far weaker in productive activities, income generation and financial services. This opinion is more or less consistent with that voiced by others in the NGO sector, as well as by financing agencies, consultants and evaluation experts.

#### **4.9 Kenya**

A first conclusion from reading locally-initiated evaluations and reviews is that they appear to be strikingly more critical (self-critical) of, if not the impact of their development initiatives, then of the difficulties they face. A second is that Kenyan evaluations tend to share a lack of good data on impact with those of other countries, notwithstanding the fact that, against a dominant trend, evaluation studies have been going on in Kenya for many years. A third conclusion from reading this set of reports is that though there is currently plenty of talk about participation and participatory methods, there is a paucity of evidence of participatory processes on the ground, though there is certainly evidence of what might even be termed an explosion of interest and expanded activity in participatory *appraisal* in Kenya.

The following points summarise the main conclusions drawn in relation to particular themes and issues raised in the donor-commissioned studies.

- The extent to which Kenyan evaluations use the headings of donor-commissioned studies (poverty impact, effectiveness sustainability, replicability, scaling-up and innovation - varies greatly).
- Take the issue of poverty: on the one hand, many of the reports do not address the extent to which the poverty status of the beneficiaries has changed as a result of the intervention being assessed; on the other hand, many do highlight the difficulty and, importantly, the complexity of the problem. Of some interest is a link drawn in some reports between progress made in enhancing livelihoods and innovations in methods tried and under experimentation.
- No evidence was found of rigorous cost-effectiveness analysis of projects, even though one Kenyan NGO had produced an impressive manual on the issue over 10 years ago. The problem is often not a lack of willingness to try, but the inadequacy of the available data.
- A common feature in many of the reports was the difficulties found and expressed in achieving long-term sustainability of the projects being assessed. Not surprisingly, many are pessimistic about achieving financial sustainability sufficient to ensure continuation of services (health and education) which have been dependent upon comparatively high levels of donor funds. Perhaps of greater interest is the extent to which the issues of institutional sustainability are discussed and analysed, leading to a strong and quite widespread conclusion that NGOs need to devote far greater thought to ways of enhancing and strengthening the capacity of groups to manage development initiatives with less external support.
- There is little evidence of cross-cutting themes such as gender or environmental issues featuring strongly in the evaluation studies reviewed. However, paralleling discussion on participatory approaches, and especially participatory appraisal, there is clearly growing concern with the gender dimension of NGO development initiatives. What appear to be lacking most are tools with which to assess gender and environmental issues.
- The Kenyan study reviewed some major studies on credit programmes. There is evidence of the interplay of evaluation and research being fed back into and influencing approaches and methods. There is also evidence from Kenya of

- difficulties experienced, and generally poorer impact performance, when generalist NGOs have tried, with limited skills and technical knowledge, to run credit and micro-finance schemes often unaware of current thinking and lessons learnt in other countries. Equally, Kenyan evidence highlights the problems associated with trying to promote small-scale enterprise projects with very poor and inexperienced participants, and of sustainability problems arising from uncritically providing both financial and non-financial services.
- The Kenyan evidence tends to support the view that because locally-initiated evaluations focus on smaller and more specific issues within a project, they tend to lead to far more instances of post- evaluation follow up, often enhancing future project impact, than donor-commissioned studies. However, some qualification to this generalisation is needed, as a number of evaluations and studies reviewed, especially those in the micro-enterprise sector, provided strong evidence of externally-initiated evaluations leading to altered directions and improved future impact.
  - The Kenyan study uniquely examined evaluation in a small community-based organisation which produced some conclusions strongly at variance with those emerging from more orthodox/conventional approaches (see Box A12.3).

#### **4.10 Senegal**

NGOs have grown rapidly in recent years in regard to both numbers and the range of different activities undertaken, totalling between 200 and 350 different organisations today. Thus, there are NGOs which fund other NGOs and smaller local organisations, information, research and advocacy NGOs, intermediary NGOs, and NGOs which provide a range of different services directly to beneficiaries. As in other countries, the target of NGO interventions is the poor, though there is little evidence of rigorous analysis taking place to identify and isolate groups of poor people.

While there have been international NGOs operating in Senegal for many years, a recent development has been expanded contact with the United States. This has been particularly influential in giving increased prominence and emphasis to three issues highlighted in the donor-commissioned studies: institutional and capacity-building initiatives; sustainability questions and analysis of the impact of projects on the lives of the beneficiaries.

Obtaining information on evaluations in Senegal is made particularly difficult for two reasons. First, because there is no central database, and second, because of the problems of confidentiality of many of the studies undertaken. There are two major centres where evaluation and linked studies are held, CONGAD and USAID. Unfortunately, it was not possible to gain access to these, though it is likely that the problems of inaccessibility will soon be at least partially resolved as there is a growing sense among NGOs of the need to tap into and build a database of current and past experiences. Indeed, CONGAD has recently decided to launch a study on the impact of development interventions. Another recent development is the *Foundation de France* decision to begin to evaluate some 10 different development interventions, though it is too early to begin to see the results of



these studies. Recent evaluation studies have generally been conducted by international and national consultants.

A particularly important feature of contemporary discussion in Senegal is the emphasis increasingly being given to process-type evaluations, building on the importance which has for long been given to participatory approaches.

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## 5

# THEMATIC AND SECTORAL STUDIES OF IMPACT

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on a number of thematic and sectoral studies which have assessed the impact of NGO development interventions. As this literature is vast, it was decided to focus particularly on two areas: child survival and micro-enterprise programmes, areas of growing involvement of NGOs and growing interest to donors. The chapter also looks briefly at capacity-building initiatives and the theme of partnership.<sup>1</sup> Thus, what is presented here is far from comprehensive, although many of the issues raised by this material have already been discussed in Chapter 3.<sup>2</sup> One problem has been tracing and locating reports and studies. This is a problem which has been faced by other studies. For example, the study by Haley used in this chapter was based on 21 individual reports. It took over six months simply to locate these (Haley, 1995).

One clear conclusion emerging from this review is that although impact is widely discussed, the precise meaning of the term is often not clear. The terms efficiency, effectiveness (including cost-effectiveness) and sustainability of development interventions are commonly used, but impact assessments of the child survival and micro-enterprise programmes examined do not focus much on cross-cutting issues such as gender, the environment and participation.<sup>3</sup> However, a number do focus on the broader context. Data and information on innovativeness, replicability and scaling up are only rarely found.

## 5.2 Donors, NGOs, themes and sectors

Most donor-commissioned NGO evaluation reports provide some information on particular themes and sectors. The following three examples, from the United States, Australia and Finland, indicate the dominance of activities in social sectors. Thus, almost 30 per cent of 274 USAID-funded PVO and INGO projects covered by the General Audit Office (1995) included health and child survival activities. Kershaw *et al.* (1995) shows that half of the Australian NGO projects over 1988-1993 were undertaken in the social sectors, including health, education and social infrastructure (although expenditure on

these projects amounted to only 32 per cent of the total). A smaller proportion of projects were undertaken in productive sectors, such as agriculture, fishing, forestry (8 per cent) and manufacturing, industry and commerce (2 per cent). The water supply and sanitation sector accounted for 6 per cent of projects. In Finland in 1996 (Kehitys 1997), education and training accounted for 40 per cent of projects, health 33 per cent and other social services 6 per cent of projects funded. The environmental projects accounted for 9 per cent of the total, and agriculture and forestry, 4 per cent.<sup>4</sup> This distribution is confirmed by NGO data, for instance, from Denmark, the Netherlands, the United States (CARE) and Bangladesh (see Husain 1995).

However, the situation is not static. As illustrated by the example of DanChurchAid (DCA), the largest relief and development NGO in Denmark, many NGOs are going through a process of fundamentally rethinking not merely their sectoral involvement but the whole way they enter into and try to influence development change. A number are moving away from a community development and a social delivery-focus towards a clearer political and humanitarian mandate, emphasising human rights, the strengthening of civil society and capacity-building, involving, too, rethinking the relationship with their partners.

### **5.3 Child Survival Programs**

In the United States, the PVO Child Survival Support Program works with organisations such as Africare, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, PLAN, Save the Children and World Vision. Funded by USAID, the Program has recently been providing support to 72 Child Survival Projects in 28 countries. The objective is to reduce infant mortality rates in USAID-assisted countries from the 1985 average of 97 deaths per 1000 live births, to 75 deaths by the year 2000.

Though there is a growing amount of data on impact (viewed broadly), much of this comes from discrete studies and analyses and often not from evaluation studies and reports - which is also true for data and information on micro-enterprise programmes. Thus, a study by Martin (1993) analysed USAID's Child Survival Program in six countries - Bolivia, Egypt, Haiti, Indonesia, Malawi and Morocco. Programme performance was assessed in relation to effectiveness, impact, sustainability and efficiency. Here, impact was measured principally in relation to improvements in infant and child mortality and morbidity rates. The study concluded that declines in infant mortality rates were attributable, in part, to programme interventions. These conclusions were based both on epidemiological studies and on the experiences of beneficiaries and providers in the field who were interviewed for the study.<sup>5</sup> It goes on to argue that PVOs in the Child Survival Program are: reducing mortality; improving nutritional status; lowering disease incidence; upgrading the quality of health worker practices; strengthening community resources; and empowering the community.

Perhaps of greater interest is the conclusion that all these impacts are interrelated. Where community building and strengthening occurs, it is argued that there is a high probability that the benefits achieved through project activity will be sustained, because the benefits

are achieved through community efforts. Relatedly, a study by Reynolds *et al.* (1991) argues that demands for rapid health status improvements and the demand for sustainability may push projects in conflicting directions.<sup>6</sup>

Sustainability remains a concern. Martin's review argues that sometimes priority is given to supporting service delivery to the detriment of institutional strengthening, and particularly *financial sustainability*. Overall, the data reviewed suggest that there is no easy way of achieving financial sustainability. Even relatively low-cost primary health care technologies incur substantial recurrent costs if permanent universal coverage and acceptable quality of care are to be achieved, notwithstanding efficiency improvements, endowments and the possibility of raising some income through charging fees for services.

Based on the findings of these US-based assessments, there appear to be three important roles for PVOs in Child Survival programmes. Firstly, PVOs often seem to be effective in 'operations research': developing and testing alternative approaches, marrying the aims of lowering costs and improving services. Secondly, PVOs are often able to mobilise additional resources for health care, sometimes complementing and supporting state child survival services. Thirdly, PVOs can often achieve success in being primary providers of services. This has occurred, for example, in Haiti, where the state system has been unable to deliver services, leaving the way open for PVOs to provide health services to 30 per cent of the national population and 50 per cent of the rural population.<sup>7</sup>

External evaluations provide evidence of some expansion into income generating activities, contributing to increased cost recovery mechanisms. In 1991, only 3 per cent of completed projects involved community education and mobilisation as a strategy of sustainability, but by 1993, this had risen to 71 per cent of projects. There is also evidence of increased involvement in institutional strengthening: in an analysis of projects ending in 1994, 85 per cent were involved in counterpart training, with 58 per cent training counterparts in management skills. There is also evidence of PVOs working to strengthen the capacity of communities to cope with emergencies, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. Training is given to workers in local NGOs, and in government health systems, in the most inaccessible and under-served areas of a country in simple life-saving measures, such as oral rehydration therapy (ORT), sanitation and immunisation. Methodologies learned in the Child Survival Program are being extended to other health projects sponsored by major PVOs.

In order to compare the results of different studies, the one undertaken by Haley (1995, see [Box 5.1](#)) on Maternal and Child Health Projects Evaluations was assessed in relation to the study done by Cabrera (1995), who provided a synthesis of rural health programs involving water supply and sanitation projects. The issues addressed were (in descending order of frequency): i) cost analysis, per project or per beneficiary; ii) effectiveness of the information, education and communication (IEC) methodologies; and iii) sustainability of benefits. The three least common elements mentioned were: i) effectiveness of counterpart relations; ii) community management and participation; and iii) effectiveness of health promoters. Those elements that appeared less frequently in the evaluations

reviewed were (in order of least frequency): i) baseline studies and implementation plans; ii) ethnic and gender relations; iii) impact of morbidity and mortality; iv) effectiveness of management; v) institutional strengthening; and vi) norms for design and construction. Both reports lack standardised evaluation and reporting guidelines. It is also apparent that recommendations contained in evaluation reports are not necessarily taken on board when designing new projects, or even integrated into ongoing projects following mid-term reviews. Haley concludes that most evaluations tended to be extremely negative, focusing on areas that needed improvement, instead of discussing both the strengths and weaknesses of a project. Where positive comments are made in evaluation reports, these tended to come in the form of praise for PVO staff.

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of NGOs and the seeds sector see Cromwell *et al.* (1995); for a discussion of NGOs and agricultural research see Farrington *et al.* (1993).

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>2</sup> Many projects are integrated development programmes containing different component parts, resulting in highly complex evaluations. See, for instance, Schoch Consultin( 1995).

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>3</sup> There are exceptions. Sebsted and Chen's review identified studies in which it is argued that gender is a key factor in understanding impact and the overwhelming conclusion is that gender does make a difference (1996; vii).

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>4</sup> The Department for International Development Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Finland publishes an annual list of NGO development activities, but this is not synthesised. It classifies data by countries in which NGOs work. Many other countries publish similar kinds of information, usually omitting any statistical analysis.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>5</sup> The study notes the impact of Child Survival initiatives in relation to their contribution to sustainable economic development, which in turn helps to create and expand markets for US businesses. Child Survival programs help slow population growth, contribute to increase economic productivity, and help further stability by meeting basic needs.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>6</sup> The conference proceedings edited by Storms *et al.* (1995) provided similar sorts of data, but also provide some other perspectives on the role of PVOs/NGOs in Child Survival Programs. Also in the United States, the PVO Child Survival Support Program at The Johns Hopkins University, School of Hygiene and Public Health has published several reports, a detailed review of which would provide a more rounded picture of the Program and its impacts. Regrettably, it was only possible to access a selection of that material for this Study.

[text]

<sup>7</sup> In the past ten years, 145 million children under the age of five and 17 million women have benefitted from the Program. Quantitative data from baseline and final surveys have documented strong, consistent performance across PVOs and across regions. At a cost to USAID of little more than \$1.20 per beneficiary per year, the Program is remarkably cost effective(<http://ih1.sph.edu>).

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## 5.4 Microenterprise Innovation Projects

One of the areas where growing attention has been focused on monitoring, evaluation and learning methodologies, is microenterprise development. USAID and the members of the US PVO community have been particularly active in this area. This section focuses especially on material from USAID programmes. <sup>8</sup>

The broad aims of these programmes are:

- to assist the efforts of the poor, especially women, to increase their income and assets, thereby enhancing their overall welfare;
- to develop the labour and managerial skills of individuals often excluded from other development initiatives, thereby enhancing the capacity of the economy to grow; and
- to facilitate the growing and development of local organisations serving the microenterprise sector.

A long-held view has been that although microenterprise financing is an important development activity because it helps poor people, it cannot be financially viable because poor people have no funds to save and loans are too costly to administer. Some recent evidence has tended to challenge this view. For example, reviews by Fox (1995) and Malhotra (1995), argue that microfinance institutions *can* be self-sustaining and, indeed, *must* be self-sustaining if they are to provide poor people access to financial services. However, as discussed elsewhere in this Report, there have been a number of studies which have shown that many (and perhaps most in terms of numbers of projects) have failed to come close to achieving these objectives. It is, thus, clearly important to temper optimism based on some case studies and the *wish* to achieve greater financial sustainability with a hard-nosed assessment of activities on the ground. What is probably of more use than more studies which conclude that generalised approaches 'work' or 'do not work' is a careful analysis of those factors which contribute to success and failure, strengths and weaknesses.

To identify 'best practices' the study by Christen *et al.* (1995) - note this was *not an evaluation* - examined 11 microenterprise finance programmes in nine countries.<sup>9</sup> The study examined performance from two perspectives: *outreach* and *financial sustainability*. Outreach refers to the central purpose of microenterprise finance of providing large numbers of poor people, including the very poor and women, with access to quality financial services. Financial sustainability concerns the institutional capacity to

become independent of donors or government subsidies. The basic findings were that the most successful microenterprise finance institutions share four characteristics:

- *they reach the very poor*: clients are typically very small businesses that would otherwise be excluded from formal financial services, and programmes offering small loans tend to serve more women;
- *they reach large numbers of clients*: several institutions, notably in Bangladesh (reaching about 2 million very poor clients) and Indonesia (more than 2 million borrowers and 12 million savers), have achieved major coverage on a national scale. It is scale, not exclusive focus, that determines whether significant outreach to the poorest will occur;
- *they grow rapidly*: the key to this rapid growth has been the ability to maintain financial viability - controlling bad loans, holding administrative costs to manageable levels, and developing a rapidly growing base of financial resources; and
- *they meet client needs and provide high quality services*: dramatic annual growth in the number of borrowers, the loan portfolio, and, in some cases, savings deposits are evidence of strong client demand and overall satisfaction with the services received.

Ten of the 11 institutions examined were operationally efficient, covering the cost of day-to-day operations - salaries and other administrative costs - with programme revenues from interest and fees. Five institutions were profitable: programme revenues covered both the non-financial operating costs and the financial costs of obtaining loanable funds on a commercial basis. 'Fully self-sufficient' programmes shared three characteristics: they charge rates of interest high enough to cover all their costs, including costs of capital, fully adjusted for inflation; they have a mechanism, such as group lending, social pressure, or unconventional collateral, to keep loan defaults to a minimum; and they consciously aim to hold their unit costs to levels that can be sustained by financial market spread.

Particularly interesting components of USAID's Microenterprise Innovation Project (MIP) are Assessing the Impact of Microenterprise Services (AIMS) <sup>10</sup> and Microenterprise Best Practices (MBP).<sup>11</sup> The AIMS Project is a multi-year effort designed for several purposes, one of which has been to produce statistically rigorous, cost-effective and methodologically sound assessments of the impact of microenterprise programmes. The AIMS Project also develops and tests monitoring and assessment tools for use by PVOs/NGOs to track and assess the impact of their microenterprise programmes. The MBP is the research and learning component of the MIP: the objective is to expand the knowledge base of microenterprise practitioners in developing countries. 'Best Practice' is a constantly evolving body of knowledge - expanding day by day as practitioners try new approaches to the successful delivery of microenterprise services and learn from their successes and failures. <sup>12</sup>

One aspect of USAID's work has been to focus on how microenterprise finance programmes should be evaluated (see Otero & Rhyne 1994). It is argued that it is

important that evaluations be carried out at two broad levels, the client level and the institutional level. The *client service perspective* evaluates programme clientele (for instance, which customers are 'good'), quality of service (what specific services clients want) and the impact on clients' choices and quality of life (what do clients do differently now that they could not do without the service). The *institutional perspective* evaluates institutional self-sufficiency, institutional financial status and institutional strength and context.<sup>13</sup>

Outside USAID, other research has been conducted by Hulme and Mosley (1996) (see also Hulme & Helms, 1996). This concludes that at the level of economic and social impact all institutions studied had a positive impact on overall output, both directly and, in some cases, indirectly. They also had generally positive effects on employment and technology but these varied in relation to income groups. In particular, it was found that poorer borrowers, being more risk averse, were disinclined to invest income from a successful project. Additionally, they found that agricultural labourers in particular were not well represented even among borrowers and that these people still find it difficult to borrow from any source. They also found little evidence that the schemes they examined increased the political leverage of poorer peoples. Finally, and perhaps of greatest interest, they found at a particular point of time that there was a trade-off, both between and within schemes, between the rate of poverty reduction and the rate of income increase, but that this trade-off can be shifted by measures which raise demand, reduce transaction costs, or increase the degree of financial control possessed by lending organisations (1996: 201).<sup>14</sup>

What are the implications of these findings? Firstly, that MFIs are likely to produce a higher average income impact by focusing their lending on borrowers just above the poverty line who demand promotional loans. Secondly, appropriate institutional reforms to bring the micro-finance institution in line with accepted best practice design features (cost-recovery interest rates, savings and insurance facilities, intensive collection of loan instalments and incentives to repay), may make it possible to increase poverty impact and financial viability at the same time.

The recent study edited by Schneider (1997), though encompassing organisations beyond NGOs, also focused on sustainability and institutional development, but additionally addressed the complex issue of transaction costs (and how to reduce them). It found that it is far from easy to provide financial services for the poor which meet the dual challenges of sustainability and outreach, but highlighted, in particular, the importance attached to good management (1997: 36). A strong conclusion of this study was that no single model works, and thus that there is still much to learn from analysing comparative performances and isolating the main factors (strengths and weaknesses) of different enterprises.

One of the central issues of current debate is the extent to which it is possible to provide non-financial services without financial support from outside. Another central theme of the MBP research programme is the problem of sectoral linkages: for instance, what has microenterprise development to do with health, housing and environment? It is argued

that microenterprises have an environmental role in protecting area conservation, waste management and recycling, and energy conservation.

In general, there is much optimism about microenterprise development, illustrated by the results and aims of the recent Summit on the subject. However, as argued forcefully by Sebsted and Chen (1996: 19), it is crucial that sweeping generalisations are not made, not least on the basis of optimistic assessments; the view that poor people are bankable is based on far firmer evidence than the view that financial institutions for the poor are institutionally sustainable. The evidence from Kenya (see *Appendix 12*) suggests that there are many problems, and that there often is a trade-off between poverty and financial sustainability. Additionally, many of the 13 BRAC studies (synthesized by Husain 1995) related to credit and savings programmes, discuss difficulties such as increases in overall indebtedness, relatively greater access of managing committee members to BRAC credit and weaknesses in credit management.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to draw is that there are still many areas where neither evaluations nor research have yet provided firm answers to questions about impact, not least in relation to impact on households in general and women in particular.

## 5.5 Capacity-building

A new growth area for NGOs is that of capacity- and institution-building. This encompasses very many dimensions such as the relationship between northern and southern NGOs, or capacity assessments dealing with the workings of the northern NGOs' country offices. Some northern NGO umbrella organisations have also assessed their capacities, as part of their policy work. There are also reviews of country programmes.<sup>15</sup>

One example of donor capacity assessments are studies carried out for Danida of the four largest Danish NGOs: the Danish Red Cross, DanChurchAid, Ibis and the LO/LOFT Council. According to the standard terms of reference for these assessments, the studies *'hall provide Danida with an assessment of the organisation's overall professional and administrative capacity to manage all aspects of their development activities that are supported by Danida, and of the organisation's overall comparative advantage relative to Danida's bilateral development cooperation.'* The criteria used for the organisation's capacity to support projects were:

- *professional competence*: is the organisation able to plan, carry out and evaluate projects and project portfolios in a professional manner and live up to the standards set for administrating Danida funds?
- *relevance*: is there sufficient linkage between critical development challenges and needs in developing countries, and the priorities set in the organisation's project activities and portfolio?
- *adequacy*: do the organisation's activities have a scope that enable them to make a difference in meeting the relevant development needs in developing countries?



- *efficiency*: are the organisation's activities at all levels implemented with the minimum use of necessary resources?
- *effectiveness*: do the organisation's activities meet the immediate objectives set by it, with the minimum use of necessary resources? Are these organized and designed to maximise their impact?

## 5.6 Shift towards new partnerships

Capacity assessments can be viewed as part of a wider movement to rethink relationships between organisations, not least in relation to the term 'partnership'. For a number of NGOs, not least church-based organisations, a rethink across the north of what NGOs might or ought to be doing is leading to a reassessment of themselves and the way they interact with organisations to whom they channel funds. This in turn is leading to debate and discussion in the south about the nature of the relationship, contributing further elements to the evolving partnership debate, though there are also many instances of southern organisations focusing on their links with donors outside *northern-initiated* processes of reflection.

In the north, changes and processes of reflection are taking place, for instance, with Danchurch Aid, within the Lutheran World Service, which is reassessing its mandate and its mode of intervention, and CARE (Cooperative Aid for Refugees), the largest relief and development agency in the world. For CARE, the focus has been on how it delivers services, and to whom and how it measures success, how its diverse programmes are integrated and how it raises money and builds support for its work. New key approaches include: focusing programmes on families and households; building effective local partnerships; enhancing advocacy initiatives; and integrating global operations.<sup>16</sup>

The issue of partnership between northern and southern NGOs has not been addressed in much depth by evaluation studies. However, a recent NGO initiative entitled *Discerning The Way Together*, with components in both the north and south, tried to address the subject with some candour and thus provides one example of the increasingly important discussion taking place on the issue of partnership.

For its part, the northern NGO report stated that there is clearly considerable unease at present across both northern and southern agencies about the relationship between the two groups and about the extent to which the concept of partnership should continue to be used and the ideals of partnership should continue to be pursued in practice. The report suggested that the way forward lies in:

- Acknowledging that relationships should be based on the fact that agencies have different interests and that some ideals of partnership are unlikely to be met in practice, especially those which challenge the integrity and autonomy of both the northern and southern agencies.
- Recognising that northern agencies *need* in-depth relationships with partners in the south, including the opportunity to debate northern and southern agencies' understanding of the context, objectives and hence funding of advocacy criteria.

- Recognising that practical constraints restrict the number of southern partners with which a northern agency can have an in-depth relationship. Thus, some relationships must necessarily be more formal and limited in their scope.
- Recognising that there are and will continue to be different relationships between different northern agencies and different partners, based on history, religious affiliation, cultural and country contexts.
- Acknowledging that partnership has to include assessment of performance and subsequent reflection and feed-back.

There were some sharp differences in viewpoint expressed in the southern response, *Discerning the Way Together: Southern Perspectives*, not merely in terms of partnership but in terms of 'a vision' for the action of the agencies in the future. Thus, it is argued that it is not enough for development intervention to be professional and efficient, but that development also requires people who are committed 'to justice, to structural change of the dominant political order, who are in solidarity with the poor and sensitive to other cultures'. A new kind of development, where 'people's creativity is part of their resistance' will rely on the strengthening of civil society and democratisation of the cooperation processes.

If current discussion within and between NGOs is a good guide, it seems that this discussion on partnership is poised to expand considerably in the months and years ahead.

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<sup>8</sup> A number of USAID reports, such as its 'Microenterprise Development Brief' are now accessible through the internet.

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<sup>9</sup> Programmes examined were Agence de Credit pour l'Enterprise Privée (ACEP) of Senegal, La Asociación Dominicana para el Desarrollo de la Mujer (ADOPEM) of the Dominican Republic, Banco Solidario S.A. (BancoSol) of Bolivia, Badan Kredit Desa (BKD) of Indonesia, the Unit Desa System of the Bank Rakyat Indonesia (BRI), Bankin Raya Karkara of CARE (BRK) of Niger, Corporación de Acción Solidaria (CorpoSol, formerly Actuar/Bogotá) of Colombia, Fundación Integral Campesina (FINCA) of Costa Rica, the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, Kenya Rural Enterprise Programme (K-REP), and Lembaga Perkreditan Desas (LPDs) of Indonesia.

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<sup>10</sup> The AIMS Project is being implemented by Management Systems International (prime contractor), the Harvard Institute for International Development, the University of Missouri, and the Small Enterprise Education and Promotion (SEEP) Network.

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<sup>11</sup> The MBP Project is implemented by Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI), ACCION International, Foundation for international Community Assistance (FINCA), Harvard Institute for International Development (HIID), International Management and Communications Corporation (IMCC), Ohio State University Rural Finance Program, Opportunity International, and the Small Enterprise Educational and Promotion (SEEP) Network.

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<sup>12</sup> The MBP contains 21 core research topics stemming from three main conceptual categories: 1) financial services, 2) non-financial services, and 3) the role of microenterprises in economic and social development.

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<sup>13</sup> Neill *et al.* (1995) discuss a framework for evaluating how microenterprise interventions contributed to household security, enterprise stability and growth, individual well-being and the economic development of communities.

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<sup>14</sup> The idea is as follows: higher-income borrowers experience a greater income impact because they are willing to take risks and invest in new technology, fixed capital, and in hiring of labour for promotional activities. Very poor borrowers tend to take out small, subsistence-protecting loans, which do not tend to produce dramatic changes in borrower income and in some cases can even lower income possibilities. *Promotion* is a better strategy than *protection*.

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<sup>15</sup> One group of such studies undertaken by an NGO would be to studies commissioned by MS in Denmark, Donors and different NGOs have done their own country profiles: many of the report findings overlap.

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<sup>16</sup> These examples from Denmark illustrate some of the re-orientations being discussed:

- from 'easy' counties and regions to more 'difficult' politically sensitive, countries and vulnerable regions;
- from large scale donor-like projects to small scale development efforts, designed and managed by branches in the operating national societies;
- from a project focus to comprehensive partner relationships integrating developing activities and institutional development;
- from merely using the branch-structure and volunteers in operating national societies as vehicles for development efforts to developing partnerships between branches in the developed countries and branches in poor countries, aiming at the promotion of democratic values and practices and the respect for human rights within the overall framework of civil societies;
- from welfare approach to empowerment and advocacy;
- from focusing on the physical aspects of disaster prevention to utilising the global coverage and the local presence of NGOs for building civil societies taking the branches in areas of tension as the point of departure;
- from separate operations to integration and programming for development.

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## **Part C**

### **SEARCHING FOR METHODS**

#### **6**

##### **INTRODUCTION**

Part C moves away from impact issues to focus on methods and approaches of assessing impact. It is divided into two chapters. Chapter 7 summarises the methodological approaches used in the donor- commissioned studies. Chapter 8 looks at methodological issues beyond this narrow cluster of studies. Most of the chapter summarises the information provided in the country studies; however it also makes reference to some additional literature, highlighting not merely interest in the issue of methods and methodologies but also the fact that this interest extends well beyond the confines of what NGOs themselves are doing both individually and in groups.

There would appear to be five clusters of conclusions emerging from this discussion. First, and as just noted, there is considerable interest across donors, NGOs and the wider research community in evaluation and evaluation methods. Some ten years ago outside the United States (where there has been a far longer tradition of interest in, and practice of evaluation of PVO development initiatives), most interest in NGO evaluation was probably focused within the official donor community rather than within and among NGOs. This has changed: today, there is widespread and growing interest in evaluation and evaluation methods among many NGOs and within the linked and wider research community.

Secondly, however, there is far from unanimity about how to evaluate NGO development interventions. In part, this can be traced directly back to two of the main conclusions arising from the discussion of impact: that the impact of discrete projects is usually profoundly influenced by the wider context, and that development is an immensely complex process. Thus uncertainty about impact and the relevance of its differing causes ripples through into uncertainties about methods of assessing it. In part, too, as discussed most fully in Chapter 8, uncertainty about how to evaluate arises because NGOs are involved in a variety of different types of development intervention, many of which are ill- suited to more orthodox/traditional approaches. Additionally, however, differing views about methods arise because of differing views about the "why" of evaluation. If the purpose of evaluation is to provide an ex-post assessment of achievements to date, then the process of evaluating is likely to be different from evaluation whose purpose is to deepen understanding of what has happened in order to enhance future performance. Together, these different factors and influences provide at least some of the explanations for the fact that there is both so much activity focused in trying to develop and use indicators (qualitative and quantitative) with which to judge impact, and so little evidence of a growing consensus on the appropriateness and use of more "holistic" indicators.

Thirdly, and relatedly, it would appear that there is probably as much, if not more, experimentation within the NGO and linked research community focusing on new and different evaluation methods than there is within the official donor community. But this does not imply that it is only donors who need to learn from and listen to NGOs, and not vice versa. In particular, it is apparent that a growing number of NGOs have seen merit in, if not, in some cases, the necessity of addressing some of the mainstream issues which donor evaluations have long considered to be essential tools of evaluation: the focus on achievement against objectives, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. But to the extent that these lessons/insights are being absorbed and, to an increasing degree, accepted by NGOs - though there remains some *vigorous* criticism of the use/misuse of such approaches - interest and debate have moved on to the less tangible and quantitative aspects of evaluation, around which debate, discussion and research are now increasingly focused.

The fourth conclusion is that both the debate and discussion of evaluation methods and experimentation tend to be focused predominantly on larger and more medium-sized NGOs. The evidence suggests that far more smaller NGOs, and even CBOs, *are* involved in evaluation, especially different forms of self-evaluation, far more than one would suspect from reading documents housed in donor organisations, or even within northern NGOs. Yet, they tend not to be involved in, or able to take part in and make use of many of the approaches being debated and discussed. In part, this is because of ignorance, rooted in failures or gaps in communication, but, in part, it lies in an inappropriateness of methods for the smaller organisations. Smaller NGOs often do not want to become involved in more complex and sophisticated methods because the time, money and human resources required would often change the nature and size of the NGOs involved, perhaps eroding the very attributes in which their (potential) successes are rooted, not least their smallness and the flexibility this provides.

Fifth and finally, it would appear that in spite of much talk about partnerships between donors and NGOs, between northern and southern NGOs and between southern NGOs and CBOs - the closer one reaches down to the immediate beneficiaries at the grass-roots the more vocal is the complaint that the flurry of activity in relation to evaluation and evaluation methods continues predominantly to be a top- down externally-driven exercise. Large gaps remain both in relation to sharing written reports and discussing conclusions with beneficiaries. Such gaps reinforce the view that those beyond view evaluation more as an audit to ensure that funds are well spent than a process dominated by the desire to learn in order to enhance future impact. This is not only a complaint which northern NGOs make about donor-commissioned evaluations; it would appear to be a complaint which southern NGOs make about northern NGO evaluations and which community-based organisations make about southern intermediary NGOs.

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## METHODS AND APPROACHES IN DONOR-COMMISSIONED STUDIES

### 7.1 Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to summarise the main methodological approaches used in the ten donor studies whose views on impact were summarised in Chapter 3. The studies not only shared a common purpose - to assess the development impact of NGO interventions funded, in part, by donor funds - but shared a common approach. This entailed selecting a sample of projects to examine across a number of countries, undertaking country and project visits which involved discussions with a range of stake-holders, analysing data and writing up reports. In most cases, the projects chosen for examination were not based on a random cross-section selection, but rather on mutual agreement between evaluators, which effectively meant that NGOs had a (potential) veto on what would be evaluated, leading to an (acknowledged) bias in favour of projects perceived to be more successful. In most, but not all cases, discussions took place with the beneficiaries. Many of the studies (the Australian, Canadian, Danish, Dutch, Finnish and Swedish) also involved the gathering of data and information beyond the confines of the smaller number of projects selected for closer scrutiny, often through sending out questionnaires, supplemented by interviews.

Though broadly sharing a common approach, the detailed methods used varied from study to study, often quite markedly, though it is possible to group the studies into three clusters. The first group consists of a small number of studies which used the least rigorous approaches: methods are loose and open-ended, or not discussed in any depth in the respective studies. They would include the main Norwegian study, whose focus lay far more in discussing macro-level issues and the wider historical context rather than the impact of specific or small groups of development interventions, the New Zealand studies and the Finnish study of NGO projects in Tanzania.

The second group encompasses the majority of donors' studies: the Australian, Canadian, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, Swedish and UK studies.<sup>1</sup> What all these studies have in common are methods of evaluation rooted in wider OECD approaches to evaluation, examining and assessing impact in relation to the four major building blocks of more orthodox aid evaluation: relevance; efficiency; effectiveness and sustainability. Additionally, however, most of these studies have also assessed impact in relation to two cross-cutting issues, gender and environmental impact, as well as in relation to some of the core attributes which NGO development interventions are assumed to have, most notably poverty reach and impact; innovation and flexibility and replicability. Another common theme running through this group of donor studies has been the attempt to assess capacities and capabilities of the organisations implementing the projects examined. In most cases this meant an assessment of management and administration, and in some cases a wider assessment of institutional

characteristics.

Some of this particular cluster of studies have tried to assess impact in relation to additional criteria. Thus, the Australian study tried to assess impact in relation to the appropriateness of the technology used, while the Swedish and Danish studies viewed the projects and programmes through the prism of democracy and/or human rights issues. Additionally, some of the studies (the Canadian, Danish and Swedish studies) not only tried to assess the development impact of the projects examined, they also assessed the projects in relation to the extent to which they were in accordance with the overall principles or purposes of the respective official aid programmes. A number of these studies - the British, Dutch, Finnish and Swedish studies - tried to look at impact within a country context, commonly asking what difference the funded NGO projects and programmes of the respective donors made to the development problems of the country taken as a whole.

Third and finally come the European Commission and United States studies. The Commission's studies are difficult to classify because the methods and approach tend to differ from study to study. In contrast, the United States' studies all share with the second (majority) group an approach which attempts a high degree of rigour and one which focuses on the core questions donor evaluations try to address: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. However they differ from this group and are put very much in a category on their own for two reasons. The first is that they generally have not tried to assess NGO development interventions in relation to cross-cutting issues (gender, the environment and democracy/ human rights issues). But, most importantly, they stand out as studies which not merely have tried to make assessments against particular indicators but, as illustrated in §7.2 below, they have made use of different clusters of indicators with which to assess impact.

Overall, one of the most important reasons why studies have adopted different approaches would appear to originate in the terms of reference (TOR) given; in most cases these have been extremely detailed. The (confidential) German studies have been the most notable exception here, providing more open-ended TOR asking for comprehensive assessments with regard to all relevant aspects of development policy.

In contrast to the differences outlined, almost all the studies *share* three characteristics. Firstly, the TOR set the scene for anticipating exceedingly high expectations of what can be achieved, particularly what can be said about development impact. In quite sharp contrast, the tone of the conclusions is usually cautious and tentative, arguing that it is difficult to come to firm and decisive conclusions because of extreme time constraints, limited funds and the paucity of hard data. This lack of quantitative data is clearly extensive and deep-seated: it is mentioned in all the more rigorous studies, encompassing a lack of base-line data, a lack of monitoring data, and a lack of data with which to

compare project performance or beneficiary impact. For example, while most of the studies pinpoint the issue of cost-effectiveness and stress its importance, they point to data inadequacies which prevent rigorous and objective assessment being made: in almost all cases benefits are not rigorously assessed, in many cases cost data is not collected. Quantitative data inadequacies led to most evaluations focusing on more qualitative data, though it is important to add that most of the studies stressed the importance of using qualitative approaches, not just because of the absence of quantitative data but because the development interventions examined could not be assessed comprehensively without such an assessment, *regardless of the quality of the quantitative data available*. Almost all studies made some comments about the inability to come to firm conclusions because of lack of time, or lack of funds to undertake more rigorous analysis - or both. Most of the second group of studies were commissioned with the intention (or hope) that the conclusions drawn from a sample of projects selected would provide the basis for making generalisations beyond these particular projects. Yet most of the studies caution against making such generalisations.

The second characteristic shared by the donor-commissioned studies is that while most of them describe in detail the specific factors against which they assess impact, they provide very little detail about precisely *how* they arrive at the judgements made. Thirdly, and relatedly, where the studies do address the issue of how they come to judgement, most refer to the role and importance of *personal* judgement. The Australian study was unique in expressing concern about this, arguing that 'greater emphasis was placed on professional judgement and unverified data than is desirable for full-scale project evaluations' (page B6). The upshot is that, by and large, and with the exception of the first American study and, in some respects, the first British study, these donor-commissioned studies provide far less in the way of detailed methodological insights than might be inferred from the extensive comments and judgements made on impact: while the better studies list the factors against which judgements are made, there is a paucity of information detailing how these judgements were made. More specifically, the donor-commissioned studies do *not* advance knowledge greatly in relation to how to assess impact, how to undertake cost-effectiveness analysis with minimal data, how to assess NGOs' ability to innovate, how to assess NGOs' flexibility, or how to undertake a gender or environmental analysis of NGO development interventions.<sup>2</sup>

The final issue to be raised in the introduction to this chapter concerns the question why is it that a large number of donors have commissioned studies on the impact of the NGO development interventions they have funded, except for two of the country case-study countries - Belgium and France. Why is this so? According to the Belgian and French country case studies (Appendices 1 and 4), there would appear to be two main reasons. The first, and most important, is that in aggregate terms the amounts of donor money channelled to NGOs for development work has been quite small. In the case of France, this explanation is, in part, confirmed by the country/geographic studies undertaken of all French



aid: these studies provide no data or information on NGO activities in these areas funded by donor money. Secondly, because there would appear to be little difference in view between donors and NGOs on the purpose and methods, there was felt to be little need for the donors to initiate independent evaluation assessments. Thematic studies have been commissioned though it is argued the quality of these has not been very high.

The rest of this chapter discusses a number of methodological approaches and issues in more detail, giving examples from the different donor-commissioned studies.

## **7.2 Judging impact**

As noted above, influenced particularly by the detailed TOR written for the specific studies undertaken, methodological discussions in the different reports focused predominantly on the list of questions to be addressed. Within the group two cluster of studies listed above, some focused on quite a small set of issues. For instance, the Canadian study addressed four: rationale; impact; effectiveness and efficiency. However most others in this cluster also explicitly included the issue of sustainability which, for almost 20 years, has dominated USAID sponsored assessments of PVOs.<sup>3</sup> As the following examples illustrate, the Australian, Swedish, first British and United States studies provide the greatest details on impact assessment methods used.

### **7.2.1 Australia**

The Australian study used nine assessment criteria against which to judge impact, most of which are common to wider, non-NGO evaluations.

1. Has the project been successful in achieving its stated and implicit objectives?
2. Were there any unanticipated benefits or negative effects?
3. If poverty alleviation was an objective, how successful was the project in improving the economic status of the beneficiaries?
4. What was the impact on and involvement of women?
5. What was the impact on the environment?
6. To what extent did the project foster self-reliance and community initiative?
7. Are project activities or benefits likely to be sustainable without further assistance?
8. Were the projects financially viable?
9. Overall, did the projects produce enough benefits to outweigh the costs of implementation?

These questions were assessed and classified within the framework of

seven possible responses:

1. Little or no achievement of desired outcome.
2. Some achievement but not sufficient to be considered satisfactory.
3. Partial but satisfactory achievement of desired outcome.
4. High or complete achievement of desired outcome.
5. Project exceeded expectations.
6. Insufficient information to make a judgement.
7. Question not relevant to project.

### **7.2.2 Sweden**

The Swedish study assessed impact in relation to four question-clusters:

1. Project assessment in relation to the achievement of direct and immediate objectives.
2. Project assessment in relation to the achievement of additional near-term objectives.
3. Project assessment judged in relation to factors beyond the project, including institutional and policy issues, as well as comparisons with non-NGO development efforts.
4. Broad-based assessment in which NGO achievement beyond the discrete project is viewed in relation to broader contextual criteria.

In order to assess their achievement in relation to their immediate objectives, the projects were assessed against the following three criteria: how closely they conformed to core stated objectives for which Sida originally agreed to provide state funding; the degree to which they are succeeding, or have succeeded, in achieving their stated objectives; and how the benefits achieved relate to the costs outlaid. Additionally, each project was assessed against nine criteria, whose composition was rooted in a mix of the over-arching purposes of Swedish aid and assumed strengths of NGO development interventions:

1. The extent to which the project was assisting the poor and, in particular, the extent to which it was assisting the poorest.
2. The extent to which the intended beneficiaries had participated, and were participating, in different aspects of the project.
3. The extent to which gender issues had been incorporated into the project, in both its preparation and while running, as well as the nature of the project's impact on prevailing gender relations.
4. The extent to which environmental factors were considered in

designing and executing the project, and what the environmental impact of the project is and has been.

5. Evidence from the projects/programmes assessed of the impact of Swedish technical personnel: their importance, their training of local people, the potential for their replacement and lessons learnt.
6. The extent to which the interventions funded have been innovative, have exhibited flexible and adaptable characteristics, and the extent to which they have been, or have the potential to be, replicable elsewhere.
7. The extent to which pre-project assessment took place prior to start-up, the extent to which, and the methods by which, ongoing project monitoring has taken place, and whether final evaluation has taken place or is planned.
8. The extent to which the projects reviewed could be considered sustainable.
9. The extent to which issues related to democracy and human rights have been considered in drawing up and executing the project, and ways in which the projects, in practice, enhance democracy and particular human rights.

### **7.2.3 The first British study**

The first British study differed from the other studies in two main respects. Firstly, sufficient funds enabled the different project evaluations to be undertaken over a far longer period than in probably all the other studies, ranging from at least two and up to four weeks for each project rather than half a day to 2/3/4 days more common in most of the other studies. Secondly, a detailed description of the methods used was published. These featured a number of attributes.

The attempt to distinguish between project outputs and outcomes and impact, reflected in the question 'Has the change in economic status of the beneficiaries been due more to the impact of the project than to the influence of other non-project factors or vice versa?'.

The attempt to form judgements by testing, refining and verifying these by discussions with different stakeholders: beneficiaries, NGO staff, government officials, other NGOs working in the vicinity and non-beneficiaries.

Downplaying the gathering and analysis of data, especially if it proved time-consuming and if it was likely that conflictual data and judgements could not easily be reconciled.

The attempt to view projects through the eyes of the beneficiaries,

achieved by a mix of the time spent in the project area and utilising techniques and tools developed in social and anthropological analysis. <sup>4</sup>

#### **7.2.4 The United States studies**

What is striking about most of the United States studies has been the manner in which, and the confidence with which, they have assessed PVO projects using specific indicators, in spite of encountering the same sorts of data limitations and constraints of the other donor studies. The first, and most rigorous, United States study (in 1979) assessed impact by focusing on and trying to address four questions: are PVO activities resulting in development benefits; are these benefits accruing primarily to the poorest members of the population; will project benefits be sustained when PVO activities are phased out; and are PVO activities cost-effective in terms of potential spread and replicability? It attempted to judge impact in three different ways: through examining the direct benefits generated by the commitment of PVO resources, standardised for differences in project costs (the benefits); by assessing the potential that those benefits will be sustained after the donor's resources are exhausted or withdrawn (benefit continuation); and assessing the prospects for future development in related activities by the same participant population based upon the success of the present project (benefit growth). As with all the other studies, this one suffered from time constraints and from little to no base-line data. Undeterred, it focused on qualitative data which, mixed with personal judgements, led to scoring assessments against established indicators.

In terms of benefits, the study assessed the number of direct beneficiaries and estimated the dollar value of the benefits of the different projects per beneficiary; it then estimated the annual recurring costs per beneficiary and subtracted these when it was assumed these were potentially payable; finally, it assessed the project costs per beneficiary and calculated (estimated) the ratio of benefits to cost. If projects were not strictly economic ones then the economic benefits were assumed and assessed.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of benefit continuation, the study used the following three indicators and scoring system.

1. *Local organisations and project decision-making.* It gave the following scores/ratings: no organisations exists (0); participants newly organised (1); organisation has assumed some decision-making functions (2); organisation fully responsible for the project (3).
2. *Participant contributions to the project.* A distinction was made here between projects requiring service/budget support and

those needing infrastructural support, for which scores of 0 to 3 were made respectively. For service budget support: service provided free (0); formal subsidy of the project (1); participants' contributions partly cover costs (2); they cover all costs (3). For infrastructure: no contribution, paid labour (0); labour on food for work basis (1); cash/labour contribution on more than one occasion (2); cash/labour on ongoing basis (3).

3. *Adequacy of project-related mechanisms for mobilising savings.* This was rated as follows: external subsidy required for continuation (0); local resources adequate, but no mechanisms to mobilise them (1); sufficient local resource mechanism exists but is unproven (2); resources can be tapped by current mechanisms (3).

In this instance, the scores given were not only the best judgement of the evaluators, but they were predictive judgements of what it was assumed would happen in the future. This was equally true for the three indicators developed to assess benefit growth. These were: the adoption of practices recommended by the project; evidence of individual farm or household level modernising improvements; and evidence of the adoption of new activities beyond the project undertaken at the community level.

A more recent example of the use of indicators in the United States comes from the Office of Private Voluntary Cooperation's Strategic Plan for 1996 to 2000. This focuses, in particular, on sustainability indicators. These are defined as 'those which would lead OPVC to believe that services initiated by PVOs and their NGO partners will continue once OPVC funding has ended' (p.53). At minimum, programmes must sustain at least 50 per cent of the service coverage level achieved during the period of OPVC support, with service delivery provided by a US PVO or through its local partner.

### **7.2.5 Verification initiatives: Canada and Australia**

As discussed more fully below (see §7.3), these donor-commissioned studies have been carried out by groups (often large groups) of evaluators, including external evaluators. One question this raises is why NGOs cannot undertake these evaluations for themselves: they are likely to cost less. In this context two of the donor studies, the Canadian and Australian, are of interest because of the way they undertook similar sorts of experiments which compared the views of NGOs and their staff concerning a range of impact-related issues with selected 'expert' groups.

The Canadian approach was to ask the Canadian NGOs to rate

themselves and their projects by responding to particular questions. The results obtained were then compared with the assessments made by two groups of people: first a team of 21 consultants who had evaluated NGO projects; and second, the staff of the NGO division. Overall, while the results of this exercise revealed a high level of consistency, this lay in NGOs allocating higher scores than the external team in terms of judgements made about different performance criteria.

The Australian approach was to use what the report termed the 'self-verification of NGOs' or the 'verification procedure'. This worked as follows. First, the NGOs were asked to assess their own projects in relation to specified criteria (listed above). Secondly, the review team went out to visit projects in order to undertake field assessments and make their own judgements in relation to the same criteria. Thirdly and because these field visits only embraced some 1 per cent of all projects funded and were thus viewed as too small a sample upon which to draw wider conclusions, a further 10 per cent sample of projects was selected and assessed by the review team by means of reading the file documentation of projects. This process led to the review team grouping answers into two categories: those in which similar assessments/ratings were made, and those in which marked differences were recorded. The results were as follows:

**Areas where NGO self-assessment was verified**  
in relation to...

- self-reliance
- sustainability
- impact on women
- meeting women's needs
- environmental impact

**Areas where NGO self-assessment was not verified** <sup>6</sup>  
in relation to...

- poverty alleviation
- financial viability
- involvement/participation of women
- cost-effectiveness

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<sup>1</sup> The (confidential) German studies would be included within this cluster.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>2</sup> As discussed in Chapter 3, there is some discussion about how to assess and approach the issue of sustainability.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>3</sup> The Canadian study did discuss sustainability, nothing that 'more precise measures will have to be developed if sustainability is to mean something' (p. xii).

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>4</sup> See Riddell (1990). Not all the projects evaluated succeeded in achieving the objectives of the methodology described: see Riddell and Robinson, 1995.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>5</sup> The clarity and simplicity of the methods used contrast, often quite sharply, with the simplicity of the assumption made. For instance, in a project providing agricultural advice to farmers, it was assumed that the advice would lead to increased crop yields, that one third of farmers would adopt the new practices, applying these to two acre plots yielding an additional three bags of maize.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>6</sup> The analysis shows the relative differences in scores, not necessarily different views about performance and outcome. Thus, for example, the NGOs rated the involvement/participation of women in their projects the lowest; however, the external team rated performance here even lower.

[\[text\]](#)

### **7.3 Participatory evaluation and who evaluates**

As discussed in Chapter 8 below, the issue of participatory evaluation is one of major interest to NGOs. The purpose of this section is to summarise the role and importance attached to participatory evaluation in the donor studies and to discuss who has been involved in these donor-commissioned evaluations.

Two generalisations can be made about the donor studies in relation to participation in the evaluation process. The first is that the issue was far from unimportant in *all* of the studies. At the extreme and negatively, no cases were found of evaluations deliberately undertaken solely by external evaluators and not involving stake-holders at the project level. More positively, the intention was invariably to involve some degree of interaction with some of the project stake-holders. This does not mean that interaction with all stake-holders consistently took place. In particular, shortages of time and money frequently meant that, in some cases, project visits never took place and assessment had to depend upon written documentation, more often that discussion took place with the staff of the NGO implementing the project, but not with the project beneficiaries. However, in the

majority of cases there were varying degrees of interaction with the project beneficiaries. Indeed, a recent study commissioned by the DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation singles out donor-commissioned studies of NGO development interventions as those which, among all donor evaluations, *did* employ participatory techniques.<sup>7</sup>

The second generalisation is that there were great differences in the ways that the various evaluation studies approached the issue of participation. Two aspects need to be considered: first, the role of the beneficiaries in the evaluation, and second, who did the evaluations. As noted, though the intention was often to involve the beneficiaries in the evaluation, even when this occurred it differed greatly in terms of both the nature of the involvement and its degree of intensity. Least common was the experience of the first UK study which attempted (and usually succeeded) in the main evaluators staying at the project site for a prolonged period, not infrequently well beyond a week and sometimes for over two weeks.<sup>8</sup> More common were visits of 2/3/4 days. Outside the development tourism visits of an hour or two, the usual form of interaction with the beneficiaries was to use some sort of focus-group discussion using open or guided questions. More often than not, too, discussion with beneficiaries was accompanied by discussion with the staff of the NGO implementing the project. What other roles did the beneficiaries play in the evaluation process? Most commonly, very little: they were not involved in determining the terms of reference of the studies and were not on the evaluation teams. In summary, while involvement with the beneficiaries frequently occurred, it was often in an (artificial, perhaps strained) context where hurried answers were sought to hurried questions.

This leads to the question of who undertook the evaluations. Most commonly, these donor-commissioned evaluations were undertaken by experienced evaluators, most with expertise in undertaking NGO evaluations, but usually not people from the NGOs concerned. Additionally, the studies were usually conducted by teams of evaluators. Some, like the Australian, Canadian, the United States and a number of the EC studies, were dominated by nationals of the donor country. However, a more common practice was for the external evaluators to join with local consultants and undertake joint evaluations. This occurred in the case of the Dutch, Swedish, Finnish, first British and Danish studies. Additionally, though far rarer, some of the studies (the first UK study) used local NGO personnel. Uniquely, the Finnish study of NGO projects in Tanzania consisted entirely of a team of Tanzanian consultants. The involvement of local evaluators was more common when the evaluations were broken down into discrete country initiatives. In most cases, the southern evaluators were in the minority; however the four Swedish country studies comprised four external and five local evaluators. One of the New Zealand studies (the Tonga study) is interesting as it was realised early on that a Tongan was needed and was co-opted into the team. Finally, the second UK study comprised various 'teams': the core teams consisted of donor, or donor-selected, and northern NGO personnel. However, many of the (12) project evaluations included consultants and NGO employees from the south. The outcome was often quite sizeable teams: one evaluation of two Christian Aid projects in Burkino Faso comprised a team of no less than 10 people!



In terms of gender composition, the teams varied. However, in almost all cases the majority of teams comprised more men than women, and more often than not the team leader was male. For instance, the Australian team consisted of five people, two women and three men, the peer review team consisting of six people, three men and three women. However, at least one of the second UK evaluations had a majority of women evaluators.<sup>9</sup> Importantly, too, it has become increasingly common for donors to assess potential evaluators in relation to gender sensitivity. Thus, it is increasingly questionable to assume that a team with more males will *necessarily* address gender issues with less rigour than a team with a majority of females, even if sometimes it may be necessary to have not only women but evaluators who are culturally acceptable to the beneficiaries at the project-level in order to help address at least some of the major problems likely to arise when seeking opinions and judgements on externally-promoted development interventions.<sup>10</sup>

A final point to make in this discussion links the issue of participation back to the analysis of impact discussed in Chapter 3. There it was noted that there is often a gap between NGOs' expression of the importance of participation and the practice of participation on the ground. Thus, one reason why participatory evaluation has been constrained in many donor-commissioned studies is rooted in the non-participatory nature of many projects, or in the weak degree of participation manifest in the projects under examination. In many respects, there is a contradiction in trying to undertake a participatory evaluation of a project which exhibits few participatory characteristics.

#### **7.4 Implications of the donor-commissioned studies in terms of methodology**

The purpose of this section is to summarise what the donor-commissioned evaluation studies have said about impact evaluation and especially about methods and approaches, supplementing this information with some details of subsequent decisions. The comments made here are far from complete; in some cases they are supplemented by information provided in the country and donor case studies and discussed in the next chapter (Chapter 8).

Perhaps surprisingly given the space given in these reports to detailing the weaknesses and inadequacies of prevailing gaps in knowledge about impact, the different reports do not place much emphasis in recommending that major additional donor-commissioned studies be undertaken. Rather, the recommendations made fall into three groups or clusters, most of which do not make recommendations specific to methodological questions. First, in relation to donor-commissioned studies, recommendations are made for the introduction or expansion of sectoral studies (see the Danish and Dutch studies). Secondly, a number of studies caution against too much donor involvement in evaluation and in demands made. The best examples of this type of conclusion come from Denmark and the United States. For Denmark, a recent paper from the NGO Unit argues unequivocally that 'the responsibility for evaluation of projects implemented by NGOs rests with the NGOs themselves'. For the United States, a 1993 study is highly critical of donors imposing unnecessary burdens on NGOs in terms of providing information (to them) at the project level, notably in terms of inputs. Thus (US, 1993: 22 and 23):

*The USAID approach (project implementation) establishes a burdensome system of surveillance which stifles creativity and diverts energy from important long term program goals... Audit requirements tend to be burdensome, expensive and preoccupied with trivia. They discourage small PVOs and act as a disincentive to United States organisations in working with indigenous organisations... The pre-occupation with INPUT management and the detailed review and approval of inconsequential management decisions needs to be replaced with a substantive concern for the achievement of fundamental goals.*

This quotation raises a question about the *purpose* of donor-commissioned studies, in this case the extent to which evaluation for NGOs should be perceived as part of the process of auditing the funds allocated by donors - in order to ensure that public funds are being and have been well spent - as against evaluation perceived as part of a process of learning: learning, for instance, about impact and how to improve it, or, perhaps, learning about methods of evaluating development interventions.

It would seem from the earlier comments in this section that the thrust of many of the donor-commissioned studies is to question the dominance of evaluation-as-audit. However, if the purpose of evaluation is to learn more about impact and to share information on methods, then there is little evidence to suggest that this has been the thrust. Consequently, at least by default, there are quite strong grounds for suggesting that it *has been* the audit function which has been dominant. There are three reasons for this. Firstly, it has been the exception rather than the rule for the results of these donor-commissioned studies to be shared with the NGOs implementing the projects, though in some cases steps have been taken to discuss the results with the donor-based NGOs. A good example would be the Swedish study which was discussed at a three day seminar with the evaluators in Stockholm and was followed by a series of NGO-led initiatives. Secondly, there has been very little interchange with NGOs to discuss the methods of evaluation used in these donor-commissioned studies. And thirdly, the fact that many donors have highlighted the need to build capacity of NGOs and to focus more on thematic rather than over-arching studies of impact tends to confirm the view that it has been the audit function of these over-arching evaluations which have been important.

These considerations lead on to a deeper question concerning how NGO development interventions should be judged. The 1993 US study, just quoted, gives pride of place to the *results achieved*: 'Attempts to develop a performance based evaluation system should be redoubled. The existence of such a system would encourage a shift away from an excessively heavy emphasis on INPUTS to an emphasis on RESULTS' (1993: 24). To the extent that evaluations are linked more strongly to audits than to learning processes, this points to an additional link between results and funds allocated. It also suggests that the future for evaluation methods lies predominantly in devising more and more accurate methods by which to assess the results achieved. Such a view is well summarised in the Canadian study (page xiv):

*The quality of work done by NGOs should be major concern behind NGO funding. Funding should be based on a performance measurement system using specific*

*performance indicators and each NGO should be provided on a confidential basis with the results of its evaluation.*

The implication of evaluation methods developing within this perspective is that NGO development interventions will be more likely to be judged in the same manner, and on the same basis as official aid projects, or even comparable private sector interventions. In short, assessing and managing by results tends to accentuate similarities between NGO interventions and other development agents rather than any real or potential differences. What is thus particularly interesting is that movement towards and support for a more results-oriented perspective is by no means shared across all the donor-commissioned studies. In particular, a number of studies, especially the Australian, and subsequent policy thrusts of other donor agencies such as the Norwegian, Danish and Dutch, severely caution against adopting a results-oriented approach as the *sole* basis for judging and evaluating NGO development interventions specifically because learning, experimentation, risk and innovation are likely to be proportionately under-emphasised and undervalued. Thus, the Australian evaluation team (page 44 and 45):

*believes that if NGOs were to lose their autonomy in programming and policy dialogue, they might become increasingly like government agencies. While this might make the relationship more harmonious, the Review Team believes that in time NGOs would come to offer the Government LESS as development partners.*

*NGO capacities for innovation and developing new areas and new forms of development cooperation may diminish as they increasingly follow the requirements and objectives set by Government. The more NGOs follow AusAid's agenda, the less they are likely to forge their own ideas, objectives, strategies, as has been claimed for some Danish NGOs...*

*AusAid does not expect private companies to harness the voluntary resources of the Australian community, to represent the interests of the wider community in policy development processes, or to undertake a third sector role. It doesn't expect private companies to provide community-to-community links. It is therefore important for AusAid to set an overall policy framework for its NGO program which seeks to minimise the risks to NGO independence while retaining accountability for the use of public funds.*

For its part, and in similar vein, Denmark has raised the possibility of support to smaller and innovative activities in order to ensure that the particular thrust and orientation which NGOs bring to development is not lost or excessively diluted. <sup>11</sup> Likewise, the first (1990) New Zealand study argues that 'constraints of language time and technical skills among third world partners increases the risk of not being able to maintain effective accountability systems including monitoring and evaluation. However, this is a risk that government must be prepared to take...' (page 56).

These examples of different perspectives presented in these donor-commissioned studies in relation to the purpose and role of NGO development interventions provide an entry point for a discussion of evaluation methods beyond the confines of this narrow cluster of

studies, a discussion - as Chapter 8 reveals þ that raises additional key questions about methods and approaches.

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7 Development Studies Unit (1995:24 and 25)

*Despite participation rhetoric, there is little evidence of participation in evaluation, even in evaluations of NGO support. NGO evaluations, however, did to a greater extent than evaluations of core-support, bilateral programmes, employ participatory techniques... The NGO evaluations... seem to employ somewhat more innovative criteria and methods than those for mainstream programmes.*

[\[text\]](#)

8 The UK/Zimbabwe study comments that in one instance the beneficiaries wanted to know why the evaluator was still there long after the time when 'other evaluator' would have 'long gone back to town.

[\[text\]](#)

9 The gender breakdown given here is based on partial and incomplete information: the team writing this Report has not been able to trace the gender of all evaluators listed in the donor-commissioned reports.

[\[text\]](#)

10 It has been argued that it is never possible to obtain sufficient trust in short-term one-off evaluations.

[\[text\]](#)

11 Such an initiative can be traced back to the following comment in the Danish report (page 116):

*Many NGOs have expressed that it is difficult to be innovative and 'take risks' if projects are based on Danida money. They feel that the Danida system in spite of recent improvements is too rigid...*

[\[text\]](#)

## 8

# METHODS AND APPROACHES BEYOND THE DONOR-COMMISSIONED STUDIES

## 8.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide some preliminary comments on methods and methodological approaches related to NGO development interventions beyond the core group of donor-commissioned studies. The chapter starts by outlining some of the (differing) attitudes NGOs have towards donor- initiated evaluation studies, focusing

especially on the methods used. It then goes on to discuss the ways that NGOs go about evaluating their development interventions; this discussion provides a comparison of NGO methods and those used in donor-commissioned studies. In both parts of the chapter a conscious effort is made to discuss any differences between northern and southern NGOs and between southern intermediary NGOs and community-based organisations.

The data and information contained in this chapter are drawn predominantly from the 13 country and donor-based studies commissioned for this Study, reproduced as separate appendices. This is supplemented in various places with references to other cited studies which have been informed by a more rapid reading of the majority of the texts referenced in *Appendix 14*. As it was necessary to keep this chapter fairly short and concise, *most* of the issues discussed here constitute extremely truncated bites of longer and more detailed examples and wider discussion. Hence it is strongly recommended that readers interested in the specific topics raised or examples given delve into the relevant appendices for more complete information. A further point to make is that the sample of countries selected for closer scrutiny is not representative of either the north or south. Thus, the conclusions drawn here need to be viewed as tentative and to be confirmed, refined or even challenged as and when more extensive information is obtained.

This chapter highlights a number of common themes and trends across countries and the wider literature. These include the following:

- There is both a growing interest among NGOs in the issues of evaluation, and growing recognition of the need to undertake evaluations. It is especially larger NGOs in both the north and the south, and medium-sized NGOs in the north, which are most heavily involved in trying to develop evaluation methods. While there would appear to be quite good networking between specific northern and southern partners, and more generally between larger northern and large southern NGOs, the medium-sized NGOs appear to be more isolated.
- NGOs are undertaking a series of rich and varied, but often uncoordinated, activities to try to deepen knowledge about methods of evaluation. These include the *whole range* of issues raised in the donor-commissioned studies (efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, gender, the environment, etc.). One set of approaches concerns undertaking thematic studies. A second set of approaches involves activities focusing particularly on indicators, cost-effectiveness, capacity building and gender. Most progress seems to have been made in relation to more narrow and more economically-focused methods, least progress in relation to social sector activities.
- Yet, there is more evidence of this type of action among large and medium-sized NGOs than among and across smaller NGOs. Nonetheless, the evidence gathered suggests that, though much remains undocumented and unwritten, self-evaluation by smaller NGOs and CBOs not only exists but in some areas is flourishing.
- There is widespread acknowledgement of major data problems, as well as poor to inadequate systems of monitoring. These suggest that NGO-initiated impact evaluations tend to be as difficult to undertake as donor-commissioned evaluations.

- The country studies provide numerous examples to support the view that NGOs are involved in an array of different forms of development activity, some of which are likely to be strong candidates for impact assessment, others less. In particular, development interventions which focus on activities which aim to enhance livelihoods both over the longer term and less directly than discrete, concrete and more tangible projects are unlikely to be able to produce firm data and conclusions on impact assessment, particularly with current assessment tools. These include a wide array of initiatives concerned with the following: consciousness-raising; solidarity support; supporting democratic organisations and initiatives; working to support and defend human and other rights (land rights); protecting and fostering community organisations; capacity building; and more structurally-focused gender initiatives.
- Many southern NGOs and CBOs lump together and see little difference between donor-commissioned and northern NGO-commissioned evaluation studies. However, it is important not to make sweeping generalisations, not least because of quite extensive interaction between some northern and southern NGOs.
- In spite of some harsh criticisms of donor-commissioned evaluations, it is quite widely acknowledged, not least by southern NGOs, that both donor and northern NGOs have a legitimate interest in undertaking evaluations.
- Though there is considerable overlap with donor-commissioned studies in relation to the issues addressed in project evaluations, NGO evaluations tend to be coloured by three major concerns and differences:
  - i. In NGO evaluations, major emphasis is placed on the need to incorporate more participatory methods into evaluations, including especially the need to incorporate the beneficiaries in the evaluation process, though there remains still a considerable gap between intention and practice.
  - ii. In NGO evaluations, major emphasis is placed on evaluation as a learning tool, thus the feedback of results is seen as of paramount importance.
  - iii. For many NGOs, evaluation is not merely seen as an integral part of appraisal and monitoring, and not to be separated from it, but is also seen as a part of overall strategic planning.
- Nevertheless, the case studies provided evidence of a number of donor-commissioned studies incorporating learning processes and leading to changes in project parameters.
- Among many northern NGOs, there is a growing interest in process and longer term engagement with communities, the outcome of which is to dilute the former dominance of focus on discrete projects. This has led to growing interest in evaluations and evaluation methods other than project evaluations. Yet here again, there often remains quite a large gap between intention and practice.
- Also among many northern NGOs, as well as donors, there is a growing focus on capacity building and institutional strengthening. The likely implications of this trend continuing are that both interest in and information about the impact of discrete projects will be further reduced.

Finally, the chapter draws attention to differences across countries in relation to attitudes to evaluation. Not only is there no simple NGO approach or attitude but the evidence

gathered thus far tends to lead to the conclusion that there is a greater spread and difference of view and approach to evaluation across NGOs in different countries than there is among donor agencies.

## 8.2 NGO views on evaluations

Whereas 10 to 15 years ago, especially among NGOs outside the United States, there was widespread ignorance about, and often hostility towards evaluations, the view of the vast majority of NGOs today is that evaluations are not merely useful exercises but important activities. Nonetheless, a small number of NGOs continues to be wary of the whole debate about evaluation, viewing it as a means of disempowering the poor.<sup>1</sup>

There is, however, a difference between support for evaluation 'in general' and support for the sorts of evaluation methods used in donor-commissioned studies. Though the evidence gathered here is far from comprehensive, it would appear that some of the harshest words for donor-commissioned studies come from southern NGOs. The loudest and most consistent critical voice came from the Kenyan study which speaks of widespread unease at donor evaluations because of their focus on upward accountability, their narrow focus on 'things' and their failure to involve the communities, and because of a fear that the perceived linked concerns with accountability and sustainability are viewed by some as a prelude to future radical disengagement. In marked contrast, however, the Senegal study found southern NGOs accepting of northern evaluations as legitimate exercises and making few criticisms of the methods used.

The Brazilian and Bangladesh studies provide less sharp and in general more refined attitudes, with NGOs consulted in these countries expressing the view that external (northern) evaluations were 'legitimate', but that they suffered from major weaknesses. The weaknesses identified included the following:

- their high costs;
- their dominant focus on the past and not the future;
- their limited scope;
- their lack of participatory approaches;
- their preoccupation with financial sustainability;
- their use of 'pre-packaged' methods which failed to embrace the complexities of different social contexts, and their failure to incorporate cultural and religious dimensions of the beneficiaries' lives; and finally,
- the fact that skilled evaluators were brought to visit projects but did not stay long enough to share their expertise with the project and local NGO staff.

But even these two studies differed in terms of some important perspectives. Thus, the Bangladesh study reported that in some cases NGOs were not consulted on the terms of reference of these external studies and were not usually involved in the selection of consultants, whereas the Brazilian NGOs reported satisfactory consultation and influence on both counts.

Shifting to the northern country studies, most of these reported high levels of interaction and cooperation between the respective donors and NGOs, arising from widespread agreement in terms of methods and approach - far more marked than differences and disagreements. The Belgian, French, Norwegian and United States studies, in particular, reflected this perspective, with the Norwegian study noting the direct influence which NORAD has had in moulding the evaluation approaches subsequently used by the NGOs. The Netherlands case differs somewhat from others within this group of countries to the extent that potential tension and disagreement over approaches tend to be minimised by the fact that the co-financing agencies are influential in deciding the national agenda and processes of evaluation that will be carried out. The Finnish study differs from this larger group of countries inasmuch as it indicates quite widespread interest in evaluation and evaluation methods but little evidence of interaction with the government either in terms of developing a common approach or, as appears more common elsewhere, in terms of the government encouraging NGOs to use a particular approach.

The UK case study stands out as different again, but in this instance in terms of articulating a range of different clusters of criticisms and concerns about the whole thrust of what are termed traditional/orthodox approaches to evaluation, and the attempt to draw firm policy conclusions from them. A number of these criticisms echo those heard from the southern country case studies. They are grouped into clusters relating to what evaluations have achieved and what they can be expected to achieve, to the role and place of evaluation (and evaluators) in general, and of different types of and approaches to evaluation in particular, and to the different ways the results of these evaluations can be used (and misused).

Thus, a first set of criticisms is that the data are inadequate to draw firm conclusions on impact and outcome, and the linked issues of effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability. Additionally, it is asked whether it is possible to use methods of evaluation which are rooted in economic analysis and accountancy and place strong emphasis on quantitative data, to evaluate community and social development projects whose outputs are likely to be less easy to measure. It is further argued that the failure of evaluations to provide reliable information on impact is rooted in the absence of baseline data and regular monitoring. Consequently, to the extent that increased attention continues to be given to evaluation and evaluation methods as discrete stand-alone exercises - as, it is argued, donors are increasingly doing - these same donors will be lured into thinking that the answers to impact questions lie predominantly in focusing on and attempting to draw answers from impact evaluations.

A second set of criticisms of donor approaches to evaluation made by UK NGOs is that they are biased towards a focus on discrete projects whereas, on the one hand, many NGO interventions need to be viewed as sub-elements of longer term and usually more complex *processes* of development, and, on the other, both project and process work are expanding in response to growing concerns with institutional and capacity building initiatives. These observations, and especially the comment about a sharper focus on capacity building, have strong resonances in some of the other country case studies, most notably the Norwegian and Netherlands studies.



A third set of criticisms focuses on the issue of accountability. Within this context, a vigorous criticism of externally-initiated and/or donor evaluations of UK NGO development projects is that they have been instituted largely as part of a narrow concern to ensure merely that the funds provided have been well spent. The criticism is not that it is wrong or illegitimate for project implementors to be thus accountable - no UK NGO has made such a statement. Rather, concerns are expressed about what is left out or eclipsed. Two issues are raised; the first concerns the need to focus on accountability downwards, the second concerns what many NGOs consider to be a far more important purpose of evaluation, namely to form part of a wider set of tools focused on learning in order to enhance future impact. External evaluations are seen as less helpful than, and often directly contrasting with, both participatory evaluations and self-evaluations, which focus far more on learning, learning tools and learning processes. At the very least, it is asserted that donors need to concentrate as much on evaluations which focus on learning and which attempt to address the accountability needs of the beneficiaries as on evaluations which meet the accountability needs of other stakeholders.

The final concern with donor-initiated and commissioned evaluations raised in the British case study concerns the growing emphasis placed on the results of development interventions, with impact assessments seen as a major new and growing data-source informing donors about results achieved. While no British NGO argues that results do not matter, a number contend that *assessing performance* by results achieved increases the likelihood that the *future funding* of NGOs will increasingly be influenced by comparisons of results achieved. This, it is argued, will tend to have the following adverse effects:

- NGOs will be driven to implement less risky interventions;
- NGOs will shift their focus away from trying to target poorer people (because these projects tend to be more costly);
- NGOs will be encouraged to undertake fewer experimental projects and to innovate less with new approaches and new ideas because of less certainty of the results likely to be achieved.

In short, the suggestion is that *judging* by results will lead to *funding* by results which, in turn, will encourage NGOs to 'play safe'. The effect is likely to shift the focus of NGO work more towards those of other development agents and to chip away at, if not eliminate entirely, the strengths and characteristics of NGO interventions in development. Part of this process is likely to see the establishment of NGOs set up and driven predominantly with a concern for achieving benefits at lower and lower costs with little regard for benefit quality.

It is important, however, to note that the Chilean case study draws attention to donor-commissioned studies which did not reflect the general thrust of these criticisms. Thus, during the Pinochet era the study comments that:

*When donors did organise evaluations, it was common practice for the NGO to participate in the selection of the evaluator or members of the evaluation team, the*

*methodology to be employed and at times participate in the evaluation process itself. By and large these evaluations were heavily qualitative and process-minded, and concerned less with issues of efficiency and effectiveness or development impact. From the donors' perspective, the evaluation served the useful purpose of gathering arguments to justify continued support for the NGO's work.*

The final point which needs to be stressed in this section is that regardless of the vigour of criticism made against particular types of evaluation, the UK country case study shares with both the other southern and donor-based case studies the universal belief that, despite differences in method and concerns with the misuse of the results, evaluations ought to take place.

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<sup>1</sup> As Howes put it (1992: 393):

Some exponents are openly hostile to evaluation in particular, arguing that it only appears to be a way of promoting greater efficiency, when its real function is to provide an additional means by which powerful external forces may exert political control over the poor.

[\[text\]](#)

### **8.3 Evaluation methods and approaches used by NGOs**

What methods of evaluation are NGOs either using or discussing and experimenting with? What is striking is that however vocal and extensive are the criticisms made against conventional/orthodox approaches, many of the issues raised in the donor-commissioned studies as appropriate for examination are raised and addressed in project evaluations undertaken or commissioned by NGOs. Thus it is not only donor-commissioned evaluations of NGO development interventions, but evaluations conducted by the NGOs themselves which focus on the following: assessment against objectives, and assessment in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. Additionally many (although fewer) evaluations assess impact in relation to gender and environmental issues.

However, there are two major differences continually emphasised in NGO literature on evaluation; these are the pride of place given to participation and the importance of learning. As the manual produced by SCF (UK) puts it, 'the emphasis should always be on evaluation as a learning process' and 'a participatory approach can be used to some extent in most types of evaluation' (SCF, 1995).

To what extent do the ways in which these specific issues are assessed differ? More specifically, do NGOs assess the achievement of objectives, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability in ways different from donor-commissioned

evaluations? It is here that it becomes difficult to make firm statements for two important reasons. The first repeats a central point made at the outset to this Report, namely that data inadequacies mean that it is still difficult to undertake project impact evaluations for the majority of projects. Secondly, comparisons between donor-commissioned and NGO studies in terms of methods used are exceedingly difficult both because of the paucity of detailed studies and because NGO evaluations tend to share with donor-commissioned studies the absence of detail when it comes to explaining precisely *how* the different issues were assessed.

### **8.3.1 Work on indicators and experimentation**

There are five features common to many NGO project evaluation approaches and methods that can be briefly mentioned here. The first is the almost universal concern with participatory methods. The second is a desire to find appropriate indicators with which to assess the different dimensions of impact. And it is here that often one sees and reads of NGO concerns with using and attempting to analyse quantitative data, especially when there is no attempt to provide and analyse qualitative data as well, linked to attempts to develop more 'appropriate indicators'. However, in this context it is also important to note that there would appear to be less concern with these issues among many United States' PVOs than among NGOs in most other countries.

A third feature is the manner in which some NGOs who are focusing on evaluation (but by no means all) have sought deliberately to incorporate evaluation work into a broader/wider framework. At the very least, this has entailed looking at evaluation within a wider continuum that embraces appraisal and monitoring, notably to address inadequacies in each. However, for some NGOs the framework includes wider issues such as strategic planning. In the UK, an example would be Oxfam UK/I, in Norway Redd Barna, in the Netherlands NOVIB, and in the United States, Oxfam America.

A fourth feature is that not merely are NGOs, especially the larger ones, involved in experimenting with developing the tools of evaluation, but many are deliberately trying to strengthen their own internal capacities to undertake evaluations.

The fifth common feature is the extent and number of different NGO initiatives embracing experimentation with, and linked to research into, evaluation methods. The case studies provide numerous examples of these initiatives; given their diversity it is not possible here to do more than merely refer to some of them. What is more, it is apparent that far more is going on both within the different case study countries and in other countries than this Study was able to document. Examples from

the case studies include:

- A four-country study initiated by ActionAid (UK): *Methods and Indicators for Measuring the Impact of Poverty Reduction Interventions*.
- A joint Oxfam UK/I and Novib study launched in 1995 to increase understanding of methods to define and measure the impact of development projects.
- A Norwegian study focusing on ways to measure the impact of food security initiatives.
- Dutch studies (by Hivos) focusing in part on how to assess the gender dimension of projects.
- A series of studies undertaken by graduate students in Finland focusing on different ways to evaluate projects especially of smaller, and often less experienced, NGOs.
- A succession of studies, many originating in the United States, developing methods to assess the impact of micro-enterprise projects, involving especially the development of indicators.
- The Kenyan study cites more than six specific examples of NGOs experimenting with new ways of evaluating projects - CARE, World Neighbors, ActionAid, Bread for the World and EZE - and describes in some detail a new participatory approach to impact assessment being pioneered by Oxfam UK/I in the country.

For its part, the Chilean study makes the following comments about innovations in evaluation practice in that country.

*Some of this has come from donors, some from NGOs, some from sectorally focused NGO networks (but not from general NGO networks), some from independent NGO consultants/evaluators and perhaps most significantly much of the more innovative thinking seems to be coming from the state: the new state that is now colonised by people who in the 1980s worked in the NGO sector. Among the emerging innovations the following merit comment: participatory learning and systematisation; work on impact indicators; work aimed at developing and adapting the use of logical framework analysis; and efforts at institutionalising impact-based evaluation.*

It is important not to note that donor-commissioned evaluations are more complex and rigorous than NGO-led or commissioned evaluations. As the Bangladesh study makes clear in its description of a major study published as *Beacon of Hope*, NGOs can and do mount highly complex impact evaluations. In this particular case, poverty impact was assessed using the following indicators: the material well-being of the member households; vulnerability and crisis-coping

strategies; and the institutional development of village organisations. In all, 2,125 households were surveyed, including 750 non-project households, 225 village profiles were undertaken of which 75 were non-project villages, and 24 village organisations were assessed in terms of their institutional capacity development.

The Chilean case study provides other southern examples of experimentation with indicators. It notes that there is a body of work evolving in Chile aimed at developing indicators for impact assessment, and that work in developing these has 'come at the NGOs' initiative rather than from the pressure of funding agencies'. Yet, confirming the evidence from the United States, it is apparent that this work has tended to be done by NGOs with *specific sectoral interests*. Thus, groups such as the Institute for Political Ecology (IEP) have sponsored events and projects oriented towards developing indicators for environmental impact and assessment, both at project and policy levels. Another example is that of Azul Consultants who have worked closely with REDESOL, a network of micro enterprise NGOs, with a view (in part) to developing indicators appropriate for assessing the poverty impact of micro enterprise work. Likewise, CEM, an NGO concerned with issues of gender in development, has worked on elaborating indicators for assessing the gender impacts of policy and also of more specific project interventions, while SODECAM, an NGO in Temuco closely linked to the Mapuche movement, has recently begun work on indicators for projects with indigenous groups (SODECAM, 1996).

### **8.3.2 Participatory evaluation**

As noted above, one of the criticisms made about donor-commissioned evaluations is the low priority given to participation in evaluation, while one of the apparent common attributes of NGO evaluations is the manner in which they highlight the importance of participation in evaluation. The case studies and the wider literature provide some comment on the nature and extent of participatory evaluation in NGO evaluations.

The first point which is made in many places is that there is still a wide gap between theory and practice. Thus, while almost all NGOs speak of the importance of participation and criticise donor-commissioned studies for the absence or low priority given to participation, there is far less evidence of participation in NGO evaluations than these comments would suggest (see Oakley, 1996 for a discussion of this issue).

The second general point to make is that the discussion of participation

often confuses two different issues: whether (all) evaluations should be participatory evaluations, and the precise role that the main beneficiaries (as well as other stakeholders) should play in the evaluation process. There is an important difference between beneficiary participatory evaluation - when the beneficiaries are involved in the evaluation process - and seeking out the views and opinions of the beneficiaries as a necessary part of the evaluation process. It is in terms of the latter that NGOs are largely in agreement. However, differences remain as to the importance to be attached to their views. At one extreme, it is argued that the views of the beneficiaries should always take precedence over the views of everyone else. Though this is held strongly by some NGOs, the evidence gathered for this Study would suggest that among NGOs this is very much a minority view. A more commonly held view is that the opinions of the beneficiaries are extremely important but that they should not necessarily, or always, be dominant.

Concerning participatory evaluation, there seems to be a growing consensus among many NGOs that there are limits to the extent to which it is possible to undertake participatory evaluations involving the beneficiaries. In particular, it is argued that it is far too ambitious to hope to involve the beneficiaries in evaluations especially if they have not been involved in either appraisal or ongoing monitoring, and particularly if they have been involved in neither. What is more, the available evidence (though it is certainly partial) suggests that this still seems to be very common.<sup>2</sup> But even if the beneficiaries have been involved from the outset, precisely what should be their role in the evaluation? Certainly there is little evidence gathered for this Study which shows precisely how participatory evaluation might be undertaken in practice. Indeed, a recent study which aimed to seek out and analyse examples of successful participatory practices concluded that examples were extremely rare (Martin and Quinney, 1994). One of the best examples of a form of participatory evaluation uncovered in this Study was the Oxfam UK/I project in Wajir, north-east Kenya. While the process was certainly participatory, the implementers conclude that it would be inappropriate to even attempt to undertake evaluations dominated by the beneficiaries, arguing rather that an effective process of self-evaluation is one that 'explicitly recognises and grows out from an acknowledgement that both the project staff and the intended beneficiaries are stakeholders in the activities being undertaken and both need to be involved in the process of assessment' (see Box A12.2).

Box 8.1, written by a southern (Kenyan) scholar, provides a southern perspective on the role and application of participatory evaluation,

explaining when and where it is likely to be most effectively used.

The Chilean case study argues that 'it is not entirely clear' why there is so little evidence of NGOs working with participatory approaches to evaluation. Yet it found some examples, one of which is the Centre for Education Research and Development (CIDE). CIDE requires all its own projects to have a strong evaluation component, and that this assessment be based in considerable measure on client participation. Interestingly, however, while CIDE has developed these approaches to evaluation, few NGOs have approached it for assistance in evaluating their work.<sup>3</sup> That CIDE has done this where other NGOs have not is probably related to its own characteristics. It is one of the smaller family of NGOs in Chile that call themselves 'academic centers', meaning they have as much a research focus as an action orientation. It is also primarily concerned with popular education and this thematic commitment to popular learning in turn fosters a concern for participatory approaches.

The final aspect of participatory/beneficiary evaluation to be noted is that the case studies confirmed the commonly-heard assertion that small NGOs and CBOs undertake various forms of self-evaluation. The Kenyan case study, in particular, found evidence of 'oral' self-evaluation (nothing written down) which stretched over a fairly long time period - weeks rather than days. Particularly interesting is the case of TAK, a CBO located in a Nairobi slum, both in relation to the sophisticated nature of the process of self-evaluation undertaken by the beneficiaries, and in the range of outcomes and conclusions which, it was assessed, would have differed quite sharply from the conclusions which professional/external evaluators would have been likely to have made.

### **8.3.3 Performance measurement: the case of the United States**

Thus far in this chapter, little mention has been made of the United States. This is not because of the absence of material, but because a number of initiatives deserve particular attention. For instance, the United States case study discusses at some length the development and use of performance measurement approaches. Thus, the majority of the PVOs contacted were developing their own performance measurement systems and were at various stages of identifying generic indicators against which to report. The time frame for identifying indicators and generating a sufficient quantity and quality of data to report against appears to be a minimum of four years.

Of particular interest was the fact that performance measurement was being developed by a range of PVOs, not just those organisations that

receive funding from the government. However, those that are less dependent on government funding were found to be taking a more participatory approach, identifying generic indicators and developing methodologies for their assessment, through the active participation of the local communities and partners with whom they work. The importance of flexibility was continually stressed by all those adopting performance measurement systems. Thus, performance measurement was viewed as encouraging locally defined indicators which would meet the information needs of project staff, partners and beneficiaries whilst 'passing up' data on key indicators to the country, regional and central office.

The United States' evidence suggests that the move to performance measurement has stimulated the development of more participatory methodologies for monitoring the impact of interventions. This is based on the recognition that impact is best assessed by those closest to it, including project staff, counterparts and local communities. The need for baselines for this work has also provided the forum for increasing participation during project design and the basis for interventions that are more appropriate to the needs and priorities of beneficiaries. Issues of particular interest during the current piloting of participatory methodologies concern 'who' participates and to what degree, as well as what types of interventions require participatory methodologies.

It is noted in the case study that performance monitoring and programme evaluations are complementary functions both aimed at improving organisational performance. Performance measurement plays a valuable role in monitoring progress towards the achievement of predetermined objectives, indicating 'what' is happening. However, evaluation provides the 'why' and 'how', the analysis of the causal relationships between project outputs and impact. The foundations for this work are the data derived from performance measurement. It is intended that evaluations will be undertaken on a more strategic basis, identifying areas of specific interest that would warrant more detailed investigation. The case study found that a number of PVOs were already undertaking strategic evaluations in collaboration with partners in academia, international NGOs and the wider PVO community. The intention is that this collaborative approach provides both the basis for more comparative work, analysing the relative costs and benefits of alternative approaches, and the technical and financial resources needed to undertake more rigorous, longitudinal studies.

It was envisaged by many of the PVOs that monitoring and evaluation will require a mix of methodologies. Where the approach and mode of the intervention are more tried and tested, and causal relationships widely understood, more rudimentary methodologies will suffice.



However, particularly innovative projects and programmes may require more rigorous methodologies if they are to convince governments, donors and other PVOs of their effectiveness and the merits of replication. Such an approach would require that monitoring and evaluation plans and costs are adequately integrated into project and programme proposals at the outset.

What is perhaps most clear is that an increased stress on performance measurement has forced many organisations to reevaluate their past procedures, giving greater priority to project and programme design. Baseline studies have provided the basis for systematically investigating the needs and priorities of beneficiaries and their distribution across socio-economic, gender and ethnic groups, an area that has not been given sufficient priority by either donors or PVOs in the past. Baselines have also served as an entry point for local participation, as the Andean Rural Health Care approach illustrates (Storms *et al.*, 1994). It is expected that these will be the ingredients for more informed and appropriate interventions and, therefore, that performance measurement will not only provide the forum for more effective evaluations but more effective interventions. Time and, perhaps, performance measurement and evaluation, will tell.

#### **8.3.4 Cost-effectiveness**

Although the cost-effectiveness of NGO development projects and programmes has frequently been seen as an issue of interest more to donors than to NGOs, the case studies provide evidence not only of growing interest in the issue but of far more cases of NGOs using, or trying to use, cost-effectiveness approaches as part of the package of tools to measure impact. Thus, cost-effectiveness has been a long-standing issue in the United States: a cost-effectiveness manual was produced as long ago as 1983 (Nathan and Associates, 1983). However, the issue has not been confined to the north: the Kenyan case study refers to a cost-effectiveness manual produced in that country 10 years ago (Brown, 1987). The studies also produced evidence of more recent experimentation, such as WorldVision UK which goes beyond the simple *cost per beneficiary* to produce a *cost per unit benefit* ratio which incorporates a quantification of benefits (see Box A7.7).

However, it is equally important to put these examples into a wider context. A recently published study commissioned by the UK's ODA (*Linking Costs and Benefits in NGO Development Projects*) argues that although there is considerable and growing interest in knowing more about cost-effectiveness, and a (small) number of NGOs are beginning to focus on different aspects of cost-effectiveness work, with some developing specific cost-effectiveness indicators, hardly any NGOs

undertake cost-effectiveness analysis, and a large majority do not even regularly collect basic cost information and are unaware of cost-effectiveness methods (see Riddell, 1997).

Building on widespread (though by no means universal) support among NGOs to look more closely at ways of undertaking cost-effectiveness analysis, the study concludes that at the most general level it ought to be a priority for NGOs to seek to ensure that the development initiatives they fund or implement are undertaken with the objective of achieving the greatest benefit at the least cost. In other words, cost-effectiveness ought to be part and parcel of all NGOs' *modi operandi*. However, it goes on to add that it is not, and will not be, possible (or even helpful) to prescribe or even recommend a universal method for all NGOs of undertaking cost-effectiveness analysis. The approach and type of analysis to be undertaken by NGOs will depend upon a range of issues likely to include the following: the nature, scale and time-frame of the development intervention being appraised or implemented; the relative importance of beneficiary participation; the nature, size and resource-skill base of the NGO involved; the time period involved; the level of resources available for undertaking the analysis; and, last but not least, the purpose of undertaking the cost-effectiveness analysis.

The study suggests that an NGO's ability to undertake more complex cost-effectiveness analysis is likely to be determined by the NGO's skills, abilities and resources to appraise, monitor and evaluate its development work more generally. In other words, it becomes less and less helpful to try to isolate debate and discussion about cost-effectiveness from these wider issues. This in turn suggests that NGO weaknesses in terms of their inability to undertake cost-effectiveness analysis are more likely to be resolved by addressing *organisational* than *project-specific* weaknesses. This is because failures to use cost-effectiveness approaches are usually symptoms of broader weaknesses within particular organisations. Thus it is argued that a narrow concentration on cost-effectiveness, including efforts to try to improve the quality of data necessary to conduct cost-effectiveness analysis, will be unlikely to address these deeper and far more important problems. The greatest requirements of NGOs are likely to involve initiatives:

- to enhance the capability and capacity to understand better the development problems of the communities NGOs choose to work with, including the nature, appropriateness, size, duration, and cost-effectiveness of discrete projects they may wish to implement and promote;
- to strengthen the management, institutional capacity and skills of the NGOs implementing particular projects and programmes;

- to facilitate greater networking of NGOs with like-minded organisations, especially NGOs of similar size and capabilities and working in the same sectors or with the same methods; and
- to strengthen internal learning systems within those organisations.

It is argued that a useful way of focusing more precisely on different methods and approaches to cost-effectiveness that particular NGOs might use is to cluster NGO development initiatives along a continuum of different types of interventions. At one extreme would be grouped NGO initiatives and interventions which are carried out among beneficiaries in communities with little to no NGO project experience, where it is difficult (and/or costly) to obtain the clear views of the beneficiaries and where these initiatives are undertaken for the reason that they are experimenting with new/different approaches to development in general or in relation to particular sectoral goals. These are likely to be innovative interventions and could be expected to be high-risk initiatives.

At the other extreme would be clustered NGO interventions undertaken with beneficiaries and within communities which have had long experience with NGOs. Here the needs of the beneficiaries are clear and non-conflictual, and the justification and purpose of intervention lie more in meeting the core needs of people which would otherwise not be met, predominantly using 'tried and tested', rather than new or different, methods and approaches. It is for this (second) cluster of initiatives that one would expect NGOs to make use of (as well as to contribute data and information to) particular and focused cost-effectiveness methods, usually at the *project level*, making use of both 'tried and tested' indicators of performance and cost analysis based on accumulated knowledge of previous methods and approaches. These sorts of interventions would be likely to include simple service delivery projects, replicating similar initiatives executed in the same country or by the same or similar types of NGO. They would also include more technical credit, enterprise or economically-focused development projects, interventions whose *raison d'être* and purpose lie in bringing specific economic benefits (including skills) to the beneficiaries, again using techniques and approaches which have been tried and have achieved some success.

Finally, it is suggested that NGOs be encouraged to tap into wider (non project-specific) networks and databases which provide information on cost-effectiveness methods and indicators. This is likely to be of greatest practical importance for those clusters of projects and programmes which involve replicating service delivery initiatives and those involved in more narrow enterprise and financial service

delivery.

### **8.3.5 Institutional assessments**

The main conclusion of the cost-effectiveness study, namely that the best way to enhance the cost-effectiveness of projects is to focus on ways to enhance organisational strengths, has far wider applicability. Indeed, another area where there would appear to be increasing common ground between some donors and many NGOs is in growing agreement over the need to move away from an exclusive focus on projects to a wider focus which looks at the institutional capacities of the NGOs implementing specific projects.

This comes out most strongly in the Netherlands and Norwegian case studies where the respective donors are encouraging an array of non-project assessments -programme assessments, organisational assessments, joint programme evaluations, country programme and country assessments. These case studies are consistent with the initiatives of other donors, such as Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom which have undertaken capacity assessments of NGOs and NGO umbrella organisations, frequently as a prerequisite for receiving block-grant funds. In the United States, the interest in institutional development occurred somewhat earlier and has developed significantly: 'institutional development with third world affiliate organisations increasingly is becoming a significant component of US PVO activities' (Bureau for Food For Peace and Voluntary Assistance, 1989).

The issue that this chapter is trying to illuminate is the approach used to assess and evaluate these institutional and capacity building initiatives. The country case studies provide some (but not much) data on methods. An exception is the approach used by Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) to assess its institutional development programmes in East Africa. This lists the following four objectives and indicators:

Objective 1: All staff members of NCA partners have a common understanding of their own organisation's vision and mission.

Indicator: Number of partners where the organisation's vision and mission statements can be articulated and explained by any staff member of the organisation.

Objective 2: Partnership development: common understanding is established between NCA and partners regarding focus, priorities, rights and obligations

for the partnership.

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| Indicator:   | Number of partners with a Letter of Understanding with NCA which explains the above qualities.                                   |
| Objective 3: | Leadership and management skills: partners have developed professional and contextual competencies in leadership and management. |
| Indicator:   | Observable leadership and management progress in the partner organisations.  |
| Objective 4: | Local resources mobilisation: increase in the partner organisation's financial resource base.                                    |
| Indicator    | Level of reduced dependency on external funding for incurred costs.  |

These indicators share a strong subjective element with the first United States donor-commissioned study (Barclay *et al.* 1979). One way to try to reduce this would be to increase the number of indicators and link their progress to more objective achievements. An extreme case where this has been tried is the health sector umbrella-type NGO initiative, the Bangladesh Population and Health Consortium (BPHC) NGO project which has developed some 100 different indicators with which to assess progress in the NGOs supported in terms of institutional strengthening. A recent assessment of this approach concluded that the system was cumbersome and overly focused on an administrative or implementation view of management in which a 'capacity built' NGO is one which can acquire donor funds, use them to meet goals and account for them. Thus, the indicators used were judged to be very mechanical (see Shepherd, 1996).

Though the present Study has focused more on project assessments and methods than on institutional assessments and methods used, the same generalisation can be made, namely that the institutional assessments reviewed fail to explain what methods they used to assess performance, notwithstanding the listing of a few indicators in some studies. The European Commission study *Evaluation of EEC-NGO Cofinancing in relation to Institutional Support for Grassroots Organisations in Developing Countries* (de Crombrugghe *et al.*, 1993) focused particularly on financial issues, not least on why the funds available were under-utilised and tended to fund recurrent costs rather than institutional strengthening.<sup>4</sup>

The EC study makes reference to 10 indicators drawn up in an INTRAC study for Africa, but cautions against their transference to Africa because of their roots in western models (Fowler, Campbell and Pratt, 1992). They are:

- the operational mode or mode of intervention of the NGO, that is the

- way in which the NGO proceeds to realise its development intentions;
- general administration;
- the funding of the organisation;
- financial management;
- internal communication;
- the form in which decisions are made;
- personnel management;
- the way in which a sense of responsibility is inculcated into the executives as a whole;
- the degree to which the environment and context are taken into account;
- methods of follow-up/scheduling/evaluation.

If it is difficult to assess the capacity building and institutional development initiatives of NGOs, then the United States 1989 publication *Accelerating Institutional Development* (Bureau for Food For Peace and Voluntary Assistance, 1989) helps to explain the difficulties encountered. It is a synthesis of 28 organisations in 18 countries where assistance was focused on institutional strengthening. The difficulties appear to lie predominantly in the more open-ended and process approaches to institutional development: an open-ended sort of institutional development in which each local programme develops more or less in its own way, pursuing a pattern that cannot be specified in advance (page 10).

A more recent - and still quite rare - synthesis study of capacity building in Africa focused narrowly on natural resources management (Brown, 1996). The purpose of this synthesis was to assess whether capacity had been enhanced through project training, technical assistance and information support activities. The methods adopted are of particular interest as the projects to be assessed suffered from the familiar weaknesses of lack of baseline data and project complexity. The approach used was also open-ended, subjective and not aimed at rigorously demonstrating 'anything particular about the project'. It used '*ex post facto nonexperimental designs*... emphasising changes at the cognitive level (attitudes and knowledge) translated into changes at the behavioral level as measured by "expert" judgements... consistent with social science methods of evaluating the impact of training activities' (page 10). The method involved assessing the extent to which eight hypotheses linked to capacity-building had, or had not, been confirmed.<sup>5</sup>

Two findings from this study in particular are relevant to the current discussion. The first is that NGO capacity is generally weak across Africa and the second is that the limited capacities of many NGOs not only impede the achievement of project objectives (in this case national resources management) but they also impede capacity building initiatives, especially those grounded in rapid empowerment and bottom-up approaches. In other words, the shift to a greater focus on institution and capacity building would appear to be the correct decision to take. What is particularly interesting about the study's conclusions is

that they, too, strike a strong resonance with the conclusions of the cost-effectiveness study, namely that

*...better monitoring and evaluation would improve implementation of capacity building and Natural Resources Management initiatives, as well as make it possible to measure progress more accurately (page 51).*

### **8.3.6 Networking and collaboration**

A final set of issues raised in the country studies concerns the importance of networking among NGOs in order to learn more about evaluation methods and approaches. A number of specific points are raised. Firstly, there is a consistent and wide consensus that networking, especially networking to know more about evaluation methods, is desired by both NGOs in the north and NGOs in the south. Second, and relatedly, knowledge of new methods and evaluation approaches appears to have been discovered by NGOs from a wide variety of contacts: by southern NGOs from other southern NGOs, by southern NGOs from northern NGOs, by northern NGOs from southern NGOs and by both northern and southern NGOs from research centres. A particularly rich exchange takes place across particular networks: religious-based (denominational) networks covering northern and southern NGOs work well as do similar networks across northern countries in particular. NGOs do not often claim to have learnt much about evaluation methods from donors, though, as noted, they use many similar techniques and approaches. Similarly, there seems to be little flow of information back from NGOs to donors which is certainly regrettable given this Report's assessment that there may well be more experimentation going on across the NGO communities in terms of trying to develop qualitative techniques than between and amongst donors. Another significant finding (revealed by the absence of data) is that the greatest gap in networking and in lessons learnt appears to lie between small NGOs and CBOs and larger NGOs, and that gaps appear to be greater between small and larger NGOs than between larger and medium-sized NGOs across the north/south divide. Another conclusion is that, although networking is clearly seen as advantageous to learning more about evaluation, it appears to be more the exception than the rule. A number of country studies, such as the Kenyan one, commented on the lack of sharing of information about methods.

The northern case studies provide a clearer picture of the need for more information on evaluation methods; however, the exchange of information between NGOs is mixed. At one extreme is the UK experience which has established an evaluation network, REMAPP, though this seems to be far better at providing information across the largest British NGOs than across the smaller ones. More widespread is the complaint that networking is 'difficult'. Certainly large gaps remain and they often tend to be in the areas where NGOs feel they either have most to contribute or most to learn, especially in relation to participatory evaluation and learning processes. This certainly explains why





gathering, interviews, the reading of reports and the attempt to analyse and synthesise the data obtained. The gaps and weaknesses of the Study are most pronounced in four areas. The first concerns the coverage of developing countries: there are clearly many initiatives going on in other countries which are not incorporated in the analysis. It is highly likely that more extensive analysis would lead to a refinement of the different conclusions contained in this chapter. The second type of gap relates to the paucity of information gathered from smaller NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs). A major reason for this was that, in the majority of cases, it was not possible for the research teams to move beyond the main (urban) centres. However, the (little) evidence obtained þ much of it from discussions with key individuals þ suggests that there is considerable, if patchy, evaluation and self-evaluation activity taking place among smaller NGOs, and this clearly needs to be explored further and understood if the aim is to obtain a whole and rounded picture of the impact of all NGO development activities.

Thirdly, it was realised early on that the Study had a choice of going for either 'spread' or 'depth' and, notwithstanding the point just made about its *lack* of coverage in relation to the potentially available countries and data sources, it chose to veer more towards 'spread', attempting to cover quite a large number of countries. The main reason for this approach was to try to embrace as much material as possible in order to make a more informed judgement about potential future studies, their scope and direction. The main weakness likely to arise was that studies would be read without sufficient understanding of the context and without sufficient knowledge of whether the NGOs whose development interventions were being assessed were in agreement with the judgements made, and if not, precisely why not. Fourthly, and relatedly, though the Study was built on experiences in 12 different countries, it is likely that a trawl of data and experiences from other countries, such as Canada, Japan, Italy and Ireland from the donor/northern side and from countries such as Indonesia, the Philippines, Trinidad and Jamaica, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali and South Africa from the south, would produce additional data and information to enrich the findings of this Report.

However, it should also be pointed out that this particular exercise was never intended to be the last word on the linked issues of the impact of NGO development interventions and the methods and approaches used. It was to be based predominantly on evaluation material: the Study has confirmed the initial view that there are other initiatives and other literatures which throw light on both impact and the development of methods well beyond the confines of evaluation studies.

These introductory remarks provide the overall framework for the more detailed comments made in this chapter. Its main purpose is not so much to make firm and comprehensive conclusions, as it was the overriding thrust of the main sections of the Report, Parts B and C, to provide conclusions on impact and methods based on the syntheses of the different issues covered. Rather, the purpose is to draw together the conclusions, some quite tentative, emerging from these different syntheses in order to highlight lessons learnt and, in some cases, to make some specific recommendations. As the discussion in the chapter shows, the issues addressed cover quite a wide range of themes across a number of different areas.

## 9.2 Dangers of generalising

Over time, official aid has been required to expand into new and different areas - shifting between project and programme aid, and focusing on different activities and different sectors. Increasingly, donors have become wary of studies which attempt to aggregate all aid from all countries and make generalisations about its impact. Relatedly, as aid has expanded into different areas, focusing often quite narrowly on undertaking different tasks, it is well recognised that the methods and tools used to assess the impact of these interventions varies and needs to do so.

If there is caution about generalising in relation to official aid, this Study confirms the need to be equally - if not more - cautious about making generalisations concerning NGO development activities. NGOs engage in development activities at many levels, undertaking different types of activity with different purposes, time frames and expectations. Clearly, not all NGOs are involved in discrete projects targeted at specific groups of poor people. Indeed, while it is likely that this type of engagement still forms a major part of many NGOs' activities, the relationship between many northern and southern NGOs is changing fast, influencing the importance attached to discrete projects and their evaluation. Increasingly, the purpose of northern and donor interventions with southern NGOs is to help to strengthen the institutions which work with poorer groups. A first conclusion to be drawn is that one needs to be cautious about assuming that NGO development interventions *should* be judged in relation to changes in the living standards of the beneficiaries: in some cases there are no clear beneficiaries, while in others the purpose is not to enhance and improve living standards.

But the problems about generalising are likely to be even more profound than this. As noted in Chapter 7, many donor-sponsored studies were commissioned in the hope that the conclusions drawn from the sample of projects selected would provide the basis for making generalisations beyond these projects about the impact of NGO development interventions. In contrast, most of the commissioned studies conclude by cautioning against making such generalisations.

Nevertheless, one of the interesting outputs of the Study is the assembling and clustering of evidence about impact. Chapters 3 and 4, in particular, both comment on and provide evidence on a wide range of issues, even if the discussion continually warns that many of the conclusions drawn are based on flimsy evidence, some of which is consistent and quite firm, some contradictory. What need to be highlighted here are the potential dangers of misusing this (firm and consistent) data and information, especially by generalising willy-nilly beyond the data presented.

Thus, this Study reinforces the view that it is dangerous to make generalisations about NGOs and about different projects or types of project which work, even when focusing on the more traditional discrete project approach. There are three reasons for caution.

- The first is that, in parallel with recent studies on the impact of official aid (see Dollar and Burnside, 1996), this Study confirms that one of the most profound

- influences on impact is the wider context within which projects are placed. Thus, what works or fails in one context (place *or* time) will not necessarily work or fail in another.
- The second reason for caution is that project performance is usually profoundly influenced by the capacity and capabilities of the organisation implementing the project and by the amount and duration of the funds available. This provides another reason for needing to seek explanations of project performance 'beyond the project'.
  - Thirdly, while many projects addressing problems of poverty may *look* alike and have similar objectives in terms of trying to alleviate or eliminate the poverty of particular groups of people, they can be designed with different expectations. For instance, it would be mistaken to compare, and judge one project which tries to improve the health status of women using tried and tested methods with another which is experimenting with new approaches in the hope of potential replication and scaling up. This reinforces, again, the view that it is too simplistic to judge NGOs simply on the basis of results achieved: often one needs to dig deeper.

These perspectives lead one to make four generalisations. Firstly (to the delight of philosophers), that it is dangerous to make generalisations. Secondly, that context matters. Thirdly, that agents and organisations implementing projects matter; and fourthly, that in coming to judgement and deriving policy conclusions from the evidence, purpose and expectations matter.

There is, however, an important distinction between arguing that it is dangerous to make generalisations and arguing that everything is unique and as a result, no lessons (or very few) can be learnt from examining projects or groups of projects. Clearly, as the review of evaluation reports makes clear, there are poor-performing NGOs achieving limited success where many of the causes of such performance lie in reasons which are subject to influence. What is more, a particularly interesting aspect of the analysis presented in Chapter 3 concerned the identification of not only some general trends, but also exceptions to most generalisations. Thus, many NGO projects fail to reach down to very poor people - but a number do; many are not financially sustainable - but a number are; many fail to address structural factors impeding the advancement of women - but a number do; and so on. This suggests that caution needs to be exercised in making hard and fast generalisations even when most of the evidence points in a particular direction.

### **9.3 Ignorance and the need to improve access to knowledge**

The Study has shown that access to knowledge is an issue of major significance and importance, manifested in distinct, though linked ways. Firstly, there is widespread ignorance about activities and studies, including evaluation studies, which are going on or have been completed. Large data and information gaps exist across and sometimes within many organisations and institutions. Thus, there is ignorance within donor agencies of all the work which has been done or is being done on NGOs which sheds light on impact and impact methods. There is ignorance within donor agencies of what northern NGOs are doing. There is ignorance across the north of many initiatives which southern NGOs

are undertaking, and ignorance of the content of southern reports written and not sent to the north. There is ignorance within smaller NGOs about debates and discussions on evaluation methods going on in larger organisations. While networks and information flows have been expanding across different NGOs, they still tend to be clustered among like-minded NGOs or within specialist NGOs engaged in specific, and often narrow, types of development intervention: there is frequently ignorance of what is happening in other networks and beyond. There is ignorance across donors and intermediary NGOs of self-evaluations taking place, greater ignorance if these self-evaluations are oral exercises. Finally, there is ignorance and often lack of interest in information 'out there' which might inform wider development interests 'back home'. For example, ignorance among donors of what NGOs are doing in the area of NGO evaluation not only means that donors are less than fully informed about NGO impact than they need be, but they are also often failing to use the information 'out there' to learn lessons which could be useful to their work outside the direct field of NGO work.

Secondly, not only is the existence of these data gaps itself a contributory factor to the duplication and replication of activities and the perpetuation of poor practice, but the failure to interact and pool knowledge is also a major impediment to both the enhancement of knowledge about impact, and the development of methods and approaches which work. <sup>1</sup> This is because research and investigation into methods which work carry with them a certain momentum; the knowledge that others are involved in a common enterprise stimulates additional interest and is likely to reduce the overall time to achieve some sort of significant breakthroughs.

One result of donor ignorance is that many within donor agencies are unaware of both the interest in evaluation and the wider range of evaluation activities which NGOs in the north and south are currently undertaking. If there was a belief in donor circles that the main body of evaluation work on NGO development interventions consists of donor-commissioned studies, then one of the results of this Study should be to dispel that belief. The reason for highlighting ignorance and data gaps is simply that knowledge matters. Consequently, the thrust of this Study is to recommend that urgent steps are taken to enhance knowledge and information exchange among the range of different stakeholders. What is more, in most areas there is a need to enhance data flows in a *two-way direction*. Thus, donors need to know more about NGO activities and NGOs need to know more about donor activities; northern NGOs need to know more about southern NGO activities and southern NGOs more about northern NGO activities; there needs to be a better two-way flow of information between researchers and NGOs, as, too, between researchers and donors.

In short, there is a pressing need to expand and create a more reliable and comprehensive database of evaluations which have been carried out (by donors and NGOs), of research and related activities which throw further light on impact, and of major initiatives to address gaps in methods of evaluating impact, including results achieved. As Chapter 4 illustrates, significant amounts of information can now be accessed by a judicious use of the internet, a source whose importance is bound to continue to increase. Overall, there is a need:

- for donors and especially large northern NGOs to enhance their internal data-capture mechanisms;
- for donors to enhance their knowledge of what both northern and southern NGOs are doing in the areas of impact and impact methods, not only to identify gaps and deepen their appreciation of current and planned activities, but also in order to feed the information and insight more widely into their own agencies;
- for northern and southern NGOs to know more about activities beyond their own organisation or more traditional networks;
- for donors and larger northern and southern NGOs to know more about the impact of smaller NGO and CBO activities and the methods they use to assess their own activities;
- for donors and larger northern and southern NGOs to use their greater power and influence to ensure that data and information is packaged up in forms useful to smaller organisations and communicated 'downwards' in a manner which encourages mutual learning and not domination.

The main ways in which donors can address some of these data gaps are firstly, by acknowledging the importance of networking and secondly, by providing funds either for new networks or the careful expansion of existing ones. While, ideally, there is merit in addressing all data gaps, priority ought to be given to using donor funds to bridge particularly important data gaps and to encourage networking where there is currently a particularly severe lack of funds, and where information exchange can be enhanced most cost-effectively. Based on these principles, an initial suggestion would be for donors (and northern NGOs) to give particularly priority to bridging information gaps in two areas: between larger and smaller organisations, and in relation to increasing knowledge of methods and approaches and conclusions of self-evaluation exercises. For their part, and additionally, it is apparent that donors would benefit both from enhancing information flows within their own countries and exchanging this information between themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'methods and approaches which work' is used deliberately instead of a term like 'new ideas'. What is important is to develop and broadcast methods which work, many of which may well be old ideas or ideas linked to traditional methods. Discussions suggest that there is a certain drive to experiment with approaches that are new, but which may well be inappropriate.

[\[text\]](#)

## **9.4 Enhancing impact**

Important though it is to know more about impact studies which have been carried out, the Study shows that, on its own, improving the evaluation database would be an insufficient response. There is an additional need to enhance and improve the *quality* of the data: a repeated and consistent conclusion drawn across countries and in relation to all clusters of studies is that the data are exceptionally poor. There is a paucity of data and

information from which to draw firm conclusions about the impact of projects, about efficiency and effectiveness, about sustainability, the gender and environmental impact of projects and their contribution to strengthening democratic forces, institutions and organisations and building civil society. There is even less firm data with which to assess the impact of NGO development interventions beyond discrete projects, not least those involved in building and strengthening institutional capacity, a form of development intervention whose incidence and popularity have grown rapidly in the last five years.

Within this overall context, there are notable sub-sectoral and thematic differences. Thus, impact data tend to be better in relation to interventions clustered around more economic-type projects (credit, saving, income generation). They tend to be worst the closer one moves to the part of development where objectives and purposes are less tangible, such as building capacity and democracy, or empowerment and advocacy work, and the more the development intervention concerned focuses on processes and issues such as reducing vulnerability to risk. Between these two extremes lie social sector development projects. Those involved in delivering services where there are more tangible purposes, such as providing clean water, schooling or clinic facilities, usually produce firmer impact data than those involved in areas such as training, increasing health awareness or improving the quality of services.

These differences are important because they go beyond some more immediate gaps and causes of gaps in data. Thus, on the one hand, poor impact data are due to the absence, or poor quality, of appraisal, monitoring and data-gathering. In such cases, some, perhaps major, improvements in methods and processes would certainly help to enhance knowledge. Yet, on the other hand, it is clear that a major additional cause of data gaps and the lack of firm data with which to judge impact lies in the nature of the development intervention, the difficulty of agreeing and deriving firm indicators with which to judge impact, and the importance of qualitative processes.

What is particularly interesting about the data and information reviewed for this Study is that most attention would appear to be focused on trying to address the latter cluster of issues, not least by discussing and testing the use of different indicators with which to assess and judge the impact of the less tangible types of development intervention. Least attention would appear to be focused on the project appraisal, monitoring and evaluation (PME) end, and on initiatives to encourage NGOs to introduce a more systematic and ongoing appraisal and monitoring system. Clearly both are needed, and NGOs and donors need to work together in networks and, in some cases, on their own to try to improve the quality of data. However, as noted in §9.2 above, it is additionally necessary to pool far more information about what is done and what is planned in order to focus efforts, build momentum, and ensure that current waste and duplication are minimised.

Important though it is to focus on improving the quality of data with which to try to assess impact, the studies reviewed also show that on their own, enhancing the processes of PME and moving to a closer consensus on what indicators are useful in assessing different types of project will not automatically lead to better impact. False expectations

must not be built up: if they are, they increase the risk of retreat from support for the (major) developments in impact assessment which have occurred to date.

Thus, impact assessment is a means of judging projects or other forms of intervention. Improving the *means and methods of judging whether the project's immediate purpose or wider impact have been achieved* is different from *improving the chances of the project's purpose itself being achieved more rapidly*, more firmly, more durably, or more efficiently and effectively. As the analysis of causes of project success and failure in Chapter 3 ([Box 3.3](#)) suggest, projects can be enhanced, in part by focusing on factors which are potentially open to manipulation such as staff quality, beneficiary consultation and participation, management quality and ensuring sufficient funds. But other factors - such as a range of external factors (sector and type of intervention, geographical area, location, attitudes of elites, whether the national or local economies are expanding, contracting or stagnant) - are far less amenable to influence. Notwithstanding the importance of this distinction, it is of more than passing interest that a number of the country studies suggest that there may well be a closer relationship between working to enhance the quality of impact evaluations and achieving project objectives and wider impact than might initially be thought. A main argument here is that NGOs which are conscious of the need to assess in a more rigorous manner the results of their development efforts tend also to be increasingly interested in analysing, addressing and trying to reduce those factors identified as weaknesses. In other words, there may be a stronger, albeit indirect, link between working to improve the quality of impact data and project performance. To the extent that this link continues to be confirmed, it provides yet another reason to justify the growing interest of both donors and NGOs in impact, and in promoting better ways of assessing it.

This leads to a related question: for what purpose is impact data being improved? The studies reviewed juxtapose two sharply different answers: to assure donors that the funds allocated have been used effectively, and to feed back into and improve performance in the future. However, they also suggest that there are wider differences in terms of rhetoric than there are differences in practice, though certainly not to the extent of arguing that identical ways of assessing impact are used and ought to be used to satisfy external funders, implementing organisations and beneficiaries. The discussion in §9.6 below, confirming a view, interestingly, that was articulated more strongly by southern than by northern NGOs, suggests that there are valid and legitimate reasons for undertaking impact assessments for different stakeholders. What is of interest here is that external stakeholders are usually keener advocates of using more quantitative and externally verifiable indicators with which to judge impact, whereas internal stakeholders, be they staff from the NGO implementing the project or the ultimate beneficiaries, are usually keener to use indicators which are in some senses 'owned' by them, even if they are not easily verified externally. Thus, if, as this Study suggests, there is donor support for funds to be focused increasingly on ensuring that NGOs have the capacity to undertake evaluations *for themselves*, this would tend to suggest that a greater push should be made to encourage analysis of the processes which lead to greater ownership of home-grown indicators (even if they are identical to indicators grown in many other homes). This

would be more important than trying to develop firmer clusters of quantitative and externally-verifiable indicators.<sup>2</sup>

## 9.5 Enhancing methods

If one of the main conclusions of this Study is that we are still searching for more information and higher quality data with which to assess impact, a second is that we are still searching for methods and tools with which to assess NGO development interventions. Indeed, to the extent that recent trends continue, we need to search for quite a wide range of different methods and tools with which to assess often quite different types of development intervention: discrete time-bound projects; longer-term processes; institutional and capacity-building initiatives; advocacy, educational and awareness-building activities; efforts to strengthen (in some cases to create) civil society organisations; and NGO activities which involve more overt attempts to create and strengthen democratic institutions and/or to try to halt the erosion of democratic processes. *Within* each of these broad categories there are further groups and clusters of development interventions which usually require different types of approach.

If all this sounds daunting, it needs to be placed in a broader perspective. Two points need to be made. The first is that the lack of firm and reliable methods and tools with which to assess the impact of NGO development interventions which this Study has found, is not a particularly new finding: it largely confirms what those at the coalface already know. Secondly, these gaps and weaknesses in methods are by no means confined to NGOs: in moving beyond traditional/orthodox social cost-benefit analysis, donors concerned with the 'softer' end of official aid as well as agencies involved in assessing social and political initiatives within the industrialised countries face exactly the same types of problems. Thus, it is not that evaluations of NGO development, and especially social and human development, projects are particularly weak, the problems experienced in evaluating NGO development interventions are part of a far larger set of problems.<sup>3</sup>

In this context, the Study's findings could be viewed not so much with gloom but with a considerable dose of optimism in that a number of the country studies not only argue that the NGO evaluation field is rich with a rapidly expanding range of different initiatives to try and test a range of different approaches and tools, but there are at least suggestions that the combined activities within the NGO sector may well involve a larger number of initiatives than are to be found within donor agencies. The fact that it is not possible to provide a firm assessment on *this* question points to the first lesson to be learnt from the Study in terms of methodology. This is the need for donors to interact far more closely with NGOs than many appear to do at present: this is to achieve a better *two-way* information and ideas-flow between the two - donors need to know more about and provide encouragement where they can to NGO initiatives, while NGOs need to be kept abreast of ideas, debates and experiments on methods occurring within donor agencies. It is important that this contact is not confined to donors' evaluation departments. It needs to involve close interaction with donors' cross-cutting departments (social development, gender, environment and economics) as well as the full range of sectoral expertise: small



business/micro-enterprise, health, education, good governance, and so on. Knowing about methods extends well beyond the donor/northern NGO relationship. It is clearly important for the two-way information flow to extend downwards and upwards to different NGOs and community-based organisations.

A second lesson on methods that comes from the Study is confirmation of the interest of NGOs in the issues of methods and tools of analysis. As this undoubtedly coincides with donor interests, there are grounds for arguing that donors should continue to encourage NGOs to experiment in devising better/sharper tools of analysis. It is beyond the scope of this Study to go into all the different aspects of methods and methodology. However, the studies do highlight a number of themes where it would appear to be particularly important to encourage more work on methods. In no particular order of preference or priority, these are some preliminary 'first thoughts' on specific areas where additional work would be particularly helpful.

- Work to clarify the (differing) role of the beneficiaries in evaluation vis-à-vis those of other stakeholders, and the interrelationship between beneficiary participation in projects and beneficiary participation in evaluation.
- Encouragement to examine rigorously the whole area of methods of assessing non-project development interventions, not least those focused on capacity-building, advocacy and development education. This work ought to have the discussion of suitable indicators as a major focus.
- Building on the verification approaches outlined in Chapter 3, it would be useful to encourage further work, especially in areas outside a narrow project-specific focus, which tries to isolate the areas of impact in which there is likelihood of agreement and disagreement about impact. The Australian and Canadian donor-commissioned studies focused narrowly on differences between the respective donor and northern NGOs. It would be useful to extend the parameters to include the whole range of different stakeholders.
- Work focused on testing the view (hypothesis) emerging in this Study that there often seems to be a tension between achieving sustainability and reaching the poor (see §9.8, below).
- Work focused on the development of relatively simple and practical methods adapted to (different) NGO development interventions in order to assess these against major cross-cutting issues such as gender and the environment.
- Work focused on methods to evaluate the development interventions of small NGO initiatives (see §9.7 for a discussion of why this is important).
- Work focused on the whole issue of partnership, specifically here in relation to how this influences and is influenced by methods of assessing impact.

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<sup>2</sup> This conclusion is one which focuses on relative balance. It is certainly not being argued that NGOs should abandon attempts to try to develop and use objective indicators. Clearly, many NGOs are not only working on such issues but find the exercise useful and rewarding.

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<sup>3</sup> See Moore *et al.* (1995) for discussion of major gaps in institution-building projects and programmes.

[text]

## **9.6 External and internal evaluations**

Many NGOs are now focusing their attention on evaluation, though it is probably not yet common practice for most NGOs to plan evaluation strategies and undertake evaluations systematically. Evaluation appears to be particularly weak among smaller NGOs, though this view could be coloured by the relative paucity of information this Study was able to gather about evaluations among smaller NGOs. There is no evidence to suggest that NGOs are spending too much on evaluations: though figures are difficult to obtain, the overall conclusion from the Norwegian and Netherlands studies was that NGO evaluations constituted no more than 4 to 5 per cent of total project costs. Some donors, such as Denmark and Finland, regularly provide funds for NGOs to undertake evaluations, though on occasions only when asked; others, most notably the United States, have insisted that all NGO projects be evaluated externally, though there are now moves to abandon the all-embracing nature of this requirement. France contributes some 2.5 per cent of the co-financing budget to a trust fund involved in appraisal and evaluation.

It is the view of this Study that the noticeable shift towards increased interest in evaluation and evaluation methods should be further encouraged. The broad question we wish to address here is the relationship between NGOs and donors in relation to encouraging the practice of evaluation. Three narrower questions concern, firstly, the balance between external and internal evaluations, secondly, the balance between evaluations commissioned and/or undertaken by donors and evaluations undertaken by NGOs, and thirdly, the balance between project evaluations and others, such as programme, country and institutional evaluations.

The evidence emerging from this Study would tend to support the view that it is unhelpful to make sweeping generalisations about the merits of external and self-evaluation: there is a clear role for both sorts of evaluation. In that context, however, two additional points can be made. The first is that donors should tread cautiously in commissioning more overarching evaluations of NGOs 'in general'. The second is that while this might suggest donors commissioning more narrowly-focused, thematic or sectoral evaluations, there seems to be greater merit in following the broad donor consensus of commissioning NGOs themselves to undertake these studies - providing the results are shared. In some countries, like the United Kingdom, the sharing of thematic evaluations and their conclusions seems to be exceptionally poor. Thirdly, when and if donors do commission external consultants to undertake external evaluations, particular

note should be taken of requests that the evaluators share their skills with project implementing staff, and that results are shared and discussed.

These donor efforts, however, need to be put into context. The thrust of this Study suggests that donors ought to focus far more of their attention on encouraging NGOs to undertake their own evaluations (which they are doing), encouraging them to broadcast these results more widely (which still seems to be a problem), and encouraging them to analyse and share with other NGOs their practical experiences in explaining precisely how the lessons from evaluations can be integrated into their planning processes (a process about which many larger NGOs, especially, are increasingly eager to learn). This approach is wholly consistent with the emerging perspective of USAID, namely that it is more important to ensure that NGOs are able, and have the skills, to evaluate the impact of what they doing than it is for USAID to contract in skills to do this for them. The French *Foundation de France* also works from this perspective.

It is also important, however, for donors not to encourage the further use of evaluations, or self- evaluations, as isolated exercises. Undertaking more and more detailed evaluations without addressing data gaps and without more rigorous planning, appraisal and monitoring is, perversely, likely to encourage the misguided (and magical) view that going through a mechanistic evaluation process will automatically lead to improved projects.

This still leaves open the question of what sort of interventions should be evaluated: discrete projects, longer-term processes, institutional assessments, country or programme evaluations? It is fairly simple to answer the question of the balance between project and institutional evaluations and assessments: the *evaluation* carried out should be a reflection of the types of *development intervention* undertaken. It would certainly be odd if the noted shift of many northern NGOs towards a far greater focus of their activities on capacity-building were accompanied by donors continuing with an exclusive focus on the impact of discrete projects targeted at particular beneficiaries. While at one level this has clearly not occurred, at another, there is some sense across a number of northern countries that it is still necessary to continue to focus predominantly on project evaluation. In contrast, this Study has shown both that capacity-building activities have expanded rapidly across a large number of NGOs and that if the methods of evaluating projects are still in their youth rather than adulthood, the methods of evaluating the capacity-building initiatives of NGOs are still in their infancy. What this suggests is that a greater emphasis on capacity-building evaluations and work to encourage a better understanding of how these might be done would be particularly worthwhile.

A number of donors, such as the Netherlands, have now begun to undertake country assessments as part of their medium and long-term programmes, building on the country studies undertaken in the commissioned studies of some donors such as the Swedish, Finnish and British evaluations. These studies have proved particularly useful in placing the impact of discrete projects into their wider context and in raising the question of the role of NGOs beyond the project level. This might suggest further encouragement to undertake far more of these studies. Three notes of caution need to be voiced. The first is

that there has already been considerable duplication of effort among different donors undertaking country studies, leading in aggregate to an inefficient use of resources. The second is that most larger NGOs now regularly undertake country studies for themselves, a large proportion of which appears to cover and duplicate the efforts of other NGOs in this area. The third is that often absent or marginal to these processes are local NGO inputs. What all this suggests is that any expansion in resources allocated to country studies ought to be preceded by a more rigorous trawl of information to ensure that future efforts build on past analysis rather than merely repeat it, and that attention is focused on building capacity in the south to undertake such analyses.

The final issue to raise here is the funding of evaluations. As noted, many, if not most, donors now provide funds to NGOs to carry out evaluations, in the case of some larger NGOs to supplement funds allocated from own-sources. Overall, however, discussions with NGOs suggest that they still remain limited in their ability to carry out evaluations because of lack of funds. Perhaps one reason for this has its roots in the fact that evaluations are still predominantly seen as project 'add-ons' and not as integral parts of the whole project process. This suggests that donors and NGOs alike should consider expanding the funds that they allocate to evaluation, providing, as argued above, these are integrated into an enhancement of wider PME efforts.

However, if one is talking about priorities, there is probably a more urgent need (as funds are even more tight) to focus on expanding the funding of *research* into evaluation methods as well as funding the broadcasting of interesting results. But if one is interested in addressing the major gaps, very few funds have probably been channelled into encouraging small and medium-sized NGOs in the south to undertake evaluations and to experiment with different methods. This suggests that funds channelled into these initiatives deserve high priority.

### **9.7 Encouraging evaluation activity among smaller NGOs**

It is one thing to help facilitate evaluation among smaller NGOs, it is quite another to discuss what form that evaluation might take. The Study has found evidence to indicate that the relative absence of evaluation among smaller NGOs does not lie simply in a lack of funds or in a lack of knowledge of evaluation methods used, either by donors or by larger NGOs. The issue of size is itself of major importance. Thus, two reasons for which smaller NGOs do not undertake evaluations are that they do not have the personnel to undertake evaluations and they do not have the funds to undertake evaluations. However, perhaps of even greater importance is that if they were to import the methods and approaches used by larger NGOs, the process and scale of the evaluations would dominate, swamp and risk changing the very nature of these NGOs. Similar arguments have been mustered in relation to transferring more rigorous appraisal and monitoring methods willy-nilly to smaller NGOs.

What all this suggests is that it is insufficient and inadequate for northern NGOs and donors to facilitate the movement of money to smaller NGOs to undertake evaluations if this entails the NGOs having to buy into their (evolving) methods as a condition for

accepting the funds. Equally, however, one also needs to be wary of moving too far in the other direction by suggesting that the projects and programmes of smaller NGOs can be excluded from the rigours of any analysis, for such an approach is akin to arguing that impact does not matter. What is needed is activity which takes place somewhere between these two extremes: a system of evaluation (monitoring and appraisal) that is sufficiently rigorous to ensure that funds are well used and lessons learnt, but sufficiently simple and small-scale to ensure that the tools used are appropriate and do not have a distorting effect.

It would appear that we are still very far along the road to achieving these objectives. This suggests that larger NGOs and donors need to devote time and resources to cooperating with identified groups of smaller NGOs to undertake a range of experiments which attempt to provide concrete answers to the linked problems of small size, impact assessment and appropriate method. Quick answers should not be expected!

### **9.8 Sustainability issues: development versus welfare**

The evidence surveyed for this Study points to a number of different sets of conclusions about NGOs and the sustainability of their development interventions.

- Donors are focusing more and more on the issue of sustainability, of which the financial sustainability of projects is a major constituent part. Indeed, it is increasingly common for donors to provide funds to NGOs on the explicit assumption that the projects funded will be, or have the potential to be, financially sustainable in a relatively short space of time.
- NGOs in receipt of donor funds are increasingly accepting funds based on an agreement that the projects they are implementing will achieve these sustainability objectives.
- Yet, the evidence from this Study revealed that by far the majority of NGO projects are currently not financially sustainable and that, for most, there is little hope of them being financially sustainable in the near term without external assistance.
- A number of donors appear in practice to be satisfied if NGOs receive funds from other donors in order to achieve their own (narrow) financial sustainability requirements.
- The overall evidence provides *strong* confirmation of the hypothesis found in the wider literature that there is an inverse relationship between the potential of projects to achieve financial sustainability and the socio-economic status of the beneficiaries. Some evidence from the micro- enterprise sector, often USAID-based, suggests that there is no trade-off here, though this is by no means confirmed by other evidence.
- The (less firm) sectoral evidence tends to suggest that the potential to achieve financial sustainability is poorer for social welfare type projects and greater for economic and income- generating projects.

- Some evidence (even more tentative) suggests there may often be a positive link between ability to achieve institutional sustainability and ability to achieve financial sustainability.

These are all extremely important conclusions. An immediate question is how generalisable they are. While this Study cannot provide an answer to this question, what it can do is suggest that these 'conclusions' be taken as hypotheses for further study and analysis.

Even before further work is done, however, it would seem that there are grounds for donors to focus on what seems to be a glaring contradiction between the demands made about financial sustainability and the ability of NGOs to achieve financial sustainability especially for groups of poorer people. As the discussion of the definition of sustainability in Chapter 3 ([Box 3.2](#)) argued, it is not necessary, or even desirable, to abandon the commitment to achieving financial sustainability: what is important is to discuss how one links noble objectives with practical realities. One of the most crucial issues to address is the extent to which, and the methods by which, donors might acknowledge that there may well be sound reasons to provide assistance to poor people to meet basic and immediate needs when there are few prospects of such assistance continuing when the project ceases. For some donors, this is not as radical an idea as it might seem, for discussion is already taking place about providing official aid in such circumstances.<sup>4</sup>

## **9.9 Using and misusing impact data**

No one doubts that one of the influences driving donors to focus more on monitoring and evaluation is rooted in the higher priority given to results achieved. The increasing concern donors have over the results of NGO development interventions is itself influenced by two reinforcing factors: increasing donor funds going to NGOs, and the context where results achieved are increasingly emphasised.

As this Study has shown, there is some concern amongst some, though by no means all, NGOs that the emphasis given to results could be overdone and ultimately prove damaging. Among NGOs which have embraced the need to assess what they do - and these are the vast majority - there is growing concern that donors and other funders might not merely focus on results in order to see how these might be improved, but might take the additional step of basing funding decisions *on* the results achieved. At one level, there is nothing wrong with taking such a step: it is surely correct to channel funds to NGOs and their projects where tangible gains for the poor are being achieved, in preference to funding NGOs and projects where there is no evident improvement. Yet, at another level, and without wishing to challenge that general principle, there would be cause for concern if donors were to fund NGOs and their development projects solely on the basis of the results achieved. An initial problem is simply that at present the data are often of such poor quality that it is difficult to come to judgement. But at a deeper level, and if the data were available, there is a concern that if results achieved were to become the predominant basis for funding this would influence what NGOs do in quite a profound and detrimental

way. Specifically, it would encourage NGOs to move away from risky, experimental and innovative projects where the results are likely to be uncertain, and away from projects focused on poorer people because the costs are likely to be greater and the prospects of achieving financial sustainability poor. What is more, as the Australian study indicates, these concerns are by no means confined to NGOs.

The Study has been able to do little more than register these concerns, not to assess the validity and importance of such worries. However, it would seem desirable for donors and NGOs to get together to examine this issue in some depth, not only in order to unravel competing claims and assertions but in order to help to expand the common ground between donors and NGOs and to reduce potential conflict.

### **9.10 Follow-up**

Previous sections of this chapter have identified a range of gaps which need to be filled. Thus, and in spite of major changes, there remains a paucity of information on the impact of NGO development interventions: there seems to be agreement among donors and NGOs alike that this information should be enhanced in terms of both coverage and quality. Additionally, however, information gaps on impact are unlikely to be filled unless more work is done on improving the quality of the data which, in turn, is linked to encouraging and even expanding the current interest in examining new approaches to evaluation.

What additionally needs to be addressed is the issue of possible follow-up to this particular Study. As noted already, the evidence gathered here needs to be viewed as an initial overview of the key issues. The question is whether this initiative - a joint initiative across the donor community - should be followed by further work and if so, what its terms of reference should be.

It is the view of the Team that for all this Study's gaps and weaknesses, it would not be wise to commission a follow-up study which aimed to obtain more of the same sorts of information, not least by extending and expanding the coverage of the present Study. This is not because there is no need to obtain more information on impact and methods: there clearly is. Rather, it is that the likely conclusions and insights to be obtained from commissioning another *general* study are unlikely to be so markedly different as to warrant the likely costs outlaid, not least because of the poor quality of impact data currently available. A second reason is that though there is certainly a need to obtain further information and refine the conclusions drawn, there are limits to what donors, either as a group or individually, can do with such information. As the Report notes, there is a danger of trying to use the generalised information obtained to make overarching policy decisions. NGOs work in a wide array of different sectors, intervening in different ways and at different levels from grassroots work to international advocacy. If the time has not already passed, it is surely fast approaching when it will be inappropriate to ask impact questions about NGOs 'in general'.

Additionally, this Study has confirmed that data and information on the impact of NGO development interventions, and work on developing appropriate methods, come not only from evaluations but also from other sources. Most important would appear to be longitudinal, in-depth research studies, a number of which are comparative studies of different interventions in different contexts. While the trawl of data for this Study has unearthed some of these studies (see *Appendix 14* for references), it also suggests that there are many other rich sources of data on impact and methods currently available from these sources. Consequently, it would certainly be a useful complement to this Study to commission a synthesis study focusing explicitly on these non-evaluation studies.

What are increasingly needed, however, are studies which try to isolate those factors which contribute to NGO successes in different sectors and different areas, and provide insights into the methods used to assess these. What this suggests is a greater focus on narrower studies and a move away from general synthesis studies - useful though the information obtained from such studies clearly still is. Thus, there might be merit in donors, individually or as a group, commissioning not another overarching synthesis study but perhaps a series of more focused studies which try, in far greater depth than has been possible here, not merely to synthesise reports and ongoing work in different areas but also to help stimulate both further work and essential networking - building, of course, on work which has already been done in this area, as well as ongoing research and linked initiatives.

**9.11 Disseminating this Report** In undertaking this Study and especially in discussing it with NGO staff and officials, two dominant reactions were forthcoming. The first was broad support for the initiative, though criticisms were heard about the lack of involvement of NGOs and NGO staff, and the timing. The second was how the Report would be distributed: the Study has clearly attracted considerable interest in both the north and the south. Within this broad context, other issues need to be addressed. One is the language of the Report: the main Report is written in English and the appendices have been produced in the language in which they were written, four country studies in French and the rest in English. It is our view that the Report, including the country case studies, should be made available at least in both French and English, and that there should be discussion about further translation into other major international languages. We would also urge that the Report be circulated widely among NGOs, using current networks and the internet as an initial form of circulation, but with the necessity of reviewing ways in which particular groups excluded from exclusively modern telecommunications methods might be reached. Relatedly, we would urge the OECD/DAC Group not merely to encourage feedback on the substance and content of the Report but, providing there is sufficient feedback, to arrange a more formal interchange of views on the Report by all key stakeholders with possible follow-up initiatives.

[\[contents\]](#) [\[next\]](#)

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<sup>4</sup> A recent guide on appraisal monitoring and impact assessment produced for the ODA's Health and Population Division argued that there are a number of reasons for which Britain should provide services to



poor people when they, nor anyone else, can afford to pay for them. See Health and Population Division (PD), 1996.

[text]

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Note: The works listed here refer to those quoted or referred to in the text of the main Report. The longer list of studies and other references used in the overall synthesis study, including the country and donor case studies, are all to be found in *Appendix 14 Bibliography and References*.

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BOXES

## Part A

# INTRODUCTION

## 1

### Overview

#### 1.1 Introduction

This Study was commissioned by the OECD/DAC Expert Group on Aid Evaluation at its Paris meeting in October 1996. The agreed purpose was:

*...to undertake a synthesis study of non-governmental organisation (NGO) evaluations, supplemented where easily accessible with related data and information, in order firstly to provide an analysis and assessment of the impact, including efficiency and effectiveness, of NGO development interventions, and secondly, to provide an analysis and assessment of evaluation methods and approaches used.*

NGOs are involved in a range of different activities.<sup>1</sup> One subset of activities involves emergency and relief activities. An early decision was that the synthesis should focus on NGO development interventions and not on NGO emergency and humanitarian activities.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, within the development umbrella, northern NGOs are involved in development education, advocacy and lobbying work within their own countries, and in networking internationally. The research team also took the decision neither to trawl the literature to assess impact, nor to synthesise studies examining the methods of assessing the impact of this cluster of development interventions and initiatives. Thus, the main focus of this Study has been development interventions implemented within developing countries. In that context, and as discussed further in Chapter 3 below, because of the nature of such interventions and the availability of literature, the major focus of the Study is on assessing the impact and analysing the methods of assessing the impact of discrete projects. Additionally, some (though far less) attention is also focused on institutional and capacity building projects and longer term development processes, not least because it has only been in the relatively recent past that NGO development work has expanded into these increasingly important areas and types of activity.

#### 1.2 Methods and approaches used in this Study

How should the Study's purpose be achieved, and what methods and approaches should be used? Initially, it might be thought that this would be relatively straightforward: use a comprehensive database in order to gather all evaluation studies, or, if the numbers of

studies are so large as to be unmanageable, obtain and make use of a representative sample of such studies. A late 1996 search of the OECD/DAC database of evaluation abstracts for the years 1986 to 1997 recorded a total of 74 entries using the category "NGO" and a total of 337 items using the keyword "NGO" from a total listing of 6,341 entries. Discussions with officials from almost all donor agencies during the course of this Study confirmed the initial view of the researchers that this database was incomplete and partial, and thus that it formed a wholly inadequate data set upon which to make a reliable synthesis of the impact of NGO development interventions. Indeed, an early conclusion of this Study, corroborated repeatedly throughout the research period, is that an international database of NGO impact evaluations simply does not exist. What is more, the case study work confirmed our initial hypothesis that there is not even a reliable and comprehensive database of all NGO evaluation studies at the country level in any of the 13 donor/country case studies.

The method of gathering evaluation reports was initially to ask the different members of the OECD/DAC Evaluation Group to gather together and send evaluation reports focusing on the impact of NGO development interventions, and then synthesise them in order to summarise what they were saying about impact and methods of evaluation used. It was the view of the researchers that for all its merits, this approach to data gathering would probably be deficient both in relation to impact data and in relation to evaluation methods. Their experience and knowledge of NGO development activities suggested that relying on donor evaluation departments to forward reports to the researchers would:

- i. run the risk of omitting evaluations and related studies undertaken by official aid agencies but not commissioned by evaluation departments;
- ii. be highly likely to omit evaluations undertaken and/or commissioned by northern NGOs; and
- iii. would almost certainly omit evaluations undertaken and/or commissioned by southern NGOs and community-based organisations.

Additionally, it was the view of the researchers that such an approach would be unlikely to provide a rounded picture of methods of evaluation used to assess the impact of NGO development initiatives. This latter concern was rooted in the criticisms which have been voiced by NGOs of methods used to evaluate official aid interventions and, relatedly, because, in undertaking and commissioning their own evaluations, NGOs were unlikely to use methods of which they have been critical. Again, and as discussed in Parts B and C, these concerns were strongly reinforced in the evidence gathered in the country case study evidence.

As a result, it was decided that it would be necessary to try to supplement the data and information obtained from donor evaluation departments with data and information from NGOs within donor countries, and from NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) within developing countries. These data and information would focus both on evaluations of the impact of NGO development interventions and on evaluation methods and approaches. In short, the revised approach to be used aimed to gather data and information on impact and methods from three clusters of sources: from official donor

agencies, from northern NGOs and from southern NGOs and community-based organisations.

The initial method of obtaining information from donors has already been described: it involved making contact with all members of the OECD/DAC Expert Group on Evaluation requesting them to send all relevant evaluation and related reports to the researchers. The initial request for studies and reports was supplemented in two ways: first by follow-up letters, and secondly by telephone/fax and face-to-face discussions as and when researchers went to different countries.

The attempt to fill gaps in knowledge about impact and evaluation methods by contacting northern and southern NGOs faced the major constraint of time and resources. The time set aside for the whole Study was only five months, of which the first six weeks involved reading the initial (donor-sent) evaluation reports, working out methods of gathering additional data and writing the Study's *Inception Report*, and the last three to four weeks were spent agreeing the Report's conclusions and finalising this document, including the Appendices. This left scarcely two months for additional data gathering. It was decided that the main additional data gathering process would involve the following:

- making postal and telecommunication contact with NGOs and NGO network and umbrella organisations explaining the purpose of the study and asking them to send what they considered were important evaluation studies and reports and manuals on evaluation methods;
- undertaking case studies in a selection of donor countries; and
- undertaking case studies in a (smaller) selection of southern countries.

In selecting countries for the case studies, the researchers were faced with a choice of undertaking a comparatively large number of case studies, but devoting only a very few days to each, or undertaking far fewer studies, but undertaking a more in-depth study. As explained in the *Inception Report*, it was decided to undertake a relatively large number of case studies. In all, 13 donor/country case studies were carried out, more within donor countries (eight) than in developing countries (five). The case study countries are listed in Box 1.1.

**Box 1.1: Country/donor case studies**

| Donors/donor countries | Southern countries |
|------------------------|--------------------|
|                        |                    |
| Belgium                | Bangladesh         |
| France                 | Brazil             |
| The European Community | Chile              |
| Finland                | Kenya              |
| The Netherlands        | Senegal            |
| The United Kingdom     |                    |
| The United States      |                    |
|                        |                    |

The fourfold purpose of the donor-based country case studies was:

- i. To ensure that the donor-based evaluation studies sent to the researchers consisted of a complete set of recent donor-commissioned impact evaluations and, where necessary, to collect important additional studies.
- ii. To gather data on development impact from evaluations undertaken or commissioned by northern NGOs, focusing in particular on any synthesis, thematic or sectoral studies which might have been carried out.
- iii. To obtain information from NGOs on current attitudes, methods and approaches to the evaluation of development interventions.
- iv. To obtain data and information on linkages with southern NGOs in relation to evaluations undertaken or commissioned and interaction vis-...-vis methods and approaches.

The fourfold purpose of the southern-based country case studies was:

- i. To gather data on impact from evaluations undertaken or commissioned by southern NGOs, focusing in particular on any synthesis, thematic or sectoral studies which might have been carried out.
- ii. To obtain information from southern NGOs on current attitudes, methods and approaches to the evaluation of development interventions and, in that context, to assess the extent to which methods are influenced by northern or other southern NGOs.
- iii. To obtain information on the extent to which southern NGO evaluations are commissioned by northern NGOs vis-...-vis being home-grown southern-based initiatives.
- iv. To obtain data and information on self-evaluation activities of community-based organisations and the extent to which knowledge about impact and methods are shared with southern NGOs, northern NGOs and donors.

The extent to which the Study was successful in meeting these objectives is discussed in Parts B and C.

### **1.3 Outputs and timing**

Using the data gathered, the researchers carried out a number of tasks. The first was the production of the Study's *Inception Report* which was completed by the end of December 1996 and circulated to the members of the OECD/DAC Evaluation Group. It was discussed at a meeting of the Group in Copenhagen in February 1997. A second task was to undertake a synthesis of the main donor-commissioned evaluations of the impact of NGO development interventions. A third was to undertake and write reports for the 13 donor/country case studies. A fourth was to gather together some of the main/larger thematic and sectoral reports to analyse what data and information these provided on impact and evaluation methods. A fifth task was to use the data and information from the reports and country case studies to provide an analysis and assessment of evaluation

methods and approaches used. A sixth task was to bring together all these different components and attempt both to provide some overarching reflective conclusions and to draw lessons from the data analysed. The final task was to draw together the threads in order to compile this Report and its appendices.

The timing of the work was as follows:

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| November-December 1996 | Initial reading of the (largely) donor-commissioned reports already gathered; discussion of methods and approaches to be used; carrying out the first (pilot) country case study (Kenya); discussion and preparation of the Inception Report |
| January-February 1997  | Carrying out the 12 other donor/country case studies and writing up the donor/country case study reports; analysis of the donor-based studies; and initial analysis of the main thematic/sectoral studies.                                   |
| March-early April 1997 | Finalising the country case study, donor-commissioned and thematic/sectoral reports; meeting of researchers to agree conclusions and recommendations; writing up of the main Report.   |

#### 1.4 The structure of this Report

Following this introduction, the rest of the Report is divided into three parts. *Part B, Searching for Impact* summarises what is known about the impact of NGO development interventions. *Chapter 2, Data and Data Quality* discusses the sources and quality of the data used. *Chapter 3, Donor-Based Impact Studies*, summarises the impact results from the 10 main donor-commissioned studies, highlighting the areas of agreement and disagreement between these studies, and ending with a summary of the factors these studies consider critical in accounting for successes and failures. With the conclusions of these donor-commissioned studies as a backdrop, *Chapter 4, The Country and Donor Case Studies* draws out the main impact conclusions from the 13 donor/country case studies, highlighting where these confirm or challenge the results and conclusions of the donor-commissioned studies. Finally, *Chapter 5, Thematic and Sectoral Studies of Impact* summarises some of the main conclusions on impact drawn from some key thematic and sectoral studies.

*Part C, Searching for Methods* switches from impact to a discussion of methods of evaluating NGO development interventions. *Chapter 6, Introduction* provides an overview of this part and draws a range of conclusions concerning the degree of consensus among donors and between donors and NGOs on methods to be used, the gaps in methods, and possible future directions. *Chapter 7, Methods and Approaches in Donor-Commissioned Studies*, looks more closely at methods used and discusses the ways in which, and the extent to which, donors and NGOs are approaching evaluation differently, and the gaps between rhetoric and reality. *Chapter 8, Methods and*



*Approaches beyond the Donor- Commissioned Studies* briefly summarises the data on methods provided by the case studies, drawing in places on the wider literature.

Finally, *Part D, Lessons Learnt and Recommendations*, draws a number of overarching conclusions, points to continuing gaps in knowledge about impact and evaluation methods, highlights a number of lessons drawn directly from the Study and outlines a number of ideas for follow-up.

This main Report ends with *Annex A, References Cited*. This is split into two parts: the first lists the main donor-commissioned studies used in the synthesis chapters (3 and 7); the second lists only additional texts cited directly in the main Report.

The Report contains 14 separate appendices. *Appendices 1-8* consist of the eight donor-based studies commissioned for this Study and *Appendices 9-12* are the five southern-based country studies commissioned for the Study. While each appendix contains its own annex and listing of studies cited, *Appendix 14* brings all these references together, supplementing them with other texts used in the overall Study. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that some texts, especially some confidential evaluation studies and reports, were forwarded to the team on condition they would not be cited directly. In these cases, the works provided have not been referenced.

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<sup>1</sup> While the term NGO is used throughout this Report, the authors acknowledges that there has been considerable debate about the desirability of using the term 'non-governmental organisation' at all, both because of the negative connotations of the term and because it clearly fails to capture the range of different organisations outside government, private sector organisations and official donor agencies involved in the development process. The report also follows the United States convention of using the term 'private voluntary organisation' (PVO) to describe United States' non-profit organisations.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>2</sup>This decision was influenced in part by the knowledge that at least one major parallel initiative was under way, supported by the former British Overseas Development Administration (ODA), to undertake a synthesis of NGO activities in emergencies. See Borton and Macrea, (1997). Following the British elections in May, the ODA ceased to exist and the Department for International Development (DFID) was created distinct from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

[\[text\]](#)

### **Box 3.1: List of donors whose studies are included in this synthesis**

| <b>Donor</b> | <b>Year of Major Studies (publication date)</b> |
|--------------|---|
|              |   |

|                    |  |
|--------------------|--|
| Australia          | 1995   |
| Canada             | 1992   |
| Denmark            | 1988, <sup>*</sup> 1989, 1994, <sup>1</sup> 1995 |
| Finland            | 1994, 1995 <sup>*</sup>                          |
| New Zealand        | 1987, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993                     |
| The Netherlands    | 1991 <sup>2</sup>                                |
| Norway             | 1994, 1995                                       |
| Sweden             | 1995 <sup>3</sup>                                |
| The United Kingdom | 1992/5, <sup>4</sup> 1995                        |
| The United States  | 1979, 1995, 1996 <sup>5</sup>                    |

Notes:

\* Evaluation of volunteer programmes.

<sup>1</sup> Evaluation of framework agreements.

<sup>2</sup> In 1995, the Dutch NGOs produced a report on measures taken in response to the 1991 report.

<sup>3</sup> From 1987, Sida has commissioned studies on the capacity of the 13 (originally 14) framework organisations.

<sup>4</sup> These was an early, very sketchy, UK study in 1986. The 1992 (ODI) study was published in book form in 1995, the year the second UK study's findings were published.

<sup>5</sup> Besides the 1979 and 1995 studies, USAID has conducted a succession of reviews of reviews - in 1988, 1994 and 1996 - many of which have also addressed the issue of impact.

For complete references to these reports, and their linked studies see the Annex to the main Report as well as *Appendix 14*.

**Box 3.2 Sustainability: conclusions from the Swedish study**

The sustainability of projects and programmes needs to be understood in terms of their financial components, their institutional components, their human resource components and their environmental components, without exclusive focus on any single element. It is increasingly important to judge NGO projects on programmes within the context of their ability to stand on their own feet, in terms of achieving greater financial sustainability, in terms of achieving greater institutional sustainability and in terms of their influence and impact on the environment. Yet, there is an equally important need to focus all the time on quality of delivery and access, and to guard against an extreme view that those unable to utilise the market can be provided with basic needs, including productive needs, without the payment of any subsidy. But sustainability also

needs to be seen beyond the narrow confines of the discrete projects and programmes funded. It must also include the notion of enhancing both the capacity of the executing NGO or agency and, ultimately, the capacity of the direct beneficiaries to take more control of their own lives and their development.

All NGO projects and programmes need to be drawn up with a view to assessing the extent to which they should attempt to achieve financial and institutional sustainability, wherever possible within a explicit time-table, and in relation to the direct and indirect impact they will have on the environment. This assessment will need to include reviewing the concrete steps that need to be taken in order to increase the likelihood that an appropriate level of benefits will continue to be delivered for an extended period of time after major financial, managerial, and technical assistance has been withdrawn.

Equally, however, the requirement to *review and assess* all initiatives funded against the achievement of sustainability does not necessarily mean that future financial or institutional sustainability should in all cases be a *necessary* requirement for funding discrete projects or programmes. In particular, financial and institutional sustainability need to be pursued only on condition that, especially for the poor and where basic needs or services are being provided, the quality of, and access to, the basic good or service provided will not be radically compromised. Where the good or service provided is considered essential to the basic well-being of the beneficiaries, and where alternative funding cannot be found, the inability to achieve either financial or institutional sustainability should not constitute an impediment to funding such NGO initiatives.

[\[text\]](#)

**Box 3.3: The factors contributing to or impeding success of NGO development projects or programmes**

| Name of factor   |  | Frequency: no of donor studies |
|--|--|--------------------------------|
| <b>Cluster A: mentioned in three or more donor studies</b> |  |                                |
| 1=   | External factors and links outside the project   | 7                              |
| 1=   | Competent/professional staff   | 7                              |
| 3  | Involvement of the beneficiaries/responding to local need                                  | 6                              |
| 4=   | Overall vision   | 5                              |
| 4=   | Good project design and good planning  | 5                              |
| 4=   | Institutional capacity: adequate management, finance and administration and local capacity | 5                              |
| 7  | The sector   | 4                              |
| 8  | Knowledge of other experiences/documentation and research/the ability to network           | 3                              |

| Cluster B: mentioned in at least two donor studies |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| 9  | Sufficient funds                                 | 2 |
| Cluster C: mentioned in only one donor study       |  |   |
| 10   | The ability to stay small                        | 1 |
| 11   | Sufficient time to achieve objectives            | 1 |
| 12   | The heterogeneity of different NGO interventions | 1 |
| 13   | Religious/membership or other affiliation        | 1 |
| 14   | Deciding not to replicate                        | 1 |
| 15   | In-country presence                              | 1 |

[\[text capter 3\]](#) [\[contents\]](#) [\[text Capter 9\]](#)

**Box 5.1: Maternal and child health project evaluations in Latin America (1989-95)**

Haley analysed 21 external and internal evaluations of 16 maternal and/or child health projects in seven Latin American countries. The 14 key project components discussed were the following:

- *community participation and management*: seventeen of the 21 evaluations included discussions off community participation to some degree. Two of the evaluations specifically stated that special effort needs be made to include women in all stages of project development. One project included representative from the community as an active evaluation team member;
- *roles and effectiveness of community health workers(CHWs)*: although 10 of the sixteen projects trained CHWs, very little was mentioned in the evaluations regarding their roles or effectiveness;
- *sensitivity of ethnic and gender considerations*: nearly half the evaluations made no reference to issues regarding cultural of gender focused perspectives. Four evaluations stated that project activities should target men as well as women in order to increase the overall acceptance of project activities within a community as a whole;
- 71 % of the evaluations made no mention of *institutional strengthening* activities;
- *partnership relations* were mentioned as an area for improvement in 11 evaluations;
- *effectiveness of interventions*: this was a very difficult area to assess through the information presented in the evaluations - indicators of project effectiveness- were described almost solely in terms of knowledge change and reported behavioural changes. Two evaluations recommended the inclusion of ex-post evaluations in order to learn more about long-term impact and sustainability of specific interventions;

- there was very little mentioned of *effectiveness of information, education, and communication methodologies (IDC)*;
- there was very little analysis of data on *impact on morbidity and mortality* in the evaluation reports;
- over 50 % of project evaluations did not include a detailed discussion of project sustainability, not a single evaluation mentioned the existence of a formalised plan to promote sustainability. However, there was discussion on the incorporation of income generating activities, strengthening of communities and the creation of an appropriate incentive structure as a means to sustainability.
- over 80 % of project evaluations made no mention of *advocacy or replicability of models*;
- the themes discussed regarding *appropriateness of project design* involved training, geographical location, needs assessments supervision and monitoring, beneficiary selection, goals and personnel;
- *baseline studies and detailed implementation plans*: there was very little specific information regarding collection of baseline data - one quarter made no reference whatsoever to a baseline study;
- *cost analysis*: the majority of evaluations (76%) included little or no information regarding project costs. Lack of systems of accounting implies that there is no way to determine if intervention strategies are cost effective;
- *project management*: there was discussion on the decentralisation of the management structure, the need to streamline data collection and the improvement upon project information systems as well as the issue of quality control and the increase of project supervision.

Source: Haley(1995).

[\[text\]](#)

### **Box 8.1: The role and application of participatory evaluation techniques**

Participatory evaluation cannot be bolted on at the end of a project, it must have been incorporated at the design stage. There are many instances when we *cannot* utilise participatory evaluation principles.

Community participation in evaluation, that is participatory evaluation, is best suited to evaluations which are designed to inform participants of the progress of their activities, and to help them improve the design of their implementation

approaches. Participatory evaluation is ideally implemented in a project which has an explicit output of building community capacity to plan, manage and evaluate project activities at the community level.

**The following should be seen as a guide in the development of participatory evaluation:**

1. The project is participatory in design: process project, participatory action research, etc.
2. Participants are implementing agents and have ownership of the project.
3. Indicators are identified with participants.
4. Community has a management role, particularly documentation/recording/storing information on the project interventions under review.
5. The participatory evaluation's primary objective is to provide information to participants that will inform their decision-making in the implementation of their role in the project.
6. Participatory evaluation should be an integral component of a project's extension strategy and community capacity-building process.

Source: Ndung'u (1996).

# **Searching for Impact and Methods: NGO Evaluation Synthesis Study**

**Volume II Appendices  
Final Draft  
May 1997**

**A Report Prepared for the OECD/DAC  
Expert Group on Evaluation**

**Searching for Impact and Methods: NGO Evaluation Synthesis Study**

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Revised: .

## APPENDICE 1

Etude de synthèse d'évaluations d'ONG

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### ETUDE DE CAS DE LA BELGIQUE

L'évaluation des ONG: politiques et pratiques

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Jean-Louis  
Groupe de recherche et d'échanges technologiques, Paris

Vielajus

Mai 1997

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### **LISTE DES ABRÉVIATIONS**

|      |  |
|------|--|
| ADO  | Association des ONG francophones et germanophones          |
| AGCD | Administration générale de la Coopération en développement |
| APD  | Aide publique au développement                             |
| CCP  | Commission de concertation des projets                     |



|          |  |
|----------|--|
| CNCD     | Centre national de coopération et développement            |
| CoPROGAM | Vlaamse federatie van NGO's voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking |
| COTA     | Collectif d'échanges pour la technologie appropriée        |
| NCOS     | Nationaal Centrum voor ontwikkelingssamenwerking           |
| UFSIA    | Université d'Anvers  |

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## RÉSUMÉ

La Belgique compte 130 ONG reconnues dans les divers secteurs de la solidarité internationale (projets de développement, envoi de volontaires, éducation au développement, accueil de boursiers, urgence). Elles sont regroupées sous des « coupoles », structures collectives pour l'éducation au développement, la collecte et le lobbying: le CNCD francophone et le NCOS flamand. Elles disposent en parallèle de structures fédératives (Coprogam, Ado, Codef), qui les représentent dans les instances de concertation avec l'administration belge.

Les cofinancements de l'action non gouvernementale par les pouvoirs publics (AGCD) représentent une part non négligeable de l'aide publique au développement (APD). Ils se montaient en 1996 à 3,2 milliards BEF, soit 12% de l'APD, dont 2 milliards BEF pour le cofinancement de projets de développement.

En matière d'évaluation, les partenaires publics et associatifs ont poussé loin leur volonté de concertation, aboutissant à la promulgation d'un arrêté royal de 1991, allant dans le sens de la réalisation régulière d'évaluations conjointes d'évaluations entre l'AGCD et les fédérations d'ONG.<sup>1</sup> Reste encore à préciser les conditions d'une bonne collaboration entre les parties. Pour 1997, l'Administration belge a décidé d'un budget très important consacré à l'évaluation d'actions d'ONG 50 MFEB).

Les évaluations à l'initiative des ONG restent limitées en nombre. Outre l'évaluation collective sur la durabilité, citée plus loin, la pratique d'évaluation reste du domaine spécifique des ONG, et notamment des plus grands d'entre elles.

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## 1

### INITIATIVE DE PROMOTION DE L'ÉVALUATION

#### 1.1 Des évaluations conjointes

### **1.1.1 Un cadre de concertation**

En Belgique, un arrêté ministériel, datant de juillet 1991, a fixé les modalités d'évaluations concertées entre l'AGCD (Administration générale de la coopération au développement) et les fédérations belges d'ONG, dans les termes suivants: « Article 1er. Chaque année, l'AGCD et les fédérations des ONG organisent au moins deux évaluations de projets ONG. Le programme annuel des évaluations, le contenu et les termes de référence des missions d'évaluation sont discutées au préalable au sein de la Commission de concertation des projets (CCP).

La CCP, sur base des conclusions de ces évaluations, formule des avis sur les orientations politiques à appliquer dans la mise en oeuvre du cofinancement.

Article 2. Les évaluations peuvent être confiées à des experts indépendants. Ces derniers sont désignés après un appel lancé par l'AGCD, en respectant les procédures et barèmes utilisés par l'AGCD en cette matière. Le choix des experts indépendants est fait par le Ministre sur avis de la CCP.

Des représentants de l'AGCD et des représentants de l'ONG, désignés par les fédérations, participent aux évaluations ». (*Arrêté du Ministre de la Coopération au développement en application d'un Arrêté royal d'avril 1991*).

Ce type d'évaluation conjointe est nettement distingué d'autres types d'évaluations prévues, soit à l'initiative de l'AGCD, soit à l'initiative d'ONG. Deux grands objectifs lui sont assignés:

- un objectif de dialogue entre acteurs non gouvernementaux et pouvoirs publics,
- et une amélioration permanente du système de cofinancement. Ce qui implique que (i) les thèmes des évaluations conjointes spécifiques soient en lien direct avec le fonctionnement du cofinancement, (ii) les ONG s'affirment concernées par le fonctionnement de ce système, et (iii) les résultats d'évaluation conjointe aient un impact maximal sur le cofinancement et que les « résultats ne doivent donc pas rester lettre morte », selon les directives approuvées en CCP en février 1995.

### **1.1.2 La mise en pratique**

Depuis que ce cadre a été mis en place, seules deux initiatives ont été prises, largement en deçà des projets initiaux. Il s'agit d'une part de l'évaluation des systèmes de crédit rural mis en oeuvre par les ONG (voir au chapitre 2.2) et d'autre part de l'évaluation des actions

d'éducation au développement réalisées en Belgique.

Du point de vue des fédérations d'ONG, le bilan de l'opération est mitigé pour plusieurs raisons:

- l'évaluation sur le crédit rural n'a pas réellement abouti, bien qu'elle ait commencé depuis plus de trois ans. La phase de restitution, explicitement prévue, n'a pas été réalisée malgré l'intention affichée d'utiliser ce type de travail pour améliorer la pratique des ONG;
- la maîtrise d'ouvrage de ces évaluations reste sous la responsabilité de l'AGCD; elle subit des lourdeurs administratives préjudiciables à l'effort de dynamisation du milieu non gouvernemental.

Les fédérations d'ONG restent attachées au principe de ces évaluations transversales, et à une concertation sur ce thème avec l'AGCD; elles souhaitent toutefois revoir le mode d'exécution de ces travaux, dans le sens d'une plus grande responsabilité des associations pour la conduite de ce type d'études.

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<sup>1</sup> Outre l'évaluation présentée ici sur les projets de crédit, citons une autre étude réalisée à la demande conjointe de l'AGCD et des collectifs d'ONG: Belgique (AGCD - ONG) - Le cofinancement belge (Agcd - ONG) pour le développement en Bolivie; analyse des projets des ONG sur base d'un échantillon - COTA, V. Brackelaire. L. Marien, J.A Peres, 1990.

[\[text\]](#)

## APPENDICE 2

### Etude de synthèse d'évaluations d'ONG

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## ETUDE DE CAS DE L'UNION EUROPEENNE

### L'évaluation des ONG: politiques et pratiques

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ou

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## **Bibliographie**

### **Encadré A2.1: Critères d'évaluation.**

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## **LISTE DES ABRÉVIATIONS**

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| ACP            | Afrique, Caraïbes, Pacifique                                       |
| CL.<br>ONGD/UE | Comité de liaison des ONG de développement avec l'Union Européenne |
| COTA           | Collectif d'échanges pour la technologie appropriée                |
| DG VIII        | Direction générale du Développement (Commission Européenne)        |
| MARPP          | Méthode active de recherche et de planification participative      |
| PRS            | Programme régional solaire   |
| PVD            | Pays en voie de développement                                      |

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## **RÉSUMÉ**

En ce qui concerne les actions d'appui au développement vers les pays du Sud, ou celles d'éducation au développement, les relations de la Commission européenne avec les ONG des pays-membres, sont assurées par la Direction générale du Développement (DG VIII). Au sein de cette Direction générale, l'unité B/2 est chargée de la liaison avec les ONG et de gérer les cofinancements de leurs actions. L'unité a pour interlocuteurs l'ensemble des ONG des pays membres souhaitant obtenir un cofinancement, ainsi que des structures collectives de concertation: le Comité de liaison des ONG de développement avec l'Union européenne (CL. ONGD/UE), lui même formé à partir des plates-formes nationales de liaison des ONG avec l'UE.

De 1986 à 1995, la Commission a engagé 1 milliard d'ECU en cofinancement de l'action non gouvernementale, avec une augmentation annuelle régulière et forte (378 MECU en cumul de 1986 à 1990, et 685 MECU en cumul de 1991 à 1995). Pour l'année 1996, l'unité B/2 a engagé un cofinancement total de 179 MECU sur 620 projets d'ONG de l'ensemble des pays de l'UE.

La pratique de l'évaluation, commanditée par la Commission européenne, relève de deux logiques différentes: il peut s'agir d'évaluations ponctuelles pour des projets dont on considère qu'ils ont un caractère novateur, ou encore qu'ils présentent des risques à l'exécution qui demande d'en faire un bilan en cours de route; il peut s'agir aussi d'évaluations transversales sur des secteurs ou domaines de coopération, qu'ils soient classiques ou novateurs, en vue de renseigner la Commission sur l'impact des actions auxquelles elle contribue, et/ou lui fournir des éléments de doctrine dans son appui aux ONG.

Le recours à l'évaluation ponctuelle reste limité: on en dénombre 9 de 1990 à 1996, ce qui représente un pourcentage infime des projets cofinancés dans la période (de l'ordre de 0.3%). Dans la même période, la Commission a engagé 4 évaluations transversales consistantes, sur des champs classiques comme la formation professionnelle ou les projets de développement intégré, mais aussi sur des champs plus récents d'intervention des ONG, comme les projets de crédit ou l'appui institutionnel aux partenaires du sud.

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## 1

### **ETUDES SECTORIELLES OU THÉMATIQUES A L'INITIATIVE DE L'UNION EUROPÉENNE**

Les bailleurs de fonds paraissent de plus en plus motivés par la mise en place d'évaluations non pas globales, mais concentrés sur un aspect de leur politique d'aide au développement via les ONG.

Les documents utilisés sont les suivants:

- a. deux évaluations thématiques, la première portant sur l'appui institutionnel des ONG européennes aux organisations de base dans les pays ACP, et la deuxième sur leurs projets de développement intégré;
- b. deux évaluations sectorielles relatives l'une aux projets de formation professionnelle, et l'autre aux projets d'épargne et de crédit;
- c. une évaluation retenue pour son apport méthodologique en matière d'évaluation, par l'application de méthodes participatives dans l'évaluation d'impact de projets hydrauliques.

#### **1.1 Evaluation thématique sur l'appui institutionnel**

##### **1.1.1**

##### **Contexte**

Cette évaluation concerne une nouvelle modalité de financement des actions de développement des ONG intitulée « appui financier aux activités d'une organisation de base située dans un PVD »<sup>1</sup> Elle consiste en un cofinancement d'un maximum de 50% du budget global d'une organisation du Sud, venant couvrir aussi bien des dépenses

d'activité, que de fonctionnement ou d'investissement, ceci sur la base d'un programme annuel global d'activités.

L'objectif prioritaire de cette procédure nouvelle était de renforcer les institutions ou organisations acteurs de l'aide au développement non gouvernementale au Sud (organisations de base). Cet appui visait notamment au renforcement de l'autonomie de ces organisations (perspective d'autonomie de fonctionnement à moyen ou long terme).

L'objectif de l'évaluation était d'étudier le système mis en place et les projets financés, et d'en tirer les leçons pour une révision future des conditions du cofinancement.

### **1.1.2 Projets étudiés**

L'étude a porté sur 27 projets (14 en Amérique latine et Caraïbes, 10 en Afrique et 3 en Inde) sur lesquels 23 ont abouti pour un budget total de 14,3 MECU, avec un cofinancement européen de 4,9 MECU (environ 34%).

### **1.1.3 Résultats**

L'évaluation indique que les cofinancements apportés au titre de l'appui institutionnel ont essentiellement servi à financer le fonctionnement des ONG du Sud concernées, avec parfois une légère part pour l'investissement, mais « aucun projet n'a été utilisé pour un véritable développement ou renforcement institutionnel de l'organisation ».

### **1.1.4 Efficacité, efficience et pérennité**

On peut relier l'efficience au fait que l'appui de l'UE vient en complément, plafonné à 50% de l'effort financier de l'ONG du Nord pour fournir les moyens de l'appui institutionnel à son partenaire du Sud.

L'efficacité de l'action peut être caractérisée à court terme, dans la mesure où cet appui permet de soutenir l'activité de l'ONG du Sud, en prenant en charge une part de son fonctionnement.

En revanche, l'efficacité à long terme, c'est-à-dire le renforcement de l'autonomie de l'ONG du Sud, ne paraît pas atteinte, puisque les ressources de cet appui institutionnel sont en réalité englouties en subvention d'équilibre de son fonctionnement, sans intervention réelle d'une part sur la capacité institutionnelle ni sur les investissements du partenaire.

On comprend dès lors que les effets sur la pérennité, qui sont pourtant au cœur de cette démarche d'appui institutionnel, restent limités.

### **1.1.5 Facteurs de succès et d'échecs de ce type d'appui**

*Les facteurs de succès:*  
pour les ONG du Sud

- que ce type de financement soit davantage conçu comme un investissement dans l'organisation (matériel et humain) que comme une simple prise en charge des frais de fonctionnement,
- qu'on établisse un contrat d'objectifs ne portant pas sur les activités de l'ONG, mais sur l'amélioration de son efficacité organisationnelle et donc de ses résultats,
- que la formulation de ces objectifs fasse l'objet d'un travail d'analyse, de bilan et d'auto-réflexion important en lien entre l'ONG du Nord et son partenaire du Sud,
- que l'organisation du Sud soit libérée des tâches administratives spécifiques au cofinancement obtenu, tels que rapports d'activités et financiers relatifs uniquement à l'activité cofinancée,
- et qu'elle soit assurée d'une continuité de financement qui la libérerait, pendant une période donnée, du travail long et fastidieux de recherche de moyens financiers.

pour le partenariat ONG Nord/Sud

- l'amélioration de la transparence, en particulier de l'ONG du Nord, y compris sur les aspects financiers,
- la mise en place de contrats d'engagement mutuel, garantissant que les efforts des deux parties sont bien orientés vers des objectifs communs.

*Les facteurs de risque:*  
pour les ONG du sud

- l'abondance de ressources d'appui institutionnel peut provoquer une croissance anarchique des organisations qui composent le secteur ONG (hypertrophie, augmentation des frais récurrents),
- la situation économique et financière de nombreux pays peut conduire les organisations à donner priorité au financement de leurs structures plutôt que leurs activités,
- le renforcement des ONG d'appui peut les conduire à se substituer à l'Etat dans des tâches pour lesquelles elles sont peu préparées, renforçant les rivalités et posant des problèmes de cohérence des politiques conduites,
- pour les ONG représentatives, l'accès à des moyens externes importants peut constituer un facteur de déstabilisation, et susciter luttes d'intérêts et de pouvoir,

pour le partenariat des ONG Nord/Sud

- l'élimination de l'assistancialisme, qui vient fausser les mécanismes de partenariat et de contractualisation,
- une formation suffisante du personnel des ONG du Nord, pour leur permettre de faire face aux enjeux du partenariat.

## 1.2 Evaluation thématique des projets de développement intégré <sup>2</sup>



### 1.2.1

### Contexte

Dans le cadre des cofinancements UE-ONG, la Commission européenne a commandité en 1994 une évaluation thématique sur les projets de développement intégré.

- La notion de développement intégré, qui doit guider ce type de projets, se réfère à trois types d'approches: le caractère global du développement, qui conduit à réaliser une pluralité d'actions,
- l'articulation entre activités et actions, qui se traduit dans une structure institutionnelle efficiente,
- et une approche du développement qui vise l'insertion des populations pauvres et marginalisées à la société.

L'objectif de l'évaluation est de faire une analyse rétrospective des conditions, modalités et effets de la réalisation d'actions conjointes, des conditions de coordination réelle entre ces activités et d'estimer la viabilité et la durabilité produites par ce type de projets.

### 1.2.2

### Projets

### étudiés

L'étude porte sur les projets cofinancés dans la période 1988/91. Le recensement opéré à l'occasion de cette évaluation fait apparaître que 15% du total des cofinancements européens ont concerné des projets de développement intégré, pour un ensemble de 217 projets.

Les évaluateurs ont établi un échantillon représentatif de cet ensemble, composé de 16 projets.

### 1.2.3

### Résultats

Les activités de ce type de projets ont été classées en cinq sous-ensembles: activités productives, d'épargne et crédit, de services, de formation et enfin liées à l'environnement.

*les activités productives: résultats des plus variables et les plus fragiles.*

- on relève une fragilité des activités du secteur primaire, en particulier en agriculture (problème des cultures collectives, des aléas climatiques), en pisciculture (activité restant marginale) ou dans la pêche (prises faibles). En revanche, les initiatives en matière de petit élevage, et surtout pratiquées par les femmes, présentent des résultats positifs;
- les réussites sont très variables en matière d'appui à des micro-entreprises (actions présentes dans la moitié des projets étudiés), et tiennent en particulier à la qualité du système de prêts mis en place;
- la commercialisation reste en général un point d'achoppement des projets. Les coopératives ou boutiques villageoises sont considérées comme très faiblement voire non rentables;
- les infrastructures (équipements, aménagements, banques de céréales) produisent quant à elles des résultats très contrastés selon les pays.

*les activités d'épargne et de crédit: des échelles très différentes pour des performances très diverses.*

- selon les projets, on est conduit soit à mettre en place une institution financière spécialisée au service d'un grand nombre de membres, soit à appuyer des initiatives de crédit au niveau de groupes de base;
- l'évaluation constate qu'en général, lorsqu'il s'agit de coopératives, le niveau des remboursements est faible.

*les activités de service donnent de bons résultats.*

- il s'agit d'activités concernant le secteur sanitaire et social, éducatif, et des services urbains (habitat et aménagement);
- une interrogation reste posée toutefois sur les interventions menées en matière de santé, qui conduisent à la mise en place d'équipes professionnelles externes au milieu, fonctionnement parfois avec des coûts relativement importants;

*les actions de formation sociale et d'apprentissage technique sont considérées comme le point fort de ces programmes de développement intégré. Il s'agit:*

- d'une part des actions visant à promouvoir la collectivité partenaire, et/ou à renforcer les fonctions d'organisation sociale du milieu associatif;
- et d'autre part d'actions de formation professionnelle à vocation plus individuelle dans le cadre d'actions urbaines;

*les activités liées à l'environnement ont donné des résultats contrastés:*

- bons résultats dans le domaine de l'assainissement de quartiers,
- résultats plus variables en matière de reforestation ou diversification agricole,
- un développement important d'actions de sensibilisation sur des questions de pollution.

#### **1.2.4 Facteurs explicatifs des résultats**

*Facteurs considérés comme externes*

Un ensemble de facteurs d'échec sont indiqués, relevant de contraintes agroécologiques, de phénomènes liés aux flux migratoires saisonniers, mais aussi des effets de violence politique et de répression, ou encore des facteurs liés à la politique économique nationale.

D'autres facteurs d'échec sont cités autour du thème intérêt individuel / intérêt collectif et intérêt à court terme / changement à moyen terme, concernant des programmes qui privilégiaient *a priori* le collectif et le moyen terme.

Les évaluateurs signalent toutefois qu'une partie de ces facteurs d'échecs ne peuvent en fait être considérés comme externes. Sont en cause ici:

- l'analyse de contexte préalable au programme, qui aurait dû prendre en compte un ensemble de risques et d'aléas perceptibles,
- et la capacité de responsables de projets à comprendre les logiques soutenant les comportements, perceptions et aspirations des acteurs locaux et des populations.

#### *Facteurs*

#### *internes*

Au niveau global des programmes de développement intégré, les facteurs internes de succès peuvent être résumés ainsi:

- *études préalables*: existence de diagnostics et études préliminaire,
- *adaptation*: souplesse d'adaptation aux situations vécues,
- *organisation interne*: capacité de communication et de suivi-évaluation,
- *ressources humaines*: disponibilité et qualité d'animateurs polyvalents, ainsi que capacité d'appui technique par des experts et de vulgarisation des connaissances,
- *initiatives*: facultés et capacité d'initiatives des groupes et de leurs structures représentatives,
- *dimension institutionnelle*: combinaison de capacités organisationnelles à plusieurs niveaux et du dynamisme de leaders locaux.

### **1.2.5 Viabilité, durabilité**

a. la viabilité à court terme demande à être appréciée sur un double plan:

- la viabilité institutionnelle du partenaire au Sud et des organisations locales. Pour 4 projets sur 16, la viabilité sociale et la capacité de gestion institutionnelle sont loin d'être assurées; pour 6 projets sur 16, la capacité à mobiliser des ressources externes à l'issue du projet se pose fortement.
- la viabilité des activités. Pour 3 projets sur 16, l'appréciation de la viabilité est négative sur les activités centrales du projet, mettant en cause l'ensemble des autres activités; pour 3 autres projets, la viabilité n'est pas assurée sur des activités non centrales mais constituant une menace pour la cohérence d'ensemble du projet.

b. la durabilité, appréciée comme la capacité des organisations locales à poursuivre et améliorer les programmes en cours, n'est pas assurée pour 11 projets sur 16 (problèmes financiers, de prise de responsabilité, de capacité de mise en oeuvre).

## **1.3 Evaluation sectorielle des projets de formation professionnelle <sup>3</sup>**

### **1.3.1**

#### **Contexte**

Lancée début 1992 par la Commission européenne, l'étude a pour objet d'évaluer des projets d'ONG européennes cofinancés par l'UE, dans le secteur de la formation professionnelle.

La formation (éducation formelle et formation professionnelle) est l'un des trois grands secteurs, avec le développement rural et la santé, dans lesquels se répartissent les projets

cofinancés par la Ce, étant entendu que la plupart des actions relèvent de plusieurs secteurs (approche intégrée). Pour la période 1976 à 1990, la formation a bénéficié d'un tiers du montant total des financements mobilisés conjointement par les ONG et l'UE (1 200 MECU) pour des projets auxquels la Ce a contribué dans le cadre de sa politique de coopération.

Dans ce vaste secteur de la formation, l'étude s'intéresse aux projets de formation professionnelle organisée dans des centres. Ses objectifs sont d'apprécier la qualité des projets et les résultats obtenus, d'analyser leur viabilité et leur articulation avec l'enseignement national, de vérifier l'adaptation des conditions générales, tant de la Ce que des ONG Nord, par rapport aux besoins et initiatives des partenaires Sud, et ce dans la perspective d'une reformulation des conditions générales. Il y a aussi deux questions sous-jacentes: déterminer si la formation professionnelle doit demeurer un domaine de cofinancement prioritaire, compte tenu des enjeux et des résultats obtenus, et si les cofinancements déjà utilisés ont permis de répondre aux objectifs prévus?

L'évaluation s'est donc attachée à dégager une problématique générale de la formation professionnelle, fonction du contexte et des enjeux, afin de fournir des axes de réflexion et de recherche ainsi que des éléments pour la conception, la mise en place et le suivi de projets à venir. Il s'agissait aussi, notamment pour apprécier l'adaptation des conditions générales et procédures, d'analyser les relations entre l'ONG du Nord et son partenaire au Sud.

### **1.3.2 Projets étudiés**

Les critères suivants ont été retenus pour délimiter le champ de l'évaluation: existence d'un centre, financement réalisé entre 1986 et 1989. 160 projets répondant à ces critères ont été recensés. Ils ont mobilisés un montant total de cofinancement (ONG + Ce) de 67 MECU. Pour la même période, sur les 239 MECU apportés par la Ce en cofinancement d'actions menées dans les pays en développement, 14 % ont été consacrés au financement de projets de centres de formation professionnelle.

L'évaluation porte sur un échantillon représentatif de 12 projets (6 en Amérique latine, 4 en Afrique, 2 en Asie, portés par des ONG de différentes origines: 4 italiennes, 3 allemandes, 2 espagnoles, 1 danoise, 1 française, 1 belge). 4 de ces projets ont fait l'objet d'une étude plus approfondie.

Il s'agit de projets réalisés par des ONG européennes, en partenariat ou non avec des ONG du Sud. Les actions consistent à créer ou réaménager et soutenir les centres de formation. L'étude distingue les projets selon le type de public visé (jeunes et enfants 8 projets, adultes 5 projets), deux centres s'adressent plus spécifiquement aux femmes. Les centres sont implantés le plus souvent en milieu rural, 5 sont localisés en milieu urbain. Les formations dispensées concernent divers secteurs (agriculture, élevage, technologies appropriées 7 projets, artisanat 6 projets, animation et organisation des populations 2 projets, formation à vocation industrielle 3 projets, économie familiale 2 projets).

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1 Union Européenne (Commission européenne, DGVIII) - Evaluation des cofinancements CEE-ONG en matière d'appui institutionnel aux organisations de base dans les PVD - COTA, 1993

[text]

2 Union Européenne (Commission européenne, DGVIII) - Evaluation des projets de développement intégré cofinancés avec les ONG - Université catholique de Louvain, 1994.

[text]

3 Union Européenne (Commission européenne, DGVIII) - Evaluation des projets de formation professionnelle réalisés par des ONG et cofinancés par la CEE. Rapport de synthèse - SACED, février 1994.

[text]

### 1.3.3

### Résultats

L'évaluation dresse un bilan globalement positif des projets étudiés. Tout d'abord, ils constituent des réponses adaptées aux grands défis que la formation professionnelle a à relever dans des contextes d'intervention donnés:

- a. contexte africain, participer au développement du secteur privé, proposer des alternatives d'emploi autres que dans le domaine agricole stricto sensu ou dans la fonction publique;
- b. contexte latino-américain, offrir des possibilités professionnelles aux jeunes urbains et suburbains, proposer des formules / programmes adaptés aux petits paysans;
- c. Sud-Est asiatique, faciliter les réinsertions ou réhabilitations sociales atténuant les risques d'une société duale.

Ensuite ils s'adressent tous, à une exception près, aux couches de population les plus pauvres, aussi bien chez les jeunes que chez les adultes, catégories qui ont peu accès à la formation proposée par d'autres institutions. Ce qui constitue bien une spécificité de l'action des ONG.

L'impact des formations dispensées a été qualitativement estimé à trois niveaux:

- a. sur le public bénéficiaire, il est important (taux de réussite scolaire élevé, socialisation des jeunes, accès à l'emploi, amélioration des niveaux de revenu et des situations personnelles, etc.). Ce constat est à nuancer. On relève que les jeunes filles et les femmes sont moins concernées que les hommes et plus difficiles à mobiliser (problème d'adaptation des formations, celles-ci doivent déboucher sur une réelle insertion économique et non plus seulement concerner les activités liées à l'économie domestique). Par ailleurs, le rapport dresse un constat d'échec pour certaines formations agricoles (mauvaise conception des formations, rejet du retour à l'agriculture par les jeunes, insuffisant

- accompagnement à la sortie, absence d'appui à l'installation). L'étude relève aussi que les résultats des micro entreprises créées sont médiocres ;
- b. sur le développement local, il est moins fréquent, moins important et plus long à obtenir (création d'entreprises avec effet de synergie 4 projets, meilleure organisation de la population 4 projets). A ce niveau les effets ne sont pas (encore) probants. L'appui aux organisations paysannes, activité secondaire de la moitié des projets évalués, contribue à la création d'associations, de syndicats, coopératives et de groupes épargne-crédit. Mais cet appui donne des résultats très variables quant aux dynamiques et à l'autonomisation de ces organisations. Le peu de projets qui associent formation et développement ne sont pas en mesure d'en évaluer les impacts;
  - c. au niveau national, il est significatif pour 4 projets (formations de compétences professionnelles reconnues et transferts de méthodologies, évolution de la politique nationale en faveur des populations les plus pauvres).

### **1.3.4 Efficacité, efficacité, efficacité, pérennité**

En l'absence d'objectifs précis, chiffrés, en particulier d'objectifs spécifiques, ce qui est le cas général, il est difficile de mesurer le degré d'efficacité des projets.

L'étude relève que le passage de la formation au développement n'est encore que faiblement amorcé. La création de micro-entreprises dans les domaines agricole et artisanal (alternatives à l'absence d'emploi en zone rurale) peut conforter le développement local.. Ainsi l'interaction formation - développement serait un concept à prendre davantage en compte à la conception et pendant la mise en oeuvre des futurs projets.

L'organisation actuelle des centres permet d'aboutir à des coûts de formation trois à cinq fois moins élevés que ceux des autres institutions de formation. Coût qui n'est supporté que très partiellement par les bénéficiaires (10 %). L'efficacité des programmes est bonne, les moyens engagés sont, dans la plupart des cas, bien valorisés.

### *Viabilité à court terme*

Pour les centres, il s'agit de l'ensemble des moyens à mettre en oeuvre pour assurer le fonctionnement du projet, couvrir les dépenses correspondantes et garantir la durabilité elle a été mesurée à 4 niveaux (viabilité technique, socio-économique, financière, organisationnelle). Elle est globalement assurée pour six projets sur douze:

- a. la viabilité technique à court terme est probante pour 10 centres (formateurs compétents et motivés, outils pédagogiques adaptés). Il serait souhaitable que soient développés des appuis à la création de petites entreprises (appui technique, financier, à la gestion);
- b. la viabilité socio-économique est compromise dans sept cas parce que l'adéquation du contenu des formations à des contextes économiques en mutation n'est pas suffisamment assurée (absence de diagnostic socio-économique au départ, faiblesse des dispositifs de suivi-évaluation, centres insuffisamment

ouverts sur l'extérieur, etc.). Le problème se pose tout particulièrement dans le domaine de l'agriculture;

- c. a. La viabilité financière est assurée pour 6 projets, compromise pour 3, en voie d'amélioration pour 2, non assurée pour 1. Le niveau d'autofinancement (critère principal) est bon ou correct pour la plupart des centres de formation classique (jeunes et adultes, grâce notamment aux activités productives) et en général faible pour les centres de formation professionnelle et de « réhabilitation sociale » (publics en difficulté). Il serait souhaitable que: la viabilité financière soit prise en compte plus en amont du projet (maîtrise des postes, prévisions réalistes sur les possibilités de financement, etc.) et que les centres diversifient leurs sources de financement (contributions locales, etc.).

Pour les actions de développement initiées par le centre, la viabilité s'apprécie en fonction de 3 critères (conditions du marché, niveau d'autonomie des populations concernées par rapport au centre, niveau d'appropriation des actions par les bénéficiaires). Elle est insuffisante pour deux projets.

*Viabilité à long terme*  
La viabilité technique des centres à plus long terme doit être renforcée (mise en place de système de suivi-évaluation pour effectuer les adaptations nécessaires compte tenu de l'évolution des besoins).

La viabilité socio-économique nécessite une attention plus grande pour permettre des adaptations (risque de saturation, inadéquation aux besoins du marché, etc.). Les centres ont besoin de dispositifs de suivi post-formation.

La viabilité financière, lorsqu'elle est assurée à court terme, est précaire. Aucun projet ne dispose de fonds propres suffisants pour faire face à de brusques retournements et tous restent dépendants des contributions venant des donateurs privés et des ressources des familles bénéficiaires.

Cependant, plusieurs des centres s'appuient sur des partenaires (congrégations religieuses ou structures laïques de type fondation, etc.) dont les chances de pérennité sont élevées (ancienneté, organisation structurée, engagement moral et politique pour mobiliser de nouveaux partenaires techniques et financiers). L'ancienneté de leur implication dans les actions de développement et de leur implantation locale constitue souvent une garantie de viabilité pour les projets. Cependant cet engagement des structures caritatives peut compromettre les chances d'autonomisation (cas d'une trop forte personnalisation du pouvoir).

Compte tenu de ces atouts, la viabilité organisationnelle semble assurée dans la majorité des cas. Cependant, une plus forte représentation et implication des bénéficiaires (instances de décision, instances de concertation) favoriserait l'autonomisation et l'émergence de nouveaux partenaires.

### **1.3.5 Articulaton des acteurs**

L'analyse des relations entre partenaires, à travers celle des projets évalués, est éclairante pour ce qui est d'apprécier l'action de coopération en elle même et le rôle des différents acteurs en présence. Il en ressort que les ONG du Nord ne couvraient pas, au moment de l'évaluation, l'ensemble des besoins en appui de leurs partenaires (congrégations religieuses 3/4, organismes laïcs 1/4), variables et divers d'un cas à l'autre. Leur rôle serait trop limité dans la recherche de financements et les relations avec les financeurs publics. Par ailleurs, les relations entre partenaires Nord et Sud seraient trop limitées dans le temps. Les projets ont été cofinancés entre 1986 et 1989, c'est-à-dire avant que n'entrent en vigueur les nouvelles dispositions aménageant le système de cofinancement (1988, durée de cofinancement jusqu'à 5 ans). De ce fait la durée des projets et souvent des relations est restée comprise entre 1 et 3 ans. L'étude recommande de développer l'appui du partenaire Nord dans les domaines suivants :

- a. formation (conception de projets et cursus, agricole notamment, pédagogie, suivi-évaluation et mesure d'impact);
- b. actions de développement (conception, diagnostic, programmation, constitution et gestion de fonds d'épargne-crédit, mise en place des conditions de viabilité, suivi-évaluation et mesure d'impact, appui technique);
- c. financement des actions;
- d. structuration du partenaire du Sud, recherche de nouveaux partenaires.

Des améliorations dans la définition des conditions de cofinancement et des procédures et permettraient de renforcer l'efficacité de l'intervention, et notamment de mieux couvrir les besoins du partenaire au Sud, de faciliter son autonomisation et sa responsabilité.

La politique générale de cofinancement devrait contribuer davantage au renforcement des partenaires du Sud pour une meilleure viabilité des actions et une amélioration du partenariat. Quant au cofinancement par projet, les conditions peuvent être mieux utilisées et améliorées, notamment :

- a. renforcer l'appui financier au fonctionnement des activités si nécessaire, à la conception et au suivi évaluation;
- b. améliorer la conception des projets en étant particulièrement attentif aux formations en milieu rural et agricole (approfondir le diagnostic préliminaire) ainsi qu'aux formations pour les femmes et jeunes filles (contenu et pédagogie) ;
- c. prévoir une phase de suivi plus longue dans le prolongement de la phase d'investissement;
- d. permettre un décaissement plus adapté selon les types de projets, plus rapide dans les cas de projets d'investissement.

### **1.3.6 Facteurs de succès et d'échecs de ce type d'appui**

Le succès de ce type d'intervention passe par:

- a. un enrichissement des modes de partenariat (diversification des appuis apportés par les ONG européennes à leurs partenaires afin de mieux répondre aux besoins



- de ces organisation, renforcer leur professionnalisme et leur prise de responsabilités; inscription de ces appuis dans des durées plus longues; promotion des échanges Nord - Sud et Sud - Sud);
- b. une plus grande attention apportée à la conception du projet (public cible, problématique, définition des objectifs globaux et spécifiques, degré d'ouverture du centre sur l'extérieur, viabilité du centre), notamment lors de l'instruction.

L'évaluation recommande pour renforcer l'impact et la viabilité des centres:

- a. que les centres s'ouvrent davantage sur l'extérieur pour une meilleure adéquation des formations avec les besoins du milieu (connaissance des débouchés), en zone rurale en particulier (concertations avec les entreprises, implication des professionnels dans les programmes de formation, etc.). Il s'agit aussi de renforcer l'insertion dans les dynamiques locales en établissant des relations avec l'ensemble des acteurs du développement (banques, services publics, représentants de la société civile, groupes professionnels, ONG, projets de développement, etc.);
- b. de mettre davantage l'accent sur la création de micro-entreprises, etc. (programmes adaptés d'appui à la création et à la gestion de micro-entreprises, mise en place de fonds d'appui à l'investissement, etc.);
- c. de renforcer les stratégies d'autonomisation et de responsabilité des populations et des organisations de base (aide à la structuration et à l'organisation);
- d. d'améliorer l'ingénierie des projets de formation c'est-à-dire mieux les concevoir (approfondi l'analyse du milieu, public visé, besoins et possibilités, etc.), constituer des dispositifs d'appui extérieur, avec les entreprises notamment (impliquer les professionnels dans les formations, développer formations en alternance et stages, etc.), mettre en place des dispositifs de suivi-évaluation;
- e. d'augmenter la participation des bénéficiaires dans les instances de décision (gestion des centres et/ou des activités productives ou encore à l'allocation de fonds pour des projets de développement), impliquer les bénéficiaires dans des dispositifs de suivi post-formation, etc. Cela permettrait un positionnement plus rapide sur le chemin de l'autonomie, favoriserait l'émergence de nouveaux partenaires et contribuerait donc au renforcement de la viabilité organisationnelle.
- f. de développer les transferts de compétences pour un renforcement des partenaires au Sud (appui méthodologique, appui technique, appui en ingénierie financière, appui institutionnel);
- g. d'améliorer le degré d'autonomie financière des centres.

## **1.4 Evaluation sectorielle des projets d'épargne et de crédit <sup>4</sup>**

### **1.4.1**

### **Contexte**

La Commission européenne s'est donné en 1988, comme une de ses trois priorités dans ses relations avec les ONG, les « actions qui permettent, en particulier dans le cas d'actions productives, la constitution de ressources financières (par exemple: fonds rotatifs, prêts, garanties bancaires, etc.) ».

De fait, on constate que le nombre moyen de projets d'épargne ou de crédits cofinancés a doublé tous les trois ans entre 1984 et 1992. L'ensemble de ces projets représentait 12.6% des cofinancements communautaires en 1992, sur un budget total d'environ 110 millions d'ECU. L'évaluation signale par ailleurs que les interventions d'ONG dans ce domaine ne se limitent pas au seul guichet de cofinancement, puisqu'en plusieurs occasions on constate que des programmes de ce type sont mis en oeuvre par des ONG à la demande de la DG VIII ou de la DG I, dans le cadre de financements classiques.

#### **1.4.2 Projets étudiés**

L'étude portait sur les projets d'ONG cofinancés par la Commission dans la période de 1983 à 1992 inclus. Elle a retenu toutes les actions contenant dans leur titre des mots tels que: épargne, crédit, banque, fonds rotatif.

En procédant ainsi, 89 dossiers de projets ont été étudiés. puis un ensemble de projets ont été soit évalués (5 projets), soit visités (14 projets), en Amérique latine, Afrique et en Asie.

Les caractéristiques propres à l'ensemble des projets étudiés sont les suivantes:

- ces actions sont orientées principalement sur une démarche de crédit (85%), moins souvent sur une démarche d'épargne (15%).
- la priorité est donnée au financement d'activités productives (86%), avant l'habitat (14%).
- 40% des actions sont concentrées en Amérique latine, 26% en Afrique, 25% en Asie, 6% dans les Caraïbes et 3% au Maghreb.
- 6 ONG du Nord ont présenté la moitié des demandes de cofinancement (concentration), et 37 au total sont impliquées sur ces projets.

#### **1.4.3 Résultats**

Les résultats sont appréciés sous trois angles complémentaires:

- ces projets sont mis en oeuvre dans des zones ou auprès de populations marginalisées par les programmes gouvernementaux. Ils cherchent à avoir un impact réel sur les plus pauvres et marginalisés.
- ces projets ont de bons résultats en matière d'augmentation des revenus de la population cible.
- dès lors qu'il s'agit de projets visant une augmentation de l'activité économique des bénéficiaires, les résultats paraissent plus contrastés.

De façon générale, l'évaluation estime que les projets qui distribuent des prêts de montant unitaire faible ont un impact finalement limité:

- certes, ils provoquent une génération de revenus à court terme, qui aura amélioré les conditions de vie,
- mais les populations cibles restent relativement pauvres, et ce type de crédit ne joue finalement pas de rôle moteur de développement économique.

#### **1.4.4 Efficacité, efficacité et viabilité**

Dans des programmes mettant en jeu le crédit, l'approche de la viabilité prend en compte:

- des revenus tirés des taux d'intérêt et éventuellement de services complémentaires facturés aux bénéficiaires,
- et des coûts liés à la gestion du crédit, aux impayés et à l'inflation.

On perçoit ici qu'il y a un lien direct entre les règles de conduite du projet et l'approche de viabilité. Certaines ONG se mettent délibérément hors des conditions de viabilité (détermination de taux d'intérêts très bas, non prise en compte des impayés), pour se placer en rupture par rapport aux pratiques classiques et créer les conditions d'un accès au financement pour les plus pauvres. Elles revendiquent des choix qui conduisent à un érosion des fonds de crédit, considérant que sa pérennisation n'est pas un objectif prioritaire.

#### **1.4.5 Facteurs de succès ou d'échec**

Une question se pose d'emblée à la conception de ce type de projets: savoir si l'aspect crédit assure la consistance première du projet, ou s'il ne s'agit que d'un volet technique au service d'une action plus intégrée. Dans le premier cas, la question de la viabilité puis du mode de mise en oeuvre demande de clarifier les options du projet dès le départ. Dans le second cas, l'évaluation fait apparaître un risque certain de voir le volet crédit et les montants alloués à cette fin, engloutis dans des pratiques approximatives sans impact significatif sur les bénéficiaires ou la structuration du financement d'activités.

L'évaluation propose aussi une typologie des crédits selon leur caractère de «reproductibilité», d'opportunité de développement ou de dangerosité. Selon l'évaluation:

- les crédits urbains à court terme, avec ou sans garantie solidaire, et destinés au commerce ou à la production, sont reproductibles,
- les crédits de moyen terme, en zone urbaine, devraient être développés de façon à avoir un impact significatif sur la structure économique,
- les petits fonds de crédits insérés dans des opérations plus vastes sont plus difficiles à gérer, et peuvent avoir des conséquences néfastes; la gestion directe de crédits par des organisations professionnelles pour ses membres engendre des confusions qu'il vaut mieux lever en créant des institutions financières spécialisées et autonomes.

Dans la mise en oeuvre, un premier facteur de succès tient dans la politique de personnel suivie par ces projets: la gestion de systèmes de crédit demande un professionnalisme, et donc des responsables de projets expérimentés et correctement rémunérés, ainsi que des agents de crédit soigneusement sélectionnés.

Viennent ensuite les questions d'organisation, de procédures et modalités d'exécution, qui demandent une planification et un suivi très rigoureux.

Pour améliorer la viabilité de ce type de projets, il faut:



## INTRODUCTION

This case study contains examples of evaluations from a variety of Finnish NGOs. There exists little in-depth experience in Finland in the field of NGO evaluation, notwithstanding efforts by both the Department for International Development Cooperation and KEPA (the Service Centre for Development Cooperation - Finnish Volunteer Service, FVS) to encourage activities, and a number of initiatives taken by large and a few small NGOs. However, there is considerable eagerness to know more about different kinds of NGO evaluations.

The basic form of NGO development activity is project-based. In 1996, 76 per cent of funds, FIM 96 mn, were allocated to projects, of which FIM 20 mn went to KEPA, FIM 5 mn to international NGOs, FIM 2.6 mn for information services and FIM 2.6 mn to Finnish Embassies for small projects. The NGOs have to contribute 25 per cent of project funds from their own sources. Some now receive European Union funding too (see Kehitys - Utveckling 1, 1997).

NGO Projects are distributed sectorally as follows: education and training (40 per cent); health (33 per cent), and other social services (6 per cent) environmental projects (9 per cent); and agriculture and forestry (4 per cent).<sup>1</sup> The largest share of NGO Support funds goes to religious organisations (60 per cent), followed by social service organisations (13) and political organisations (9 per cent). Trade union organisations receive 7 per cent of donor funds, cultural organisations 6 per cent, friendship and peace organisations 4 per cent, and environmental organisations 1 per cent.

The government's NGO support programme concentrates on the largest organisations. 120 organisations receive funds, with 91 of these supporting only one project. SASK (the Trade Union Solidarity Centre of Finland) has 31 projects and received 6 per cent of total funds in 1996, the Finnish Free Foreign Mission has 25 projects and received 17 per cent, the Finnish Red Cross 20 projects and 5 per cent, FinnChurchAid 15 projects and 8 per cent, Finland's Svenska Frikyrkogård 15 projects and World Vision Finland 12 projects. Most projects are small: average allocation in 1996 were FIM 270, 000 per project (about \$50,000). Finnish NGOs have projects in over 60 countries, most of them in Sub Saharan Africa.

## NGO Evaluations in Finland

There are no accurate data on the number of NGO evaluations that have been carried.<sup>2</sup> One reason is that the term 'evaluation' is used to encompass activities ranging from internal auditing to more rigorous assessments done by independent, external evaluators.

There seems to be growing tendency to make greater use of external, mostly local, evaluators. However for smaller projects, of which there are many, informal 'evaluations' are more common often using unpaid, voluntary, evaluators, notably students. As for the projects themselves, there has been a tendency for Finnish NGOs to spread out beyond their initial focus, for instance from tree planting to income-generating activities.

One consequence of the range of studies undertaken out by independent external evaluators is the varying quality of those produced. It seems that in general evaluations are not currently seen as a meaningful part of project work, though this attitude is changing. The following points can be noted: terminology formerly used is being tightened up; and in their overall approach the emphasis is shifting towards partnership.

The narrow criteria previously employed for evaluating projects, in terms of objectives achieved, is being replaced by a greater focus on impact. However, whilst internationally this shift has often led to discussion of social and economic development activities being replaced by discussion on rights and empowerment, this has not yet happened in Finland. In fact, there are many elements of the Finnish NGO support programme which suggest that this shift is not going to be manifest for some time. What is happening is that some of the religious-based organisations are shifting their areas of interest from, for instance, Africa to Estonia and Russia. They are increasingly referring to their activities as 'cooperation with nearby areas'. This shift will mean that evaluation criteria and requirements will also change.

Riddell *et al* (1994) undertook a major evaluation of the rationale and mandate of the Finnida NGO Support Programme (SP). The report produced focused on the efficiency and effectiveness of the Support Programme as a whole, the impact of initiatives supported, sustainability and replicability of the activities, and participation - especially that of women - in them. A major part of the work involved country case studies in Ethiopia, Nepal, Nicaragua and Uganda.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, FINNIDA funded an impact evaluation of Finnish NGOs development projects in the Morogoro region of Tanzania, encompassing a five year period, ending in 1994.<sup>4</sup> The evaluation was carried out by Dr. (& Mrs) Lucy S. Nkya, Mr. Audace I. Kanshahu and Mrs. Angela M. Chaila, who are Tanzanian economists, a medical doctor and a social scientist.

The major objectives of this evaluation were to assess the impact of Finnish NGOs development cooperation; to evaluate the implementation methodology of these projects; to recommend how to improve local community participation in these projects; and to give Finnida and the Tanzanian Government an insight into the project work done. The evaluation covered four sectors: health, education, community development and environment. The results of the evaluation were very sector- specific. The report also included some general observations on project relevance, efficiency and effectiveness. It stated that the projects under review benefitted the target population, but there were difficulties in assessing project efficiency and project effectiveness. Impact (expected and unexpected) at various stages of project implementation was influenced by the following factors: a lack of infrastructure; poor communication; insufficient medicines; community participation; local government participation; lack of markets; and project planning and

management. The report concluded that an evaluation should have taken place much earlier, both to address the problems listed and to assist ongoing project design and management. The report argued that if this had occurred it would have helped to enhance project impact.

The Tanzanian report also discussed the issue of sustainability. The major elements used to assess project sustainability were: cost profiles; the contribution of local skills and local raw materials; outputs that meet the needs of local people; the creation of local employment and income; environmental 'harmony'; and the presence of supportive institutions. Recommendations for enhancing sustainability included the need to improve project design; better contextual data and information; better coordination; greater sensitivity to cultural issues; better communication and infrastructure; and training.

The Tanzanian evaluation is an example of how local evaluators themselves appraise NGO development activities. Earlier examples include an evaluation of 4H Activities in the Tanga Region of Tanzania by the Finnish Embassy in Dar es Salaam, begun in 1992, which was also carried out by local evaluators. The report of this evaluation includes some discussion of the impact of 4H on individuals and the community. One interesting aspect of this evaluation is its conclusion that some of the problems encountered in the project were caused by a lack of local understanding. This confirms similar conclusions made in other evaluations, a number of which emphasise the decisive influence of cultural differences between northern NGOs and southern beneficiaries. Today some 'Finnish' NGOs projects are carried out almost entirely by local partners, with the Finnish NGOs just managing and advising on certain aspects such as sustainability. This function is carried out by different local and Finnish NGO headquarters staff and is regarded as an efficient method of influencing project work at different levels.

Some of the largest Finnish organisations have been commissioning evaluations for over a decade. In recent years, when there was a danger years that government funding of NGO development projects would contract, the number of evaluations conducted went up. The approach used in these evaluations has been influenced very much by current thinking at the time they were commissioned. A key problem that NGO evaluations in Finland has faced is that projects are often too small for a large scale evaluation. Though factors such efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, participation and many other criteria are well known, they are often not effectively used in practice. In Finnish NGO evaluations, cost-effectiveness analysis is rarely used.

Many projects have been evaluated as part of synthesis studies, such as Riddell *et al* (1994) and Nkya *et al* (1996) By the late 1980s, evaluations had been carried out which assessed agricultural and rural development-related cooperation projects in Tanzania, involving four Finnish NGOs. These evaluations concentrated on the achievement of project objectives and, in this case, concluded that in general the projects were consistent with the development objectives of the state of Tanzania.

Many evaluation findings have caused controversy because of their lack of sympathy towards the amount of voluntary work undertaken, particularly in the case of small

NGOs. Many NGOs believe that large-scale evaluations are inappropriate as they do not fully take into consideration the small scale, humanitarian nature of the organisation and project evaluated.

Some Finnish organisations work together with their partner organisations at a global level, including religious-based organisations such as World Vision. One result is that evaluations have often been designed and managed outside Finland, such as by the World Lutheran Service. This has tended to reduce the Finnish influence.

SASK (the Trade Union Solidarity Centre of Finland) is involved in projects in Uganda involving three public sector unions which focus on women's education. When these were evaluated, an initial step of the joint evaluation was to visit study circles, meeting instructors and leaders and attend management committee meetings. Issues such as sustainability and budgetary processes were discussed with the management committees. The issue caused concern to the beneficiaries who feared a cessation of funds at an early stage of their projects. Step two of the joint evaluation covered questions such as relevance, efficiency, methods and sustainability. In this, case sustainability referred to the process by which the projects have helped the unions build up their organisations for study activities.

FIDIDA (the Finnish Disabled People's International Development Association) has undertaken a mid-term evaluation of its project with ZAFOD (the Zambian Federation of the Disabled). The terms of reference for the evaluation were discussed with ZAFOD, and a local consultants was contracted competitively. FIDIDA also included an evaluator from Zimbabwe with relevant experience. The evaluation was based on interviews, the draft was discussed at a round table discussion in Zambia, and the final report was used as seminar material in both in Finland and Zambia.

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### 3

#### **SMALLER PROJECTS AND SMALLER NGOS**

Small organisations, mostly with one project, seem to be innovative in many fields. These organisations, often rooted in different kinds of student organisations in Finland, have done some of their own evaluations, the students often using them as an input to their studies. These 'evaluators' have studied, and are familiar with, the language and literature of evaluations. They concepts such as efficiency, impact, sustainability and gender. These evaluations have usually been based on project material and group discussions with the beneficiaries. The evaluators are also familiar with the various difficulties associated with evaluations; they are also usually active member of the implementing organisation. One idea coming from these smaller NGOs is that different small organisations could evaluate each others' projects, which would reduce the costs as most small organisations cannot afford to use professional evaluators. Small Finnish organisations usually advocate the use of a variety of different evaluation methods at different phases of their projects; often



they do not want outside evaluators, preferring people who already know something about the project. Local evaluators have been used, however, to analyse particular projects which require a wider knowledge of the local situation. Examples would include assessing the possibility of enlarging an NGO project, and/or to shift towards income generating activities.

Most small NGO evaluations are directly linked to specific projects. As a result methods tend not to be rigid and standardised, but open to suggestions and change. The thinking on project impact has changed, not least by taking a broader contextual view. As for the projects themselves, there has been a tendency for Finnish NGOs to spread out beyond their initial focus, for instance from tree planting to income-generating activities. Evaluations can help in this process.

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## 4

### **RECENT INITIATIVES AND QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS**

Both organisations with wide experience in evaluations and smaller, less experienced, NGOs are interested in evaluations. However, as many have not developed their own basic evaluation tools and guidelines, they have looked elsewhere for them. Both NORAD and Dutch literature are popular because they have been easily available. All NGOs want education and training related to evaluations. In response, KEPA is planning a variety of initiatives with the help of Finnish evaluators. Finnish organisations also need to see good evaluation reports to review these as potential models. All organisations want more money for evaluations, and there is now evidence of NGOs building evaluation components into their funding applications submitted to the Department for International Development Cooperation. What is emphasised is that evaluation is an ongoing process and not just as a post-project exercise.

At the end of February 1997, at the initiative of some 70 NGOs, KEPA organised a seminar on the evaluation of NGO development activities. At the seminar, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire, based on a modified version of those used in the United Kingdom and Norwegian case studies. Some NGOs were interested in completing the questionnaire, most were not. The lack of response and interest may well be due to the fact that these Finnish NGOs do not regard evaluations as problematic, or else that they have little experience of them. Some NGOs, however, were keen to give their views on evaluations. In general, the main concerns at the seminar were the same as those discussed in the other case studies.

The results indicate that work is needed on developing evaluation methodologies and toolkits, especially for organisations concerned with only one or two projects. The wish was expressed to have an evaluator who could solve all the problems of evaluation with the best possible tools! The fundamental questions raised in relation to NGO evaluation activities in Finland included the following:

- Are there any relevant toolkits or guidelines for evaluation?
- What options are available if different evaluation methods are contradictory?
- Who should evaluate?
- How essential are competence, objectivity or the partnership of locals?
- How should the different expectations of northern and southern partners be handled?
- How can reliable information be found, in contrast to diplomatic information? How can qualitative outcomes such as training, partnership, capacity building and advocacy be measured?
- How can evaluations be marketed to southern NGOs and beneficiaries, not as criticisms, but rather as processes to enhance impact?
- What can donors learn from the NGO work? Can the development research community help NGOs?
- How can lack of time and resources be managed?
- What are the possibilities for participatory and/or self-evaluation as well as self-criticism?
- Should KEPA take the responsibility for centralising evaluations and evaluation activities?
- Is there any solution to the problems of lack of information in Finland and in the southern countries?
- Who should take responsibility for training evaluators at different levels?

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<sup>1</sup> This share is linked to social policy in Finland. The National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health (STAKES) has a division called Health & Development Cooperation for Welfare and Health (HEDEC) which is active in international cooperation, both in developing countries and 'countries in transition'.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>2</sup> It is not even easy to estimate the number of Finnish NGO evaluations carried out. One of the biggest NGOs in Finland, concentrating mainly on education and health activities, has commissioned four evaluations in the last five years, and its projects have been part of larger activities in six instances during the last fifteen years. Another large NGO has commissioned only a few evaluations of its own, but takes a very active part in the evaluations commissioned by its international headquarters.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>3</sup> The study has been summarised by Koponen& Mattila-Wiro (1996, 285-298).

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>4</sup> This evaluation is included in the donor-commissioned synthesis in Chapter 3 of the main Report.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>5</sup> Where they have had the language skills, some Finns have also been used as evaluators by different non-Finnish donors and NGOs.

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## APPENDICE 4

### Etude de synthèse d'évaluations d'ONG

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#### **ETUDE DE CAS DE LA FRANCE**

#### L'évaluation des ONG: politiques et pratiques

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Jean-Louis  
Groupe de recherche et d'échanges technologiques, Paris

Vielajus

Mai 1997

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### **LISTE DES ABRÉVIATIONS**

|        |   |
|--------|---|
| ACAPES | Association culturelle d'aide à la promotion éducative et sociale |
| ACATR  | Association coopération Aveyron Tulcea Roumanie                   |
| AFVP   | Association française des volontaires du progrès                  |
| ALDIS  | Action locale pour un développement international solidaire       |
| ANS    | Action Nord Sud   |
| CCFD   | Comité catholique contre la faim et pour le développement         |

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| CICDA | Centre international de coopération pour le développement agricole           |
| CIDR  | Centre international de développement rural                                  |
| CSN   | Coopérants du service national   |
| FAFD  | Fédération des associations du Fouta pour le développement                   |
| FONGS | Fédération des ONG du Sénégal  |
| GRDR  | Groupe de réalisation pour le développement rural                            |
| GRET  | Groupe de recherche et d'échanges technologiques                             |
| IRAM  | Institut de recherches et d'applications des méthodes de développement       |
| MEEP  | Mission d'évaluation et d'études prospectives du ministère de la Coopération |
| OSI   | Organisations de solidarité internationale                                   |
| PLS   | Partenariat Lille/Saint-Louis du Sénégal                                     |
| RAFOD | Réseau d'appui aux formations pour le développement                          |
| VSF   | Vétérinaires sans frontières   |

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## RÉSUMÉ

On estime couramment en France à 1 000 le nombre d'ONG (dites OSI: Organisations de solidarité internationale) engagées dans des actions d'éducation au développement, d'appui à des actions de développement, ou d'intervention d'urgence.

Toutefois, dès que l'on porte attention à leurs moyens, il apparaît que seule une part d'entre elles disposent de ressources significatives pour une action internationale : selon une enquête récente auprès de 300 ONG<sup>1</sup>, 53% ont un budget annuel inférieur à 250 KF, 22% entre 250 KF et 3 MF, 15% entre 3 et 15 MF, et 10% supérieur à 15 MF.

Les ressources d'ensemble des ONG étaient estimées dans une autre enquête<sup>2</sup> à 3,2 milliards de francs en 1994. Sur ce total, 1,5 milliards ont été affectés à des actions de développement, le reste allant à l'urgence (1 milliard), ainsi qu'à l'éducation au développement et au fonctionnement des ONG.

Le cofinancement des pouvoirs publics aux actions de développement est assuré

par le Bureau commun de la vie associative (ministère de la Coopération, ministère des Affaires étrangères). En 1994, l'enveloppe disponible pour ce Bureau était de 189 MF, mais il n'est pas pertinent de rapprocher ce chiffre des ressources totales des ONG: manquent en effet les contributions publiques aux actions d'urgence, ainsi que les ressources allouées aux ONG sur d'autres guichets des ministères.

En 1995, le Bureau commun a engagé 223 MF sur 279 demandes présentées par 138 ONG. Sur ce montant, 36% étaient destinées au cofinancement d'actions de développement, 56% pour le volontariat, 8% pour l'éducation au développement et le soutien de structures non gouvernementales collectives. Les secteurs prioritaires d'intervention ayant bénéficié de cet appui sont: la santé, le développement rural, l'éducation et la formation.

Les ONG françaises ont fait des avancées significatives dans le domaine de l'évaluation depuis la fin des années 1980. L'une des plus grandes ONG française (le Ccfd, Comité catholique contre la faim et pour le développement) a mis en place un service interne d'études et d'évaluation, mais ce cas fait plutôt exception. Deux initiatives à vocation collective paraissent exemplaires: le F3E, fonds d'évaluation mis en place de façon concertée entre un ensemble d'ONG (36 en 1997) et les pouvoirs publics, avec en particulier la participation du Bureau commun de la vie associative et de la Mission d'évaluation et d'études prospectives (MEEP) du ministère de la Coopération; la Fondation de France, qui a produit une charte de l'évaluation et qui engage des moyens significatifs pour le financement d'évaluations d'ONG du Sud.

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1 France, Coopération Sud - Une photographie des organisations de solidarité internationale - janvier 1997.

[\[text\]](#)

2 France, Commission coopération développement - Argent et solidarité internationale - juin 1996.

[\[text\]](#)

**1**

## **INITIATIVES DE PROMOTION DE L'ÉVALUATION**

### **1.1 L'expérience du F3E<sup>3</sup>**

#### **1.1.1 Historique et cadre général**

Fruit de la concertation entre les pouvoirs publics et les ONG, un dispositif spécifique à l'évaluation des actions non gouvernementales a été mis en place en France. L'initiative remonte en fait à 1989. Dès cette époque, et dans le cadre de la Commission Coopération Développement, instance nationale de concertation entre l'administration et les ONG, le besoin s'était fait ressentir de promouvoir l'évaluation en milieu non gouvernemental.

Dans un premier temps, une structure associative (F2E) s'est mise en place, dans l'objectif de sélectionner des demandes d'évaluations à caractère ponctuel ou transversal, émanant des ONG ou suggérées par les pouvoirs publics. Cette structure assurait dès lors un suivi de ces études, qui étaient commanditées sous la responsabilité directe du Bureau commun en charge des ONG pour les ministères de la Coopération et des Affaires étrangères.

En 1993, une table-ronde organisée sur le thème « évaluer pour évoluer » a rassemblé près de 250 personnes, manifestant l'intérêt réel des ONG pour l'exercice d'évaluation. Au cours de cette réunion, des orientations fortes de l'approche de l'évaluation ont été formulées:

- promouvoir l'évaluation auprès des ONG dans le sens d'une amélioration de leurs pratiques,
- donner une priorité à l'évaluation à vocation de conseil, par rapport à des évaluations de type contrôle (qui restent toujours mobilisables, mais dans d'autres cadres),
- insister sur le bénéfice collectif produit par les évaluations à l'intention du milieu associatif, en particulier pour des évaluations de type transversal.

A la suite de cette rencontre, décision a été prise, par les ONG d'une part, et avec les pouvoirs publics d'autre part, de renforcer le dispositif mis en place. Le F2E s'est transformé en F3E<sup>4</sup>, intégrant aussi un pan d'activités lié au cofinancement d'études préalables pour des projets d'ONG ayant un volet productif.

Le F3E s'est trouvé doté de trois principes et deux objectifs:

#### *Trois principes*

- pour renforcer la qualité des interventions non gouvernementales, le F3E entend promouvoir un réflexe d'étude en préalable à l'action et d'évaluation, au cours ou au terme de l'action;
- pour lever au moins partiellement les cloisonnements entre coopérations publique et non gouvernementale, il y a nécessité d'une concertation que le F3E tente de mettre en pratique dans la décision de cofinancement d'études et dans la valorisation ultérieure de leurs résultats;
- au delà du soutien individuel auprès de chaque ONG membre, le F3E met en avant un principe de bénéfice collectif, selon lequel toute étude



financée avec son appui est à la disposition de tous les membres du Fonds.

### *Deux objectifs*

- mise en place d'un guichet de cofinancement d'études, alimenté par les Pouvoirs publics et les ONG, et géré directement par le F3E,
- et mise en oeuvre d'un programme de valorisation des études cofinancées visant à élargir les résultats d'études à caractère ponctuel.

## **1.1.2 Organisation et fonctionnement**

### *Structures*

Le F3E est organisé sous la forme d'une association de loi de 1901. Ses membres sont des ONG qui cotisent volontairement au Fonds. On comptait, en février 1997, 36 associations membres, témoignant d'une réelle diversité du milieu associatif français. <sup>5</sup>

Le F3E est doté d'un secrétariat technique qui en assure le fonctionnement régulier. Son Bureau se réunit régulièrement pour sélectionner les demandes d'études, ou en suivre l'exécution. Un Comité d'examen, établi sous une forme paritaire entre le bureau de l'association et les représentants des Pouvoirs publics, et animé par un président indépendant des deux parties, décide finalement du financement des études.

Tant pour le fonctionnement de la structure permanente que pour la dotation du Fonds de cofinancement, les ressources proviennent pour une part des pouvoirs publics et l'autre part des ONG, selon des règles clairement précisées.

### *Evaluations*

De 1994 à 1996, le F3E a apporté son appui à 17 évaluations présentées par ses membres.

**Tableau A4.1 Liste des évaluations cofinancées par le F3E de 1994 à 1996**

| <b>Intitulé de l'évaluation</b>                | <b>Zone / pays</b> | <b>ONG</b>   |
|--|--------------------|--------------|
| impact d'un programme de développement intégré | Philippines urbain | Inter Aide   |
| programme régional de coopération sur 15 ans   | Asie               | T des Hommes |
| développement de l'élevage familial            | Sénégal            | Vsf          |

|   |                 |               |
|---|-----------------|---------------|
| crédit et accompagnement<br>d'activités économiques   | Madagascar      | Cidr          |
| coopérations<br>brésiliennes pour le<br>développement de la petite<br>agriculture familiale | franco- Brésil  | Aldis         |
| programme régional de<br>coopération  | Afr. de l'Ouest | Afrique Verte |
| appui au développement<br>micro régional  | Bolivie         | Cicda         |
| programme d'appui aux<br>agents d'élevage   | Cambodge        | Vsf           |
| action dans le domaine de<br>l'irrigation   | Mali            | Grdr          |
| programme provincial de<br>santé  | Cambodge        | Ans           |
| programme provincial de<br>développement agricole   | Cambodge        | Ans           |
| programme naissance   | Vietnam         | L'Appel       |
| programmes de coopération<br>décentralisée  | Sénégal         | Pls           |
| programme concerté de<br>développement rural  | Cambodge        | collectif     |
| programme d'actions du<br>Cedal   | Am. latine      | Ccfd          |
| coopération Aveyron -<br>Tulcea   | Roumanie        | Acatr         |
| appui aux coopératives de<br>petits producteurs agricoles                                   | Venezuela       | Cicda         |

En examinant de plus près les motivations qui ont poussé ces ONG à mettre en route une évaluation, on obtient la typologie suivante:

- *un motif principal de désengagement*: dans 2 cas sur 17, il s'agissait pour l'ONG de tirer un bilan de longues années de coopération avec un ou des partenaires, et d'envisager les conditions de leur retrait;
- *un motif principal de renouvellement*: dans 4 cas sur 17, il s'agissait pour les ONG de tirer les leçons d'une première phase de l'action pour

- concevoir la nouvelle phase et pour pouvoir accéder à de nouveaux cofinancements;
- *un motif de consolidation des acquis*: dans 3 cas sur 17, il s'agissait d'ONG de création récente, qui cherchaient à consolider les acquis de leur intervention pour préciser leurs stratégies et modes d'intervention;
  - *un motif de validation des démarches*: dans 8 cas sur 17, soit environ la moitié des cas, il s'agissait pour les ONG de valider des démarches nouvelles de coopération et d'intervention: appui à la privatisation des services, actions dans le champ économique, nouveaux partenariats, démarche concertée d'intervention.

Un certain nombre de ces évaluations dépassent le cadre ponctuel du projet, pour étudier des programmes dont certains ont un caractère régional et pluriannuel.

D'autres évaluations, qualifiées de transversales, tentent d'apporter un éclairage sur la pratique de plusieurs ONG sur un même champ ou domaine: cela a été le cas, en particulier, pour une évaluation transversale du partenariat entre ONG du Nord et du Sud, commanditée par 5 ONG françaises, ou bien pour les initiatives d'échanges de jeunes urbains dans le cadre de chantiers d'été (Opération Ville Vie Vacances), ou encore pour l'étude des politiques d'information et d'édition de 3 autres ONG.

#### *Actions*

#### *d'accompagnement*

Selon ses objectifs clairement énoncés, l'action du F3E ne s'arrête pas au cofinancement des études. Le F3E a une intervention en amont et en aval du processus d'évaluation.

L'intervention en amont consiste en un soutien individuel et collectif à la préparation des évaluations:

- le soutien individuel se fait sous la forme de conseil et d'appui à la demande de l'ONG, dans la préparation des termes de références de l'évaluation; c'est le travail du secrétariat technique, parfois relayé par celui d'un « facilitateur » quand la négociation des termes de référence présente des difficultés, soit internes à l'association, soit entre l'association et ses partenaires;
- le soutien collectif a pris en 1996 la forme d'une première session d'information technique, destinée à des permanents d'ONG. Cette session a été l'occasion de poser les enjeux de l'évaluation, d'explicitier les différents types d'interventions, et de former les participants à la préparation des termes de référence.

L'intervention en aval, prend deux formes: valorisation collective de résultats d'évaluations, et réflexion sur la mise au point d'outils méthodologiques adaptés au milieu non gouvernemental.

La valorisation se fait de différentes façons:

- chaque évaluation fait l'objet d'un résumé rédigé par l'évaluateur, d'une note de commentaire de l'ONG, d'une fiche de lecture du secrétariat technique, et d'un questionnaire rempli par l'ONG un an après l'étude. Le résumé est public, les autres documents accessibles à tous les membres du fonds qui le demandent;
- les évaluations transversales sont mises en débat en séances collectives, auxquelles est convié le plus grand nombre possible d'ONG ainsi que les représentants des Pouvoirs publics, dans un cadre qui dépasse le F3E, de façon à préparer les éventuelles décisions de réorientation prises par les uns ou les autres de ces acteurs.
- enfin, un premier travail de capitalisation de quinze évaluations d'ONG a été réalisé par le secrétariat du F3E en 1995/96. C'est sur la base de ce travail de capitalisation qu'une synthèse a pu être élaborée, tirant les enseignements de cet ensemble d'études (voir le chapitre sur les études commanditées par les ONG du Nord).

L'ensemble de ces travaux opérationnels et de réflexion conduit maintenant le F3E à s'engager sur l'approche méthodologique de l'évaluation, appliquée au milieu non gouvernemental. Un groupe de travail a été mis en place, pour l'année 1997, chargé de réfléchir sur la méthodologie et la déontologie de l'évaluation. Ce groupe, qui en est à son démarrage, devrait réfléchir autour de deux séries de questions:

- sur des questions d'évaluation qui n'apparaissent pas spécifiques aux ONG (par exemple l'approche de l'impact), quelles sont les réponses des ONG?
- les caractéristiques a priori propres aux ONG (par exemple les valeurs, la proximité, le partenariat) conduisent-elles à des méthodes ou des critères d'évaluation spécifiques?

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<sup>3</sup> France (F3E) - Rapport d'activité de janvier 1995 à avril 1996 - Anne Fonteneau - mai 1996.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>4</sup> Fonds pour la promotion des études préalables, transversales et évaluations.

[\[text\]](#)

<sup>5</sup> au 1er février 1997: ACATR, Action Nord Sud, Afrique Verte, AFVP, AVICEN, Bioforce Rhône-Alpes, CFSI, CIDR, CODEV, Eau Vive, France-Pays du Mékong, GERES, GRDR, Handicap International, LFEEP, RAFOD, Secours Catholique, TECHNAP, VSF, Acroterre,

Aide et Action, L'Appel, CCFD, CICDA, Europact, Frères des Hommes, GRET, Inter Aide, IRAM, OICS Medicus Mundi, Partenariat Lille Saint-Louis, Peuples Solidaires, RAFOD, Scouts de France, Solagral, Terre des Hommes.

[text]

### **1.1.3 Les réponses des ONG membres du F3E au questionnaire**

Un questionnaire a été diffusé, pour les besoins de cette étude, auprès des ONG membres du F3E. Ce questionnaire est la traduction de celui élaboré par nos collègues de l'ODI à destination des ONG anglaises regroupées dans le collectif REMAPP (groupe d'ONG de recherche et d'évaluation).

Nous avons choisi de le rédiger sur des bases identiques, afin de se doter d'un point d'observation conjoint entre ONG anglaises et françaises.

Douze associations, soit le tiers de l'effectif du F3E, ont répondu au questionnaire. L'échantillon de réponses provient de quatre ONG dites généralistes (CCFD, Frères des Hommes, Aide et Action, l'Appel), deux ONG de formation (Bioforce développement, Rafod), quatre ONG dites spécialisées (ANS, Europact, GRET, IRAM, VSF) et une association animant un jumelage-coopération (ACATR). Il présente une réelle diversité à l'instar des membres du F3E.

Toutes les associations sauf une ont une responsabilité propre sur des projets de développement, et se sont trouvées en situation de décider d'une évaluation. La dernière est impliquée comme opérateur ou comme évaluateur et n'est donc pas commanditaire d'évaluations, mais son avis reste intéressant à prendre en compte.

#### **Encadré A4.1: Questionnaire adressé aux ASSOCIATIONS membres du F3E**

1. Nom de l'association:

Coordonnées de l'association:

Nom de la personne répondant au questionnaire:

*Caractère confidentiel: veuillez indiquer, le cas échéant, les éléments de vos réponses pour lesquels vous ne souhaitez pas que soit mentionné le nom de votre organisation.*

2. Commanditez-vous et/ou réalisez-vous des évaluations de vos projets de développement? (nous ne traitons pas dans cette enquête des actions d'urgence)

OUI

NON

- a) Si vous avez répondu « OUI » à la question 2, combien d'évaluations avez-vous répertorié, et combien sont réalisées en moyenne par an?

Nombre d'évaluations répertoriées: .....

Sur quelle période: de 19..... à 19 .....

Nombre moyen par an: .....

Sont-elles dans le domaine public? OUI  NON

% d'évaluations dans le domaine public: .....

- b) Si vous avez répondu « OUI » à la question 2, pouvez-vous expliquer en quelques lignes POURQUOI vous avez mis en œuvre ces évaluations.

- c) Si vous avez répondu « OUI » à la question 2, pouvez-vous décrire en quelques lignes les éléments spécifiques et/ou importants concernant les METHODES utilisées dans ces évaluations.

3. Si vous apportez un appui financier à des ONG du Sud pour la réalisation de projets ou de programmes de développement, quelles exigences avez-vous pour l'évaluation de ces initiatives de développement?

4. Résumez brièvement la manière dont les partenaires au Sud et les « bénéficiaires » sont impliqués dans les évaluations d'impact.

5. Dans les pays où vous travaillez ou apportez un appui financier, avez-vous connaissance d'approches en matière d'évaluation d'impact mises en œuvre par des ONG du Sud et/ou des consultants qui soient différentes des vôtres, ou qui ont influencé votre approche de l'évaluation? Si oui, décrivez brièvement ces différences.

6. Avez-vous réalisé des études d'impact « thématiques »?

OUI  NON

Si oui, pouvez-vous les citer et nous en adresser un exemplaire?

7. Avez-vous réalisé des études de synthèse de vos évaluations?

OUI  NON

Si oui, pouvez-vous nous en faire parvenir une copie?

8. Indiquez si vous seriez intéressé par une discussion plus approfondie autour de ces thèmes, ou plus généralement par le sujet de cette étude pour l'OCDE?

Pas  
vraiment  
intéressé

Serait  
intéressé

9. Voulez-vous rester informé de cette étude, et être inscrit sur la liste de ceux qui souhaitent recevoir copie du rapport?

OUI  NON

*Merci de votre disponibilité.*

Sur une période qui couvre à peu près les cinq dernières années, les douze associations déclarent avoir réalisé 103 évaluations, c'est-à-dire près de 20 par an. Ce chiffre donne une idée du nombre important d'études existantes, réalisées à l'initiative des ONG françaises. Il est difficile d'en tirer une extrapolation fiable. On peut dire avec quelque certitude, compte tenu du nombre d'ONG de taille significative existant en France, qu'on doit pouvoir dénombrer au total pas moins de 100 évaluations en tant que tel par an, soit un demi-millier sur les cinq dernières années.

Dans sept cas, les ONG déclarent que ces études sont à usage interne, dans les cinq autres cas, les ONG considèrent qu'elles sont publiques soit totalement (deux ONG considèrent que toutes les évaluations sont du domaine public); soit partiellement (trois ONG considèrent que seulement une partie des évaluations réalisées est du domaine public). la forme des réponses laisse penser que nombre d'évaluations aujourd'hui à usage interne pourraient être plus largement diffusées sous des conditions qui restent à définir.

Les évaluations pratiquées concernent plus particulièrement des projets et des programmes. Huit ONG contre quatre disent n'avoir jamais engagé d'évaluations thématiques; dix contre deux disent n'avoir pas réalisé d'études de synthèse de leurs évaluations.

La justification des évaluations s'appuie sur quatre types de nécessités. Par ordre décroissant de citations, on trouve:

- la volonté d'améliorer l'action et d'évoluer, en vue d'une nouvelle phase d'un projet (7 citations);
- la nécessité de tirer un bilan de l'action engagée, ou d'en vérifier la viabilité, éventuellement en situation de clôture d'une coopération (5

- citations);
- la volonté de bénéficier des enseignements de l'action pour l'orientation plus générale des interventions (4 citations);
  - la nécessité de transparence vis-à-vis des bailleurs est enfin citée une fois.

Du point de vue des méthodes, les ONG ayant répondu au questionnaire insistent en particulier sur trois facteurs:

- la nécessité de concertation entre l'ONG du Nord et son partenaire du Sud dans la préparation de l'évaluation, en particulier dans l'élaboration des termes de références, mais allant aussi jusqu'au principe d'associer un consultant du sud ou un membre de l'ONG partenaire à l'équipe d'évaluation;
- les caractéristiques mêmes de l'évaluation: on insiste sur son caractère externe, le lien à établir avec le processus de suivi-évaluation permanent du projet, ainsi que sur la préférence accordée à des évaluations de type qualitatif, c'est-à-dire s'appuyant sur des critères qualitatifs de l'impact des actions;
- la mise en oeuvre de l'évaluation: celle-ci doit être longuement préparée avec l'évaluateur, qui doit privilégier les entretiens, multiplier les visites de terrain et donner une grande importance à la restitution tant auprès des acteurs et partenaires au Sud qu'au siège français de l'ONG.

Vis-à-vis des partenaires du Sud auxquelles elles apportent un appui financier, les ONG françaises interrogées ont à propos de l'évaluation des exigences qui restent limitées. Les réponses insistent généralement sur la capacité des ONG du Sud à agir en conformité avec les objectifs du projet, à en assurer un bon contrôle de suivi, à produire des rapports d'activité et financiers. Du point de vue de l'évaluation proprement dite, les seules réponses enregistrées disent privilégier l'évaluation externe par rapport à l'auto-évaluation, ou bien encore signalent que le suivi-évaluation est en fait réalisé par des intervenants du siège de l'ONG du Nord.

Il y a en règle générale une recherche d'implication des partenaires du Sud et des 'bénéficiaires' dans les évaluations faites par les ONG du Nord:

- l'implication est réelle dans la mise au point de l'évaluation: concertation sur les termes de références, recherches d'indicateurs sociaux pertinents, participation d'un membre de l'ONG partenaire dans l'équipe d'évaluation. Elle se traduit aussi par la recherche d'une articulation forte entre un suivi-évaluation permanent et des évaluations externes plus espacées dans le temps, ou encore dans la mise au point d'études spécifiques confiées au partenaire du sud;
- les ONG du Nord affichent aussi une volonté forte de communication autour du processus d'évaluation. Celle-ci se traduit par un nombre



- important d'entretiens ou de réunions collectives, dans certains cas l'affichage des résultats des indicateurs de mesure dans des lieux publics. Enfin, une attention particulière est réservée aux séances de restitution collective des résultats des évaluations;
- mais plusieurs ONG considèrent que leurs démarches sont aujourd'hui insuffisamment participatives, et qu'elles doivent réfléchir sur ce sujet pour faire évoluer la relation avec leurs partenaires dans le cadre de l'évaluation.

Les ONG interrogées mentionnent quelques éléments d'approche de l'évaluation qui soient spécifiques aux ONG du Sud. Les méthodologies appliquées paraissent différer et s'appuyer plus fortement sur des approches participatives et plus sociologiques, demandant toutefois une capacité de 'décodage de la parole des acteurs' qui n'est pas à la portée de toutes les ONG du Sud. Celles-ci pratiquent plus largement, et pour des raisons évidentes de proximité et de coût l'auto-évaluation. Enfin, des ONG paraissent plus intéressées par un processus de confrontation de leurs expériences, non nécessairement issu de travaux d'évaluation, que par des évaluations stricto sensu.

Toutes les ONG interrogées ont confirmé leur intérêt pour cette étude du CAD OCDE, et d'une discussion approfondie sur le thème de l'évaluation. Dans tous les cas, elles souhaitent pouvoir lire le rapport de cette étude.

## **1.2 L'expérience de la Fondation de France**

### **1.2.1**

### **Historique**

La mobilisation de la Fondation de France sur les questions d'évaluation est due à la cohabitation dans la même organisation d'un département gérant un programme « tiers-monde » et d'un service chargé de développer l'évaluation pour l'ensemble des programmes de la Fondation.

Au départ, il s'agissait pour la responsable de l'évaluation d'apporter son concours au programme tiers-monde, pour la préparation, le suivi et la valorisation d'évaluations des activités financées auprès d'ONG du Nord ou du Sud.

C'est ainsi qu'une série d'évaluations a été mise en oeuvre, ayant trait:

- à l'étude du soutien institutionnel et aux activités d'une série d'ONG sénégalaises (FONGS, FAFD, ACAPES),<sup>6</sup>
- et à l'étude de conventions d'objectifs passées avec des ONG françaises (Vétérinaires sans frontières, Handicap international).

Mais progressivement, les ressources affectées au programme tiers-monde se sont trouvées limitées, et la Fondation a décidé de s'orienter plus sur un soutien méthodologique et institutionnel aux ONG que sur un financement de leurs actions. L'évaluation est alors apparue comme un instrument privilégié de cette

stratégie

nouvelle.

Cette évolution s'est opérée en deux temps:

- dans un premier temps, la Fondation a réuni un certain nombre d'experts associatifs de l'évaluation, et animé un travail de réflexion sur le thème « promouvoir l'évaluation au Nord ». Ce travail s'est soldé par l'édition et la diffusion large d'une charte de l'évaluation, à destination des ONG du Nord. Son propos était de dédramatiser l'évaluation, plus vue comme un exercice de conseil permettant aux ONG de tirer les leçons de leurs expériences et d'améliorer leurs pratiques, et de présenter de façon très pédagogique les méthodes d'évaluation pour que les ONG s'y familiarisent.
- dans un second temps, et en allant au bout de la logique de renforcement institutionnel des ONG du Sud, la Fondation a décidé de lancer un « appel à projets d'évaluation d'ONG locales ».<sup>7</sup>

### **1.2.2 L'appel à projets d'évaluation d'ONG locales**

Cette initiative est encore récente, et les premières décisions de financement d'études datent de novembre 1996.

L'appel, largement diffusé auprès des ONG françaises considérées comme relais, ou directement auprès d'ONG du Sud a été limité dans ce premier exercice à deux zones: les îles du Sud-ouest de l'Océan Indien, ainsi que trois pays du Sahel: Mali, Sénégal et Tchad.

La Fondation exprimait cinq conditions pour examiner les demandes de financement:

- qu'il s'agisse d'une première évaluation,
- que celle-ci soit de type participatif (définie par et pour l'ONG et suivie par elle),
- qu'elle soit portée par une ONG locale,
- qu'elle soit réalisée par un évaluateur professionnel indépendant,
- qu'elle concerne un projet de développement suivi par l'ONG.

Pour traiter son appel à projets, la Fondation a fait appel à l'expertise de l'ONG belge COTA, qui a produit une analyse des dossiers et proposé des décisions auprès du comité « solidarités internationales ».

Ce comité a eu à se pencher sur 20 demandes, sur lesquelles:

- 3 ont été refusées,
- 4 ajournées pour information complémentaire,
- 5 accordées sous condition,
- 8 accordées sous réserve.

La Fondation s'est donc engagée sur 13 demandes (pour 20 dossiers), avec un budget global de 960.000 FF.

Bien qu'il soit difficile d'opérer une comparaison, par manque de références similaires, on peut considérer que le résultat de cet appel à projets est globalement satisfaisant. Les demandes sont parvenues en nombre significatif, malgré la distance réelle et institutionnelle entre ces ONG du Sud (qui sont généralement de petites associations, dans le cas de cette réponse) et la Fondation. D'autre part le taux brut d'échec est relativement faible (3 sur 20): il s'agit dans deux cas de demandes d'évaluation sur des projets qui venaient de démarrer, dans un cas d'une demande sans consistance réelle. Le taux d'ajournement (4 sur 20) reste lui aussi limité et est lié à des questions de pertinence ou de flou dans la démarche des demandeurs.

On ne peut encore conclure sur l'impact de cette opération, puisque les premières évaluations ne faisaient que débiter au début de l'année 1997. Signalons que cette opération est appelée à se renouveler, en tenant compte des enseignements de cette première expérience. D'autre part, la Fondation a en projet d'engager un travail de synthèse, basé sur tous les résultats de ces études, fournissant par là un lieu original et privilégié d'observation de l'impact de l'action des ONG du Sud.

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6 Nous avons pu rencontrer ces trois ONG au cours de la mission au Sénégal, et mesurer combien la pratique de l'évaluation constitue aujourd'hui pour elles un acquis et un outil de leur pilotage stratégique.

[\[text\]](#)

7 France (Fondation de France) - Appel à projets d'évaluation pour des ONG locales, L'évaluation participative, outil du développement - 1996.

[\[text\]](#)

## 2

### **EVALUATIONS CONDUITES À L'INITIATIVE DES POUVOIRS PUBLICS**

Contrairement à ce qui se passe dans certains pays anglo-saxons, et dans les pays du nord de l'Europe, il n'existe d'évaluation globale de l'impact des actions des ONG en France. On peut avancer deux explications à ce constat: d'abord, le nombre et la diversité des ONG actives dans le champ du développement ne rend pas un tel exercice aisé et, d'autre part, le niveau de cofinancement des ONG par les pouvoirs publics français est sans

commune mesure avec ce qui est pratiqué dans les pays nordiques, ceci justifiant que l'évaluation de l'impact global des ONG constitue une moindre priorité vis-à-vis des politiques publiques.

Une façon d'aborder partiellement cet aspect de l'impact global nous est cependant fournie, d'une part, par une évaluation du volontariat français, appréhendé comme un moyen de l'aide et, d'autre part, par des évaluations géographiques pratiquées par le ministère français de la Coopération. Ces dernières restent confidentielles, mais nous avons pu avoir accès au chapitre « ONG » de trois de ces évaluations géographiques concernant la Guinée Conakry, le Mali et le Sénégal. Ces évaluations n'avaient pas pour objet principal les actions des ONG, mais l'ensemble de l'aide apportée à ces pays; elles fournissent quelques éléments de réflexion sur l'impact des ONG en matière de développement.

## **2.1 Evaluation de moyens: le volontariat français dans les pays en développement**

### **2.1.1**

### **Contexte**

Cette étude sur le volontariat français dans les pays en développement a été commandée fin 1993, par les ministères français des Affaires étrangères et de la Coopération. Réalisée sous la responsabilité du ministère de la Coopération, elle a associé le F3E à son suivi.<sup>8</sup>

Les pouvoirs publics français s'interrogent sur la pertinence de leur politique en faveur du volontariat qu'ils encouragent depuis le début des années 60. Il s'agissait au départ, d'une volonté de compléter l'action publique de coopération par des actions privées, menées, à la base, plus directement auprès des populations, par des volontaires ayant pour rôle de transmettre un savoir-faire.

Cela s'est concrétisé, outre le cofinancement de projets et une importante subvention à une association spécialisée dans l'envoi de volontaires, par la mise en place de crédits destinés à couvrir les coûts de la protection sociale des volontaires (décret de 1986 qui leur donne un statut minimum, en termes de protection sociale notamment, texte révisé en 1995). Ces crédits ont été en progression constante jusqu'en 1991, ils ont alors atteint 231 millions de francs. Ils sont, depuis, stabilisés à hauteur de 195 millions de francs par an (niveau d'engagement financier auxquels cependant s'ajouteraient des coûts pris directement sur certains projets financés sur des fonds spécifiques).

En tendance, l'on observe aussi dans la même période récente, une multiplication des initiatives publiques tendant à créer de nouvelles formes de volontariat et à augmenter leur nombre. Par ces mesures, l'Etat entend répondre à des aspirations détectées dans la société, motivation qui se conjugue avec celle de soulager le marché de l'emploi, mais sans que le lien avec la politique de coopération soit véritablement explicité. Dans le même temps, des voix s'élèvent, en particulier dans le milieu ONG, pour mettre en garde contre un développement mal contrôlé du volontariat, voire le remettre en cause au motif que les actions seraient qualitativement discutables et ne répondraient pas à une réelle demande.



L'évaluation a porté plus particulièrement sur onze associations à partir desquelles une étude transversale des différentes formes de volontariat a été réalisée. Quatre missions de terrain ont été effectuées (Brésil, Cambodge, Cameroun, Guinée).

### 2.1.3 Résultats

*Eléments*

*descriptifs*

On peut, de manière quelque peu caricaturale distinguer trois types d'associations et de volontariat (les formes de volontariat et la fonction assignée au volontaire diffèrent en fonction de la philosophie dominante de l'association et des types de besoin auxquels elle tente de répondre):

- a. les associations humanitaires dont l'approche est technique avant tout. Elles interviennent notamment dans les situations de crise. Les volontaires y sont des professionnels de la technique mise en oeuvre, de la logistique ou de l'administration. Les conditions dans lesquelles ils partent sont, dans l'ensemble, plus confortables que celles proposées par les autres associations;
- b. les associations dont l'activité est essentiellement orientée vers des projets de développement, inscrits dans la durée et hors contexte particulier de crise. Les volontaires sont là pour apporter une technicité particulière et/ou encadrer une composante du projet. Ils travaillent en lien étroit avec les populations locales et jouent un rôle essentiel dans le transfert de compétences;
- c. les associations pour lesquelles le volontariat procède en premier lieu de l'échange interculturel, organismes confessionnels en particulier. Entrent dans cette catégorie les associations ayant vocation première à organiser le départ des volontaires (éventuellement pour d'autres). Les volontaires sont souvent envoyés sur des postes de substitution correspondant à des fonctions permanentes au sein d'institutions d'intérêt général (établissements scolaires, hôpitaux, administrations publiques). Les conditions matérielles dans lesquelles ils partent sont moins favorables. La majeure partie des volontaires français relèvent de cette dernière catégorie d'associations.

On observe l'existence de fait d'un partage des rôles entre ONG « premières missions » et ONG « professionnelles », les premières servant de tremplin et potentiellement de sélection professionnelle. Les stratégies des ONG qui font régulièrement appel à des volontaires tendent à converger autour d'exigences communes portant sur:

- a. les méthodes de préparation et de gestion de programmes. Les grands bailleurs internationaux (UE notamment) ont probablement contribué à ce que les ONG y apportent toute leur attention;
- b. les attentes vis-à-vis du volontaire (compétence professionnelle, capacité en animation-formation, etc.).

On assiste à des évolutions:

- a. vers des formes d'interventions moins consommatrices d'assistance technique externe (tendance à l'augmentation de la part des ONG professionnelles et à la diminution de la part relative des associations traditionnelles de volontariat);
- b. une tendance, de la part des organisations de volontariat, à privilégier l'approche projet par rapport à la logique de substitution. Il y a alors un problème de moyens (l'orientation des moyens financiers de l'aide publique vers le financement des hommes - subventions aux associations de volontaires, aux Csn, subvention pour la couverture sociale - plutôt que vers celui des associations et des projets n'est pas de nature à accélérer cette évolution).

La répartition sectorielle des postes occupés par les volontaires est assez équilibrée: enseignement 20%, agriculture et développement rural 19%, santé 17%, social 15%, gestion et logistique 15%, artisanat 14%. On observe un tassement relatif du secteur rural par rapport à la croissance des interventions d'urgence et à la montée des secteurs social, sanitaire et urbain.

La répartition géographique est caractérisée par une forte concentration de volontaires (50%) dans une dizaine de pays d'Afrique subsaharienne (Afrique de l'Ouest en premier lieu), pays du champ du ministère de la Coopération. Mais, l'on a assisté récemment à une diversification et à une forte progression des pays du « hors - champ » (Cambodge notamment). Entre 1987 et 1993, le nombre de mois / volontaires financés au titre de la protection sociale passe de 1 000 à 5 000 dans les pays hors champ tandis que, depuis 1988, il est resté stable aux alentours de 6 300, dans les pays du champ.

Ainsi, à partir de cinq critères principaux l'on peut caractériser les conditions dans lesquelles se réalise le volontariat de développement et définir des situations types:

- a. existence ou non d'une structure d'accueil, d'encadrement et d'appui, sous contrôle de l'ONG employeuse;
- b. l'existence ou non d'un réel partenariat avec des organismes locaux, préexistant à l'envoi durable de volontaires;
- c. rôle de maîtrise d'oeuvre directe ou de substitution plus ou moins marquée des volontaires;
- d. l'apport ou non d'une réelle expertise professionnelle;
- e. mise en avant ou non d'une finalité confessionnelle justifiant la présence du volontaire.

#### *Eléments*

#### *d'analyse*

Certaines associations de développement remettent en cause le principe même du volontariat ou, plus largement, de l'expatriation. Leur argument principal est le suivant: la validité du modèle de transfert de savoir-faire qui sous-tend l'intervention du volontaire, notamment parce qu'il présuppose la supériorité des techniques importées, est contestable. Il vaut mieux un pilotage des projets par les bénéficiaires eux-mêmes.

Pour d'autres, pour qui le facteur humain est essentiel à la réussite d'un projet, le volontariat se justifie dans la mesure où le volontaire:

- a. assure un lien entre l'association et les bénéficiaires et permet un meilleur suivi (volontaire garant d'un bon suivi et d'une gestion conforme à ce qui est prévu);
- b. par son extériorité, permet l'obtention de résultats différents de ceux accessibles à un homologue local;
- c. permet de maintenir une motivation forte de la part de l'association et des bailleurs de fonds (rôle d'informateur pour l'ensemble des partenaires);
- d. permet de pallier l'indisponibilité locale de certaines compétences;
- e. plus proche des populations les plus nécessiteuses, peut intervenir plus directement et de manière plus souple que les coopérants et experts de l'aide bi ou multilatérale.

En tout état de cause, les initiatives de développement du volontariat qui ne posent pas la question du niveau de compétence requis ni celle de la demande réelle sont critiquables.

Les enquêtes de terrain ont permis d'identifier des difficultés rencontrées par les volontaires, leurs associations, ou leurs partenaires, principalement:

- a. le volontaire ne reste pas assez longtemps pour être en mesure d'intervenir efficacement (compréhension des enjeux, connaissance du contexte, imprégnation, maîtrise de la langue, etc.), de même qu'il paraît souvent insuffisamment expérimenté professionnellement. Les conséquences en sont le montage de projets inadaptés que les bénéficiaires ne peuvent s'approprier;
- b. les volontaires, en particulier ceux des associations spécialisées dans l'envoi de volontaires, déplorent souvent un déficit de préparation;
- c. le suivi des volontaires apparaît fréquemment trop lacunaire;
- d. dans la plupart des cas, l'exploitation des données de suivi et évaluation n'est pas suivie d'effet retour sur la situation des volontaires ni de grandes inflexions dans les stratégies d'implantation ou de relation avec les partenaires locaux;
- e. la pression qu'exercent les bailleurs en attente de résultats visibles et rapides pèse sur les volontaires et les place souvent en porte à faux vis-à-vis de leurs homologues.

Les détracteurs du volontariat avancent que:

- a. il y a risque de création d'une situation de dépendance vis-à-vis de l'assistance extérieure ou de conflits entre compétences locales et cette assistance;
- b. le volontaires peut, par sa seule présence et son comportement, être à l'origine de perturbations des mécanismes culturels et économiques.

Les partenaires du Sud (représentants d'administrations, d'organismes non étatiques et des populations) exposent ce que peuvent être, selon eux, les effets du volontariat. On remarque que certaines de ces appréciations concernent plus que le cas particulier du volontariat, ou de certains volontariats, l'expatriation dans son ensemble et son principe.

En positif, ils relèvent que le volontariat (ou le projet) peut:



- a. faciliter l'accès aux financements, et la fourniture de certains biens (médicaments, intrants) entraînant, via le projet, un apport de salaires et de revenus locaux;
- b. favoriser l'ouverture du milieu local;
- c. contribuer à l'amélioration des conditions de vie;
- d. garantir la saine gestion des moyens engagés;
- e. contribuer à minimiser les charges du projet par rapport à d'autres types d'expatriés plus coûteux.

En négatif, ils y voient aussi une possible:

- a. concurrence de main d'oeuvre par rapport à la main d'oeuvre locale, ce qui entrave la responsabilité et le renforcement des capacités institutionnelles locales;
- b. concurrence avec des initiatives locales non subventionnées (cas notamment d'ONG d'abord préoccupées de conforter leur position et/ou d'assurer l'équilibre de leur budget).

Les volontaires eux-mêmes expriment souvent des doutes quant à l'impact réel de leur action. Le jugement que les volontaires portent eux-mêmes sur leur rôle réel est fortement influencé par la qualité des tâches qui leur ont été assignées. A cet égard, le clivage entre associations est particulièrement marqué.

**2.1.4 Efficacité, efficience, pérennité**  
L'évaluation avance que les conditions d'organisation du volontariat et le soin avec lequel, dans la plupart des cas, les volontaires sont recrutés et gérés, favorisent plus qu'autrefois une certaine efficacité des actions.

On peut se demander avec la montée des volontaires gestionnaires (administrateur ou coordinateur) et les évolutions du technique vers l'administratif, si le volontariat n'est pas dévié dans son principe pour n'être plus qu'un mode de gestion du personnel expatrié dont le principal avantage serait le moindre coût et la souplesse d'emploi.

Les coûts sont analysés selon une grille intégrant les frais liés directement à la mission (indemnités, protection sociale, logement, transports, etc.), les frais fixes au départ (recrutement, formation; voyage, etc.) et les frais d'encadrement et de gestion (encadrement local et siège, évaluation, retour). L'analyse fait apparaître des différences notables d'une ONG à l'autre. Les organismes confessionnels fournissent les plus faibles indemnités (1 500 F / mois à un volontaire par ailleurs pris en charge par le partenaire). D'autres perçoivent des indemnités et autres avantages qui les placent dans une situation très proche, du point de vue des revenus, de celle d'un salarié (distinction « bénévole », « militant », « débutant » des « volontaires » « professionnels », « expérimentés »). L'évaluation fournit quelques indications relatives au coût du volontaire: le coût annuel moyen est compris entre 90 000 et 200 000 F.

Ainsi, le volontariat qui bénéficie d'exonérations fiscales et de moindre coûts salariaux a un avantage concurrentiel considérable sur les sociétés commerciales, bureaux d'étude, etc.

Les partenaires expriment le souhait que les charges du personnel expatrié, pratiquement assimilé à l'assistance technique directe, soient réduites au profit des investissements et des moyens de fonctionnement locaux.

L'évaluation souligne que si l'objectif de tout projet de développement est son propre transfert, dans les meilleurs délais possibles, à une organisation locale capable de le gérer durablement sans présence expatriée (autonomie et responsabilité des bénéficiaires), des ambiguïtés demeurent, notamment dans le volontariat confessionnel. En effet l'objectif de ces organismes est moins de quitter le pays que de s'y intégrer. Certains organismes dont la vocation première est l'envoi de volontaires tendent à pérenniser leurs interventions.

### **2.1.5 Facteurs de succès et d'échecs de ce type d'appui**

L'étude ne se prononce pas de manière catégorique sur l'opportunité qu'il y a à utiliser le volontariat comme moyen de l'aide. Il en ressort toutefois que la réponse à cette question diffère selon le type de volontaires considéré. L'étude formule quelques remarques élémentaires:

- a. ce qui est vrai pour les actions de coopération en général l'est bien sûr pour le volontariat en particulier. Ainsi le « volontariat de développement » ne peut se concevoir efficacement sans un partenariat local actif et structuré;
- b. le volontaire n'étant qu'une composante d'un projet, de la qualité du projet dépend naturellement l'efficacité du volontariat. Le volontariat ne peut avoir d'intérêt que si le projet lui-même en a et si la présence du volontaire est justifiée (par exemple besoin d'une compétence non disponible sur place);
- c. la durée de la mission sur le terrain et l'expérience du volontaire sont également des facteurs jugés déterminants;
- d. la qualité de l'intervention dépend aussi du bon encadrement du volontaires par l'ONG, à toutes les étapes (recrutement, formation, suivi, évaluation, capitalisation).

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<sup>8</sup> France (ministères de la Coopération et des Affaires étrangères / F3E) - Evaluation du volontariat français dans les pays en développement - MP Conseil, février 1995. (extrait)

[\[text\]](#)

## **2.2 Evaluations géographiques: synthèse des évaluations de l'aide française en Guinée, au Mali et au Sénégal**

### **2.2.1**

#### **Contexte**

Les « évaluations pays »<sup>9</sup> sont initiées par le ministère de la Coopération et conduites, en son sein, par la mission chargée des études, des évaluations et de la prospective (qui peut faire appel à des experts extérieurs à l'administration). Le ministère évalue sa politique de coopération. Lorsqu'il se penche sur les ONG, c'est donc essentiellement à la part de

l'aide publique française mise en oeuvre par le secteur non gouvernemental qu'il s'intéresse. Cette part, même si elle s'est accrue au cours des 15 dernières années, est traditionnellement très faible au regard de celle de certaines autres aides internationales bilatérales.

Le ministère, qui se préoccupe du bon usage des financements et de l'efficacité de l'aide ainsi que de la qualité des relations bilatérales, attache, en matière de coopération non gouvernementale, une grande importance à la bonne articulation entre son action et celle des acteurs privés. Il porte une attention particulière aux actions mobilisant des expatriés. Sa responsabilité est directement engagée dans la mesure où il s'agit de ressortissants français et, pour nombre d'entre eux, d'appelés du contingent (coopérants du service national - Csn). Cela tient aussi à ce qu'il existe un lien particulièrement étroit avec l'Association des volontaires du progrès (Afvp), association dont dépendent beaucoup d'expatriés (50% de ceux qui sont présents en Guinée, par exemple) et qui bénéficie d'une part importante des crédits affectés aux ONG.

Ces rapports présentent un intérêt particulier en ce qu'ils éclairent sur la manière dont l'Administration regarde l'action des ONG, sur ce que sont ses attentes et, en terme d'articulation entre les acteurs, sur son positionnement vis-à-vis des associations.

**2.2.2 Champ de l'étude**  
Concernant les ONG, les évaluations s'en tiennent aux actions et/ou aux organismes auxquels la coopération française apporte son soutien

Les évaluations s'intéressent en premier lieu aux questions financières ainsi qu'aux aspects institutionnels (relations entre acteurs). Il n'y a pas de regard direct porté sur les actions au niveau du terrain. Il faut noter que les études ne distinguent pas toujours, au sein de la coopération non gouvernementale, ce qui se rapporte à la coopération des ONG de ce qui se rapporte à la coopération décentralisée. Et ce d'autant que coopérations ONG et décentralisée ont de nombreux points d'articulation (financements de projets ONG par des collectivités locales françaises, ONG opérateurs de projets ou maîtres d'oeuvre de projets initiés par la coopération décentralisée).

Sur les trois cas deux sont comparables en ce que la présence des ONG française y est importante et ancienne (Mali et Sénégal).

Au Sénégal, pays qualifié de « terrain de jeu des ONG », il y a beaucoup d'initiatives internes pour le développement, de types associatif ou privé, notamment en milieu rural. La coopération peut aussi s'appuyer sur la mobilisation des immigrés sénégalais, en particulier originaires de la vallée du Fleuve. Le Mali présente aussi un attrait particulier pour les ONG française, le rôle de la communauté malienne en France y est pour beaucoup.

En Guinée l'implantation des ONG françaises est plus récente, mais la place qu'elles occupent dans la coopération est importante (le nombre d'expatriés ONG atteint une

centaine soit un nombre équivalent à celui des assistants techniques de la coopération publique).

Dans les deux premiers cas, le nombre d'ONG françaises présentes et ayant bénéficié de financements de la coopération française sur l'ensemble de la période considérée, approche la trentaine. Pour la Guinée, on sait qu'au total une trentaine d'ONG françaises apportent des financements réguliers à des actions de développement, une vingtaine intervenant avec des expatriés dans une cinquantaine d'actions.

La coopération publique cofinance des projets d'ONG:

- a. pour le Sénégal, entre 1990 et 1994, 44 interventions d'ONG ont bénéficié d'un cofinancement, pour un montant total engagé de 14,25 millions de francs, (soit une moyenne de 2,84 millions de francs par an);
- b. pour le Mali, entre 1990 et 1993, 19 projets portés par 16 ONG ont bénéficié de financements, pour un total de 8,25 millions de francs (soit 2,75 millions de francs par an);
- c. pour la Guinée, 21 opérations ont été soutenues par la coopération entre 1985 et 1992 (pas d'informations sur le nombre d'ONG soutenues ni sur les crédits publics engagés).

On peut noter que le nombre de volontaires du progrès est en diminution au Sénégal, depuis 1990, mouvement qui s'est accéléré depuis 1994. Au Mali, ils étaient 32 volontaires en 1986 et 56 en 1991, pour 37 opérations.

Au Sénégal et au Mali, priorité est donnée au développement rural. On relève toutefois, au Sénégal, une multiplication des interventions en milieu urbain. Dans ces deux pays, le principal secteur d'intervention de l'Afvp reste celui du développement rural - hydraulique. En Guinée, pour la période considérée, le domaine de la santé arrive avant celui du développement rural. L'implication dans l'agglomération urbaine de Conakry est très faible.

### **2.2.3**

### **Résultats**

Une note d'information remise aux coopérants par la mission de coopération au Mali, citée par l'un des rapports, cadre le propos: « l'intérêt de ces formes d'intervention n'est pas financier, encore que les efforts soient loin d'être négligeables, mais d'ordre humain, par les contacts et échanges directs qu'elles permettent entre collectivités et associations des deux pays ».

Pour le Mali, l'évaluation se réfère à un rapport, produit en 1985, qui souligne l'absence quasi générale de suivi-évaluation des projets ONG pour la période du début des années 80. Il fait état de « quelques initiatives encourageantes » tout en rappelant que « par la nature et l'échelle de leurs actions, de tels types d'intervention restent complémentaires ou marginaux par rapport aux opérations gouvernementales et intergouvernementales ».

Pour la période récente, les évaluateurs, ne disposent que de peu de données. Leurs appréciations ne portent que sur quelques projets. Ils relèvent:

- a. un retrait des zones difficiles du Nord, mais une ONG expérimentée a pu se maintenir et continuer à y intervenir avec succès, précisant que l'action et les secours apportés aux populations sont très appréciés;
- b. le caractère exemplaire de certains projets dans le secteur hydraulique, pour les aspects contractualisation des relations entre les associations villageoises, les entrepreneurs et le service de l'hydraulique;
- c. que les actions productives paraissent plus difficiles à mener et connaissent des résultats mitigés (problèmes d'approvisionnement et de commercialisation d'un projet laiterie, par exemple);
- d. une expérience innovante, dans la région du Fleuve Sénégal, consistant en la mise en place d'une cellule animée par une ONG destinée à apporter un appui méthodologique aux projets initiés par les associations de migrants en France et les migrants de retour. Cette expérience est la seule à avoir fait l'objet d'une évaluation récente d'où il ressort (malgré l'absence de conclusions d'ensemble) qu'elle semble intéressante mais qu'elle ne porte pas encore tous ses fruits parce que le projet n'aurait pas encore pu définir une méthodologie satisfaisante d'appui aux projets des populations et des anciens migrants. Outre des ONG françaises et africaines, des collectivités locales (villes jumelées) et des associations inter-villageoises des trois pays africains de la zone participent à cette expérience. Celle-ci a des répercussions positives de par son existence même et le fait que le Mali y participe, parce qu'elle permet d'atténuer les tensions de la zone.

L'évaluation traite distinctement les actions de l'organisation de volontariat soutenue par la Coopération française. Elle se fonde d'une part, sur des évaluations rétrospectives, réalisées par ailleurs, de projets financés entre 1980 et 1990 et, d'autre part, sur les conclusions de deux missions qui ont eu l'occasion de visiter un projet gestion de terroirs (dont une de la mission d'évaluation elle-même). Le rapport fait état de difficultés sur un projet santé (promotion sanitaire et rurale): erreurs d'identification préliminaire, pilotage au coup par coup, manque de suivi technique et surtout insuffisante participation des cadres et de la population malienne. Ce constat a conduit à l'arrêt des projets santé de cette organisation au Mali. Concernant le projet d'aménagement de terroir, les missions se rejoignent pour dire que l'action gagnerait beaucoup à s'appuyer sur une meilleure réflexion préalable autour des aspects institutionnels et fonciers, économiques et financiers.

L'évaluation conclut qu'il serait souhaitable de stabiliser l'accroissement du volume d'activité de cette organisation et de consacrer les efforts à une amélioration qualitative des opérations, notamment dans la gestion de terroir où une réflexion approfondie serait à mener. Elle préconise que l'on fasse davantage appel à des volontaires plus expérimentés professionnellement, notamment pour mieux encadrer les moins expérimentés.

Le jugement global porté sur l'action des ONG en Guinée est tout à fait positif. Les ONG ont de bonnes performances techniques et une bonne approche sociale, elles savent



utiles font défaut aux ONG. A contrario, la conception des politiques sectorielles de la Coopération française gagnerait à ce que les ONG y soient associées, à ce que l'on utilise davantage leur connaissance technique et sociale du terrain (qui mériterait d'être mieux valorisée). L'évaluation relève quelques évolutions, par exemple le fait que la Coopération fasse appel à des ONG comme opérateurs dans le cadre d'un programme qu'elle a initié, mais elle s'interroge sur la philosophie de cette démarche: la Coopération ne penserait-elle pas à faire appel aux ONG que lorsque ses financements sont limités alors que, par ailleurs, ces dernières semblent exclues ou ignorées?

L'évaluation Mali recommande, pour une meilleure coordination, que le ministère fasse mieux connaître les orientations de sa politique de coopération dans ce pays. Elle énonce par ailleurs qu'il se révèle impossible de faire travailler ensemble assistants techniques et volontaires alors même que ces derniers ont absolument besoin d'un soutien motivé et qualifié, qu'il y a un chaînon manquant entre le coopérant et le volontaire ONG.

### **2.2.5 Points forts / points faibles**

Les points forts et points faibles listés ci-après portent sur quelques projets vus d'assez loin. Il serait abusif d'en étendre la portée.

#### *Points forts*

- a. des bénéfices pour les populations, en particulier les populations menacées;
- b. un impact politique dans l'axe Nord/Sud et un impact politique au plan local (exemple de l'action pluri-Etats dans la vallée du Fleuve Sénégal);
- c. de bonnes performances techniques (niveau élevé de compétences en santé notamment) et bonne approche sociale (exemplarité des méthodes de contractualisation des relations entre acteurs, dans le secteur hydraulique);
- d. une bonne cohérence avec la politique nationale de soins de santé primaire et de réforme hospitalière (une originalité de l'action des ONG en Guinée) ainsi qu'avec la politique de coopération de la France (priorité au rural).

#### Points faibles

- a. caractère non significatif de certaines actions en raison de leur nature et de leur échelle;
- b. difficultés des projets productifs;
- c. problèmes de conception et problèmes méthodologiques en appui;
- d. insuffisante expérience des expatriés.

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<sup>9</sup> France (ministère de la Coopération) - Evaluation de l'aide française au Sénégal, rapport principal Tome 1, le contexte économique, social et politique, les flux financiers extérieurs, les moyens de l'aide - Mission chargée des études, de l'évaluation, et de la prospective, Avèque Conseil, avril 1996. (extrait)

France (ministère de la Coopération) - L'aide française au Mali (1980-1992), rapport des experts - Mission chargée des études, de l'évaluation, et de la prospective, 1993. (extrait)

France (ministère de la Coopération) - L'aide française en Guinée (1979-1992), rapport des experts - Mission chargée des études, de l'évaluation, et de la prospective, 1993. (extrait)

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