THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF EMPOWERMENT

A RESOURCE DOCUMENT

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INTRAC

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Resource Document is to introduce key issues for development practitioners concerning the concept of **EMPOWERMENT** and its evaluation in order to provide resource material for workshops that might be based on the theme of Empowerment or might include it in its discussions. The Resource Document begins with a discussion of the concept of empowerment, providing an overview of various interpretations and approaches that have been developed. A series of brief case studies are presented of a number of different NGO projects that have been concerned with empowerment. There then follows a chapter which sets out basic guidelines for monitoring and evaluating social development. This will serve as a general introduction to monitoring and evaluation for those who are unfamiliar with the issues. The next section presents a detailed case study of one approach to monitor and evaluate an empowerment project. Then is a review of methods and instruments for collecting information and a detailed bibliography. Finally there is a practical exercise on the M and E of Empowerment based on four short case studies.

As a Resource Document, it does not set out to provide a comprehensive review of the literature or develop new approaches to monitoring and evaluation. Nor does it suggest an a specific approach to the monitoring and evaluating of empowerment. Rather it sets out to provide readres with an overview of the common approaches to empowerment in development, key issues for monitoring and evaluating, and methods and instruments for collecting information. It is intended that readers will be able to relate the information presented in the Document to their own experiences of supporting empowerment and then develop approaches themselves assessing to what extent empowerment has taken place in relation to their own work.

Different sections of the Resource Document may be more useful to some readers than others. For example, while the substantial section on evaluating social development may be less relevant to those already familiar with the issues, others may have had little previous exposure to the subject. We would suggest, however, that most readers will be in a position to draw from the established experience in the subject. The Resource Document, therefore, can be used in conjunction with the reader's own experiences in the task of both understanding the central concept and also the issues involved in its evaluation. Essentially we want to answer the question: ' how can we know when previously powerless, marginalised or disadvantaged groups have been empowered and thus better able to confront and deal with those forces which influence their development? So many development agencies now underline the central purpose of their work as that of 'empowering' such groups, that it is appropriate to ask when and how can we know when this aim has been achieved.

The Resource Document was prepared as the basic working document of a series of workshops on the theme that were held in late 1999 and early 2000 as part of the INTRAC sponsored Fourth International Workshop on the Evalauation of Social development. The Resource Document, therefore, is written and strutured in the style of a working document and includes not only text but also questions and acse study

exercises that can be sued in a workshop setting. On reflection we have decided not to exclude these important sections since they may prove useful to any organisation or group of people that also wish to use the Resource Document in a workshop.

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SECTION 1:

THE CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment has become a central concept in development discourse and practice in the 1990s. The notion of empowerment is widely used in the policies and programmes of both bilateral and multilateral agencies, not just NGOs. Yet it is a complex term that is not easily defined and is open to a wide variety of interpretations. Any attempt to assess whether or not a particular development intervention has 'empowered' people must recognise this and for this reason this Document begins with a brief analysis of the concept of empowerment.

There is an ever-expanding literature on empowerment. Van Eyken (1990), Friedmann (1992), Craig and Mayo (1994) and Rowlands (1997) have all examined the concept and focused on the notion of 'power', its use and its distribution as being central to any understanding of social transformation. This centrality includes power both in terms of radical change and confrontation and also in the sense of the power '**to do**', '**to be able**' and of feeling more capable and in control of situations. Power is, in most contexts, the basis of wealth, while powerlessness is the basis of poverty and both the 'powerful' and the 'powerless' are categories of actors fundamental to understanding the dynamics of any development process. Power can be seen as an asset owned by the state or a dominant class and exercised in order to maintain its control and to stamp their authority and legitimacy. Power, furthermore, operates at many different levels and is manifest in the conflicting interests of different groups within any particular context; for example, local or regional patrons, the power that men often exercise over women and the power that institutions such as the church exercise over people.

Furthermore, Rowlands (1997) distinguishes between '**power over**', '**power to**' and '**power within**'; while Craig and Mayo (1995) contrast the notions of power as a '**variable sum**' in which the powerless can be empowered without altering the level of power already held by the powerful, with power as a '**zero sum**' in which any gain in power by one group inevitably results in a reduction in the power exercised by others. Power is also related to knowledge, which is both a source of power and a means for its acquisition. In this respect Cornwall (1992) has argued that 'all development work is to do with the control of knowledge' and that if the 'underprivileged' were able to control the sources of knowledge, the structures of existing power relations would be radically altered. The following three quotations illustrate the range of meanings of empowerment in a development context.

> . . . an alternative development involves a process of social and political empowerment whose long term objective is to rebalance the structure of power within society by making state action more accountable, strengthening the powers of civil society in the management of their own affairs and making corporate business more socially responsible. (Friedmann 1992)

> Empowerment is about collective community, and ultimately class conscientization, to critically understand reality in order to use the power which even the powerless do possess, so as to challenge the powerful and ultimately to transform that reality through conscious political struggles. (Craig and Mayo 1995)

> While the empowerment approach acknowledges the importance for women of increasing their power, it seeks to identify power less in terms of domination over others and more in terms of the capacity of women to increase their self-reliance and internal strength. This is identified as the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through ability to gain control over crucial material and non-material sources. It places less emphasis than the equity approach on increasing women's status relative to men, but seeks to empower women through the redistribution of power within, as well as between, societies. (Moser 1991)

Empowerment has become a major purpose of social development interventions in the 1990s. It has been operationalised into practical project methodologies and, in terms of its effect and impact, it is beginning to be translated into **observable and measurable actions**. Concretely people's empowerment can manifest itself in three broad areas:
- power through greater confidence in one's ability to successfully undertake some form of action
- power in terms of increasing relations which people establish with other organisations
- power as a result of increasing access to economic resources, such as credit and inputs.

Social development as empowerment does not see poor people as deficient and needing external support; more positively, it seeks to create an interactive and sharing approach to development in which people's skills and knowledge are acknowledged. Empowerment is not merely therapy which makes the poor feel better about their poverty, not simply the encouraging of 'local initiatives' or making people more politically 'aware'. Similarly it does not assume that people are entirely powerless and that there do not already exist networks of solidarity and resistance through which poor people confront the forces which threaten their livelihoods. On the contrary, empowerment has to do with 'positive change' in an individual, community and structural sense, with organisation and with negotiation. But, as Rowlands (1997) has commented , 'empowerment takes time' and it is not a process that necessarily achieves results in the short term.

As with other development concepts, such as civil society or participation, there is always a danger that the use of empowerment in the context of development interventions may be based on a superficial understanding of local relations of power. Empowerment maybe limited to little more that greater participation in project decision-making and have little, if any, impact on wider structural change. This has led to some concern that the use of the concept in development tends to mask the true nature of

power relations. A recent collection of papers by anthropologists reflects this growing scepticism about the increasing use of the concept of empowerment (Cheater 1999). James, for example notes that:

> Notions of sharing power, of stakeholders, of participation and representation and so on seem to refer increasingly to the self-contained world of projects themselves: the external structures of land-holding and subsistence economy which have perhaps been disrupted, of political and military formations which have shaped and still shape the forms of social life in a region, tend to fade from view in the world of development-speak. (James 1999:13-4)

Much of the concern is that many development projects concerned with empowerment fail to understand and analyse the historical dynamics of local politics with its complex interplay between different local interest groups, state policy and the wider political economy (e.g. Werbner 1999, Chabal 1992). These criticisms of the current utilisation of the concept of empowerment are important to bear in mind. Yet, while James urges fellow anthropologists and other academics to distance themselves from the term, this is not a realistic option for development practitioners. Empowerment is a key objective of such a wide range of development interventions; the challenge for development practitioners is to deepen their understanding of the term, recognise its complexities, strengths and limitations, and explore how they may be able to assess whether or not 'empowerment' has taken place.

The starting point of any analysis of empowerment in development interventions has to be that the term has a diverse range of meanings associated with it. Like participation and civil society, empowerment is a motivational concept which evokes a wide range of different responses among different groups. It is important to seek to understand how different organisations have used the term empowerment, and what type of empowerment they have sought to bring about. With this in mind we present a number of short **case studies** taken from the practice, which illustrate how a number of different development agencies have tried to promote empowerment within the context of a development project. Together the three case studies provide a broad spectrum of interpretations of empowerment and help us to understand the very broad nature of its meaning.

Case Study 1
Empowering Communities: The Kebkabiya Project in West Sudan

This case study provides an example of project-centred view of empowerment. The Kebkabiya Project is essentially a food security project, but Oxfam have seen the project as part of process of community empowerment, hence the title of the book based on the project is 'Empowering Communities'. As is shown in this brief case study, the use of empowerment in this project is very much in terms facilitating the participation of communities, and especially women, in project decision making and by Oxfam itself being prepared to relinquish control to the KSCS.

The Kebkabiya project in West Sudan emerged out of the Oxfam relief programme in West Sudan following the 1984 famine. It represented a shift from relief to development and the main objective of the project was to increase food security in the communities around Kebkabiya. The project was initially managed directly by Oxfam, but later a local organisation, the Kebkabiya Smallholders' Charitable Society (KSCS) was created which gradually took over the management of the project.

The initial objective of the project was to establish 12 seedbanks and the first phase of the project enabled Oxfam staff to gain a clearer sense of other perceived problems in the communities in the area. The second phase of the project began in 1989 introduced additional components to address these problems, notably animal health, animal traction, pest control, soil and water conservation and community development. The key organisational change in the management was that while overall co-ordination of the project was done by Oxfam staff, this was done in conjunction with a new democratic structure of community representation, the Village Centre Committees. Each village from a group of five to twelve villages elected one man and one woman to represent it on a the Village Centre Committee. In turn, each Village Centre Committee elected one man and one woman to a Project Management Committee.

In 1990 the PMC decided to register as an independent organisation and the Kebkabiya Smallholders' Charitable Society (KSCS) was created. It is a membership organisation drawn from the communities in which the project has been working. In 1992 KSCS held a constitutional workshop which set out society's system of community accountability, and formalised the representational structure that had been introduced in the project; i.e. each village sending a male and female representative to the VCC etc. During the 1990s the process began by which Oxfam began to hand over direct control of the project to the KSCS.

For Oxfam, the project represented a successful example of how an Oxfam managed food security project was transformed into a project in which local communities have become increasingly involved. Whereas at the start of the project, local people, particularly women, had little if any say in project decision making, the project is now under the management of KSCS. Democratic structures have been put in place, notably through the creation of the KSCS, which have improved the accountability of project management to the community. From the perspective of the Oxfam staff involved in the project, this has resulted in community empowerment.

(Source: P. Strachan with Chris Peters, *Empowering Communities: A Casebook from West Sudan*, Oxfam 1997)

Case Study 2
Empowering the Landless: Case Studies in Land Distribution and Tenure Security for the Poor

This report examines the experiences of Christian Aid (a British NGO) and its partners in working for a more just system of land distribution in Brazil, the Philippines and Mozambique. In this report, empowerment is seen in terms of securing access to land for poor people and providing them with the means to farm it productively and sustainably. This is based on the belief that land is crucial for poor people living in rural areas in order to secure and sustain their livelihoods. The case studies outlined in this report show how Christian Aid and its partners have worked with poor people in improving their access to productive land.

1: Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra (MST), Brazil. MST defines itself as a mass social movement of landless rural workers who seek access to land, and campaign for agrarian reform and broad political changes in Brazilian society. Between 1991 and 1997 MST helped 600,000 landless people gain land, build houses and start schools. It has done this through a strategy involving three stages: firstly, MST identifies land that is not being used for production and attempts to negotiate for the use of the land. If this fails a large number of people occupy the land and build a camp; secondly, usually the owners, police and judiciary attempt to evict them but MST attempts to resist this eviction or be allowed to be transferred to other similar land. The support of churches, trade unions, urban movements and NGOs is important during this stage; thirdly, MST works with the land trying to make it more productive, building roads, schools, health facilities etc. In addition to this form of direct action, MST along with many other groups is campaigning for agrarian reform in Brazil. In doing so it has recognised that this is not isolated from wider macro-economic challenges confronting Brazil. While Brazil has paid huge amounts on debt repayment over the last five years, rural development budgets have been cut and there is increasing poverty in rural and urban areas.

2: Mapalad Farmers, the Philippines. The Mapalad farmers have been involved in a long-running legal dispute with a local landowner concerning 144 hectares of land in the southern Philippines. Although the land was allocated to the farmers under the government's Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Programme (CARP) this allocation has been fiercely contested by the landowner who has successfully appealed against the ruling and prevented the farmers from occupying the land. This situation is seen as a test case of the government's commitment to land reform, and the farmers have been supported by a churches and NGOs. Christian Aid has been involved through its partner Balay Mndanaw Foundation Inc (BMFI). BMFI has offered the farmers legal advice, access to a other actors in civil society and moral support. This case showed the power of rural and urban elites, as well as some government officials and members of the judiciary, in protecting their privileges and manipulating existing laws and policies to their own advantage. Christian Aid and BMFI see their role as one of working with the Mapalad farmers, and others, in order that they may be empowered to counteract the strategies of the land-owning elites.

3. Smallholder land security in Mozambique. In Mozambique, Christian Aid has supported small farmers in protecting their existing access to land in the face of outside speculators and developers. With the ending of civil war and economic liberalisation has created a land rush for the more economically valuable land in Mozambique. There have been examples of farmers being evicted from their lands while in other cases people have returned from refugee camps only to find their land occupied by others. In response, the Christian Council of Mozambique set up an organisation, ORAM, to work with smallholder farmers associations in defending their land rights. In 1995 the government began the process of creating a new land law and a Land Commission was established. ORAM and UNAC (National Peasant's Union) managed to get places on the commission and lobbied on behalf of peasants' rights. In doing so they encountered strong opposition from powerful interest groups lobbying on behalf of commercial and political interests, which sought to undermine the status of peasant land rights in the new law. The new law was finally passed in 1997 in a form that did include many of the peasants' demands on protecting their rights. For ORAM and Christian Aid, the new law does in principle empower peasants in the sense that their claims to land are now protected by law. However, the work for ORAM continues since the passing of the new law is only the first stage and many difficulties are likely to arise during implementation.

These case studies reflect the dynamic, even perilous, nature of empowerment in the context of land reform: For these landless people there has been a continuous struggle for land reform. All have involved victories and setbacks and in all three countries, the farmers and NGOs concerned have been met by strong opposition from established elites. In each case, local level action has been supported by national level campaigning and lobbying on land reform and even the macro-economic policy. Empowerment clearly does not end with a change in the law or approval of access to land. These are only the beginnings of a process of achieving secure, productive and sustainable livelihoods.

(Source: M. Whiteside, 1999, Developing good practice discussion series, Christian Aid)

<u>Case Study 3</u>
Health Promoters' Training Programme, Urraco, Honduras

This case study examines women's empowerment in the context of a health promoters training programme in Honduras. This particular programme was set up in Urraco in 1985, with support from an American NGO who provided a volunteer and funding for programme activities. Although the programme was not set up initially with the specific aim of empowering women, both the American volunteer attached to the programme and some of the co-ordinating team have increasingly seen the programme as essentially about women's empowerment. Yet as the case study shows, there was no clear strategy in the programme for facilitating the empowerment process and as a result the programme made only limited progress.

The programme provided a two-year course to train members of local communities in preventative health and basic treatment. The course is organised around study circles in

26 communities, and involve weekly meetings for about two hours each and monthly sectoral meetings when all the groups meet together to discuss a common theme. Eighty women have been trained as health promoters over a three and a half-year period. Other women have been actively involved in the programme through providing meals for malnourished children, craft work and goat projects. There is a co-ordinating team of five women who work full time on the programme, and who are each responsible for three to six of the study circles. In her analysis of this programme, Rowlands (1997) has explored empowerment at three levels:

- personal: developing a sense of self confidence and capacity
- relational: developing the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of a relationship and decisions made within it.
- collective: where individuals work together to achieve a more extensive impact, such as forming a co-operative or involvement in political structures.

Personal empowerment. Women who had joined the study circles they had experienced an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem as a result of participation in the programme. Furthermore they also highlighted the importance of learning new skills through the programme, such as diagnosing common medical conditions and treating them, checking their children's nutritional status etc. A few had even managed to get employment. The sense of personal empowerment was particularly marked among those women who were members of the co-ordinating team. In particular they had been given the opportunity to attend meetings and courses in other parts of Honduras and even abroad, which had enable them to look beyond their traditional position within the home.

Empowerment in relationships. Some women who have been involved in the programme stated that their relationships with their husbands and families changed. They have noted such changes as more involvement in decision making on money matters, greater freedom of movement around their communities, improved treatment by their husbands and they, in turn, have been more conscious of improving their relationships with their children.

Collective empowerment. There was little evidence to suggest that the study circles themselves had led to any collective empowerment. Some activities were undertaken as a group but this did not result in the groups becoming more able to organise collectively in order to meet their needs or gain more access to economic, social or political power. However, there was some evidence of collective empowerment among the co-ordinating team. For example, they were now running the programme without the support of an American volunteer and they were also involved in networking with other organisations in the country.

The main achievements of the health programme in terms of empowerment have been at the personal level whereas, outside of the co-ordinating team, there has been only limited empowerment at the relational or collective level. Rowlands' identifies a number of factors which may have worked against the empowerment process:

- the programme has been structured around a two year training programme which has meant that many women see it only in terms of learning a finite set of skills and have not been motivated to build on the programme to undertake further activities;
- women were not led to challenge the social, political and economic relationships which underpin health provision;
- the focus on training health promoters has limited the number of women who can participate;
- the methodology used for the training did not encourage women to develop their own themes and agendas, nor learn from their own mistakes;
- a number of cultural and local factors may also have limited the process of empowerment through the programme.

(Source: J. Rowlands *Questioning Empowerment*, 1997)

Discussion of Case Studies

These three case studies reflect very different notions of empowerment. In the case of the Kebkabiya project, community empowerment is seen very specifically in terms of increasing the role of the community in managing the project. This is a rather narrow view of empowerment which makes little reference to the wider social and economic context and how the 'empowered' communities engage with this. The case study from Honduras looks beyond the immediate project and stresses the importance of women's empowerment in terms of building up their self-confidence and self-esteem. However, like the Kebkabiya project, the empowerment of women involved in the Uracco project has not extended to their broader political and economic rights. By contrast, the Christian Aid land reform studies do provide examples of broader processes of empowerment. Landless people have successfully struggled for access to productive land, while in Mozambique, the new land law has recognised the demands of peasant farmers. Furthermore, while the Christian Aid supported campaigns had a clear objective from the start of empowering the landless through campaigning for their land rights, in the case of the other two projects, empowerment was not the initial objective but rather has been added-on later. They have been far less politically controversial because unlike the land reform campaigns they did not attempt to redistribute control over productive resources.

The fact that the concept of empowerment is open to such wide interpretation presents particular challenges for evaluating the impact of empowerment processes. In particular, there is the issue of whether or not empowerment is assessed in relation to the specific project objectives, however limited these may be. For example, a starting point could be to undertake the assessment within the project framework, i.e. what are the empowerment objectives of the project or other type of intervention, and to what extent have they been achieved. Yet an alternative starting point is to firstly undertake an analysis of local power structures in order to highlight which factors have been most significant in creating conditions of powerlessness among poor and marginalised people.

This would allow more critical and demanding questions to be asked of the any empowerment process that a development agency has started.

For example, while the Kebkabiya project appears to have made significant process in achieving its objective of empowering communities through involving them in project management, the project report makes no reference to the engagement of these communities with wider political and economic structures in Sudan. While participation in project decision making is an important development in itself, it is only so within the context of the project. As the quote from James (1999) above noted, many development agencies see empowerment only in terms of the 'self-contained world of projects', yet in doing so they underestimate or ignore much deeper power structures which have a much greater bearing on peoples' lives. In assessing empowerment resulting from development interventions, it is important to undertake both. Firstly, the intervention can be monitored against its original objectives. But in order to understand whether or not the intervention has had any long-term impact a much wider assessment of local power structures will be needed.

The need to understand discrete development interventions in the context of wider social change is central to approaches to evaluating social development. While acknowledging the complexity of assessing social change, there has been much innovation, experimentation and learning in development organisations over the last decade or so in evaluating social development interventions. It may be useful to recap on the main lessons that have emerged from these experiences.

THE DIMENSIONS OF EMPOWERMENT

Psychological	**Cultural**
Self-image and Identity	Redefining Gender Rules and Norms
Creating Space	Recreating Cultural Practices
Acquiring Knowledge	

Social	**Economic**
Leadership in Community Action	Attaining Income security
Action for Rights	Ownership of Productive Assets
Social Inclusion	Entrepreneurial Skills
Literacy	

Organisational	**Political**
Collective Identity	Participation in Local Institutions
Establishing Representative Organisation	Negotiating Political Power
Organisational Leadership	Accessing Political Power

CONCLUDING COMMENT

There can be no doubting the widespread use of, and the commitment to, a process of empowerment in many development interventions. However, it could be argued that in the past five years or so this commitment has run into difficulties. There is evidence that many development projects, which placed 'empowerment' to the forefront of their objectives, have become frustrated by their inability to monitor and explain the process and thus 'evaluate' its outcomes. In this respect it is important in this workshop to come firmly to grips with the concept - and the process involved - and to be able to use it analytically to explain the dynamics of the contexts in which these projects take place. With this in mind, it would be useful if in our discussions we could focus on a number of **key questions:**

1. In the context of development projects which are intended to 'empower' the poor, what are the **key characteristics** and **factors** in the project context that we will need to identify and explain if we wish to understand the dynamics of power ?

2. What are the key **political, social and economic** differences between those with power and the powerless within a particular development context ?

3. What are the main characteristics of **powerlessness** that will have to be addressed if a development project is concerned to 'empower' local people ?

4. What do you think would be the **key elements** in any development intervention designed to 'empower' the poor ?

These and other questions constitute the initial **contextual analysis of power** which must be undertaken if we are to be able to assess to what extent a particular project has changed the locus, pattern and distribution of power. All too often development projects seek to assess to what extent they may, or may not, have influenced the power equilibrium in a particular context, but most are unable to do so for lack of an initial contextual understanding. The purpose, therefore, of the first session of the Workshop is to construct such an analysis and to ensure that we have a framework for understanding and assessing the notions of 'power' and 'powerlessness' in the immediate and wider project context.

SECTION 2:

UNDERSTANDING THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF PROCESSES OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

The measurement of the effectiveness of a development intervention to promote empowerment requires an appropriate **monitoring and evaluation system.** In order to be able to do this effectively, it is important to set out clearly the general lessons that have been learnt in monitoring and evaluating social development interventions. This is the purpose of the section and is intended for those participants who are not familiar with the recent literature and conceptual and practical advances in the field. The emphasis is upon a **minimum but effective** system which has as its objective the generation of a sufficient, but not an exaggerated, amount of data and information which would allow a development agency to have a reliable understanding of the output, effect and impact of processes such as 'empowerment' that it is supporting. It is in this area that most of the interesting work on M and E is currently taking place. Essentially in the past decade there has emerged an alternative to the more conventional quantitative and results orientated approach to project evaluation. It is within the framework of this alternative 'model' that we must seek guidance on how to approach the issue of the M and E of as process of 'empowerment'. The increasing emergence of a has begun to show us how we might go about the M and E of these qualitative process and this section will examine this new model of project evaluation.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION: AN INTRODUCTION

It should be standard practice among development organisations, including NGOs, to monitor and evaluate the outcomes, effects and impact of all their programmes and projects. This applies as much to capacity-building programmes and other social development interventions as it does to programmes with more quantifiable objectives, but the task is more difficult. The key issue is how to measure qualitative change using a method that is not too time-consuming and demanding, and which provides useful, accessible information for decision-making.

It is important to recognise how monitoring differs from evaluation, since the two terms are often used together or synonymously. The essential difference between the two is that while monitoring is a continuous assessment and is an integral part of project management, evaluation is carried out periodically, both by project staff and beneficiaries and, at times, with the help of external teams. While monitoring ends on the completion of a project, evaluation may be undertaken over a much longer time frame; for example, an evaluation of the impact of a rural development project may be carried out several years after its completion.

There is no single definition of monitoring and evaluating nor standard procedure for carrying it out. Nevertheless, some common features can be identified in the literature on programme monitoring and evaluation systems. Some definitions of monitoring and evaluation are presented here, all of which are taken from some of the key manuals for practitioners on monitoring and evaluating development programmes and projects (with emphasis added).

> *'Monitoring is a **continuous assessment** both of the functioning of the project activities in the context of implementation schedules and of the use of project inputs by targeted populations in the context of design expectations. It is an **internal project activity**, an essential part of good management practice and therefore an **integral part of day to day management**.'* (Casley and Kumar 1987:2)

> *'Monitoring is the **in-built mechanism** to check that things are "going to plan" and to enable adjustments to be made in a methodological way.'* (Oxfam 1995: 413)

> *'Monitoring is **the systematic and continuous assessment** of the progress of a piece of work over time.'* (Gosling and Edwards1995: 81)

It will be clear from these quotes that the two main features of any monitoring system are firstly, that it is an **integral** part of project management, not something done by an external team, and secondly that it is a **continuous**, on-going process for collecting, storing, analysing and using information. Evaluation, by contrast, is not an integral part of programme or project management.

> *'Evaluation is a **periodic** assessment of the relevance, performance, efficiency and impact of the project in the context of its stated objectives. It usually involves comparisons requiring **information from outside the project** - in time, area or population.'* (Casley and Kumar 1987: 2)

> *'An evaluation is the **assessment at one point in time** of the impact of a piece of work and the extent to which stated objectives have been achieved.'* (Gosling and Edwards 1995: 89)

Broadly speaking, there are **two main approaches to monitoring and evaluation.**

(i) The first can be called the **orthodox** or '**blueprint**' approach. This is the approach that most development agencies have traditionally followed; a detailed monitoring system, including the selection of indicators, is set up before the implementation of the project, and serves as the basis for monitoring for the duration of the project. While this approach is appropriate for monitoring the physical input and output of projects, it has major limitations when monitoring broader social development objectives, including capacity-building.

(ii) An alternative **process approach** to monitoring has been developed in the past decade or so which is less prescriptive and more flexible and adaptable. Rather than define all the elements of the monitoring system at the start of the project, the system develops and evolves out of the on-going experience of implementing the project.

Monitoring and evaluation should cover the output, outcome and impact of the intervention. It might be useful to examine the terms **outcomes** and **impact.** The evidence suggests that development agencies 'in general' are stronger on issues such as outputs, effort and activities, but less strong when it comes to determining what has been the result of all the endeavour. Also we should bear in mind that, while local people may be involved in definition, terms such as 'outcomes' and 'impact' often come from the perspective of donors; however, understanding the 'change' which has taken place from the perspective of the people involved will be more relevant.

POINT OF MEASUREMENT	WHAT IS MEASURED	INDICATORS
Outputs	Effort	Implementation of Activities
Outcomes	Effectiveness	Use of outputs and sustained production of benefits
Impact	Change	Difference from the original problem situation

While initially M and E will involve a detailing of effort expended and a description of activities undertaken, the crucial first stage in measurement will be to assess what has been the outcome of the project in terms of the **effect** it has had on the initial situation. By effect we mean the more immediate tangible and observable change, in relation to the initial situation and established objectives, which it is felt has been brought about as a   direct result of project activities. In the overall process of M and E, **impact assessment** is the last stage and it is rarely reached. In the first instance it is important not to confuse 'impact' with 'effect'; the latter refers to the more immediate outcome brought about by an intervention, the former to the longer term change. Impact refers to the 'consequences or end products' which result, either directly or indirectly, from an intervention and on which can be placed an objective or subjective value. Furthermore, we must also bear in mind that impact can also be negative as a result of unexpected consequences of the development intervention. For example, credit programmes targeted at the poor, can often concentrate on the more credit worthy and thus end up exacerbating poverty and differentiation.

Both monitoring and evaluation provide a means of measuring the effectiveness of programme interventions in order to make both long-term and short-term management decisions. A monitoring system provides both the necessary information for project management decision making and also an on-going assessment of how the project is developing. The type of information required will be dependent on who needs it. At a project or programme level, management decisions will require detailed information on the progress of the project, while the regional office or international headquarters may only require more abstract, aggregated data. An effective monitoring system at the project level should provide a continuous record of the progress of the project.

Evaluation is dependent on the monitoring system in place - a good monitoring system will provide the information which will form the core of any evaluation. However, additional information may also be required in undertaking an evaluation.

- **Monitoring and evaluation should indicate whether the project is being implemented as planned.** Each project and programme should have defined objectives in terms of outputs, effect and impact. The primary purpose of monitoring is to check whether or not the project is on course to meet these objectives and, if not, to take the decision to modify the project or review the objectives.

- **Monitoring and evaluation should identify problems or difficulties in the implementation of the project.** An analysis of the information obtained as part of the monitoring process should indicate problems or difficulties that have arisen in the project, thus allowing project management to take appropriate action to overcome these.

- **Monitoring and evaluation should account for resources used**. One of the functions of monitoring is as a system of accountability for funders, whether these be government agencies, NGOs or individuals. Basically, the monitoring system will show how much money has been spent and how it has been spent. In many organisations, this is usually considered the most essential and necessary function of monitoring.

- **Monitoring and evaluation should check whether assumptions made at the planning stage are still valid.** Project planning depends on an initial assessment and assumptions about local conditions, both social and physical. Monitoring can provide a mechanism for testing the validity of these and if necessary, providing alternatives which can be fed back into project implementation.

- **Monitoring and evaluation should assess whether the project continues to be relevant to the needs of the beneficiaries.** A comprehensive monitoring system should keep track of the needs of the people for whom the project or programme is intended to assist. This will help to ensure that the project continues to be appropriate and focused.

THE OVERALL M and E SYSTEM

The building of an overall framework of the process, stages and tasks of evaluation is a critical first step. However, the framework has got to be more than a paper exercise at central level; it has to be operationalised at the project level. The lack of an overall framework can be and often is the major obstacle for initiating M and E. The '**framework**' to which we are referring has several main components: structure, methods, indicators, data storage and retrieval and analysis and interpretation. Already there is evidence that development agencies are formalising these frameworks into Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Systems (PME) which can be highly structured, not always easy to follow at a glance and begging the question of how they would be

operationalised at the project level. Smillie (1995) has warned of the 'blueprint' approach to project evaluation, particularly with respect to the Log Frame as a means of structuring evaluation activities; and Blankenberg (1995) refers to the genuine 'fear' on the part of development agencies that such systems might become 'top-heavy' and not justify the expenditure. Essentially we are looking for some evidence of an overall 'view' of the evaluation exercise, that its various stages have been contemplated and that there is a notion that the exercise will lead to more than cataloguing effort and output. It is important to avoid situations where evaluations are undertaken as impromptu, one-off exercises with little sense of overall planning or direction. The notion of an overall framework is particularly critical in the unfolding, process nature of social development evaluation.

Increasingly, therefore, development agencies are building their project evaluation activities into institutionalised systems and moving forward on that basis. In a review in 1995, PLAN International examined the systems of a number of agencies using six key criteria: process elements, outputs, management, users, linkages and technical aspects. The review provided ample evidence of the growing tendency to build M and E into existing project planning systems and also to structure evaluation activities in a more consistent manner. There is, however, no notion of some form of universal M and E system for social development; indeed there is a remarkable range of approaches each geared to the particular nature and demands of the agency operating them. Essentially such systems follow the broad contours of the evaluation sequence which formed the basis of the case studies examined at the 1992 Amersfoort Workshop

– PREPARATION - EXECUTION - REPORTING - REFLECTION -

 with the introduction of more formal and standard institutional principles and procedures at the different stages. The increasing interest in such systems can be attributed partly to the nature of social development. Conventional and largely quantitatively orientated evaluations are more concerned with inputs and outputs and are usually able to measure these using quantitative research methods. Social development evaluation, on the other hand, is not amenable to such limited methods and demands an approach which is more wide-ranging and capable of picking up and explaining the qualitative change which may have taken place. It is to be expected, therefore, that as development agencies – and particularly NGOs – actively promote social development they will need to develop accordingly their M and E capabilities. There would appear to be a direct relationship between the growing influence of social development and the increasing sophistication of M and E. A detailed examination of a number of social development **M and E systems** reveals the following as the kinds of broad **principles** which underpin them:

* the system should be minimum but cost-effective, it should be intelligible to both staff and project partners at all levels and should not require onerous and unnecessary reporting;

- the system should be designed in such a way that it is able to develop the reflective and analytical capacities of those involved and not merely result in the mechanical undertaking of pre-programmed activities;

- the system should be able to feed consistent, quality information on output, outcome and impact into the (annual) project cycle – both for accountability and learning purposes – leading to the ongoing adaptation of plans and objectives;

- the system should emphasise decision-making and analysis and not merely be geared to the collection of information and data;

- the system should be based on the assumption that change as a result of social development may be unpredictable and that its evaluation, therefore, cannot always be based on predetermined expectations of likely outcomes;

- the system should also be based upon as wide an involvement as is realistically possible and necessary and one which values the contributions of the various stakeholder groups; it should recognise gender diversity and should seek to ensure that both women and men are able to contribute;

- the system should recognise that the most crucial aspect of the M and E of social development is monitoring and should emphasise this function as opposed to the ex-poste evaluation approach;

- finally the system should acknowledge the value of alternative sources of information, both oral and visual, and of the perceptions of local people who have not been directly involved in the project.

The above principles are, of course, far easier to express than to build into a commonly understood and used M and E system. Within most conventional understandings of a Project Cycle, M and E inevitably appears in the latter stages and, accordingly, is affected by the inconsistencies and difficulties of the earlier stages. Problems such as external influences, intended and unintended outcomes, the tangible and the intangible and the potentially conflicting roles of the operating agency and the donor, can all contribute to a complex and unpredictable scenario in which the system is functioning. While there would be fairly widespread recognition and solidarity with the above kinds of principles, there is little evidence that they have been widely employed in the practice of social development evaluation. Although some might argue that, by definition, such systems are anathema to social development evaluation which should be as 'unstructured' as possible, it is difficult to avoid the need for a framework which will produce, on a consistent basis, the **continuous** understanding of the unfolding process.

INDICATORS

A major operational breakthrough of the past decade has been development agencies' increasing familiarity with and apparent use of qualitative indicators in the evaluation of

social development. The amount of discussion and examples in the literature on this matter is a reflection of this breakthrough. In this respect, therefore, there is no need to review here either the background information concerning qualitative indicators or indeed the basic issues relating to indicators such as **definition, characteristics, selection and use**. There is ample background material on these issues in works such as Casley and Kumar (1987), Pratt and Boyden (1985), Oakley (1988), Marsden and Oakley (1990), Westendorff and Ghai (1993), World Bank (1994) and Gosling and Edwards (1995). The basic principles that indicators should be unambiguous, consistent, specific, sensitive and easy to collect are as valid today as they were when first suggested by Casley and Kumar in 1987. Moreover, indicators should reflect project results at three levels: **output, outcome** and **impact;** and in the evaluation of social development almost certainly both **quantitative** and **qualitative** indicators will be needed. Finally, come the questions of **who** will identify the indicators and **when.** An initial general observation which could be made would argue that while there is an increasing familiarity with the 'language' of indicators and reference to them in project documentation, there is still a predominance of indicators which show material results whereas, in the unfolding of a social development project, results are not usually predictable beforehand.

In terms of indicators of social development, the three current **key issues** would appear to be:
- the **identification** and **operationalisation** of indicators of both immediate outcome and longer-term impact of social development
- research which would help us to answer the question '**how many indicators?**'
- how to develop a set of indicators that satisfies a variety of **stakeholders**.

As regards the first, it is probably true, but challengable, to say that 'output indicators' still dominate social development monitoring activities and that 'outcome' and 'impact' indicators are still largely at the experimentation stage with, however, an increasing number of notable exceptions. Effect and impact indicators present particular problems. In the first instance, the two terms are often used interchangeably and the distinction is not made between 'effect' and 'impact'; in such cases, the use of 'impact' is more common, with the distinction perhaps being made between 'immediate' and 'long-term' impact. In this respect it is wise not to be too concerned about the correctness in the use of terms, but to stress the 'evolving' nature of overall project outcome and at least to make a distinction and to select indicators which will help to give an understanding of what is happening at two distinct phases in the project's evolution. However, there must be an intermediate stage between input and overall impact; to try to develop indicators for such a broad time span will make it impossible to identify and describe the changes as they happen. Indicators of social development, therefore, need to be selected and operationalised within the following broad framework and sequence:

Overall >>Project >> Project>>>Indicators >>Indicators of >>>Indicators
Goal   Objectives Activities of Output   Immediate and   of Impact
**   Verifiable Outcome**

While there is nothing particularly novel about the above sequence and its interrelationships, it is remarkable how few approaches to evaluating social development seem to build around the above framework. In this sequence it is also important to stress that, as a project moves from inputs to effect to impact, the influence of non-project factors becomes increasingly felt thus making it more difficult for the indicators selected to 'measure' change brought about by the project. This fact should temper the exercise and not lead to fruitless endeavours to identify changes to reflect the chosen indicator. Second, impact can take an unexpected amount of time to occur and be evident, thus straining the usefulness of indicators to capture this change. Third, the whole exercise could be costly and time consuming, which could make it impossible for many resource-poor projects to undertake. There is no readily available empirically based evidence to provide insights into these dilemmas. Hopefully some of the ongoing enquiry into impact assessment might shed some light.

SMART Properties of Indicators

Properties	Definition
Specific	Indicators should reflect those things the project intends to change, avoiding measures that are largely subject to external influences
Measurable and Unambiguous	Indicators must be precisely defined so that their measurement and interpretation is unambiguous. Indicators should give objective and not subjective data - that is they should be independent of who is collecting the data. Indicators should be comparable across groups, projects thus allowing changes to be compared and aggregated.
Attainable and sensitive	Indicators should be achievable by the project and therefore sensitive to changes the project wishes to make.
Relevant and easy to collect	It must be feasible to collect chosen indicators within a reasonable time and at a reasonable cost and these should be relevant to the project in question.
Timebound	Indicators should describe by when a certain change is expected.

(Roche 1999)

Following on from the issues raised above, an equally critical question concerns the **number of indicators** which a project might need in order for it to be able to measure the effect and impact of its activities. In this respect Carvalho and White's (1995) insistence that '. . any list of indicators must be parsimonious and must be related clearly to need .' is apposite and echoed by Dawson (1995). Similarly a review of Impact Evaluation undertaken by PAC (1995) concluded that more thought needs to be given to the number of indicators often proposed for impact measurement. This is a most crucial

point since it would appear that project staff often respond to the challenge of evaluation by exaggerating the number of indicators, without taking into account the demands of their operationalisation. Certainly the literature has more than one example of lists of indicators which would appear inappropriate to the resources available. Davies (1995) writing in the context of the Bangladeshi NGO Proshika, for example, reported on 13 indicators of empowerment which resulted in some 25 pages of questions in an evaluation proposal to measure its impact. In general terms it is wiser to attempt to assess effect and impact with a smaller number of relevant and manageable indicators, which offer the prospect of some understanding of the change which has taken place, than to be overwhelmed methodologically and timewise by an unmanageable and ambitious list. The following table from a forthcoming Oxfam book provides a useful summary of the essential properties of indicators.

Essentially the number of indicators used should decline as the project moves from input – output – outcome – impact. If the selection of the output indicators has followed the usual cautions about relevance and usability (and so on), they should be the basis for one or two broader indicators of outcome and then a general indicator of impact. The Impact Indicator is a 'framework' indicator and will itself need to be broken down into a small number of more specific indicators as signs increase of the impact of the intervention. For example, if we take the objective of a hypothetical social development project below, we could construct the following set of manageable indicators:

Objective	Output Indicators	Outcome Indicators	Impact Indicator
Organisational development at the community level	a. Organisation formation and structuring b. Capacity building related to organisational growth c. Type and frequency of organisation activities d. Actions planned and executed	a. Emergence and strengthening of community level b. Growing involvement of the organisation in local development matters	a. Consolidation of autonomous organisations involved in local development matters

The key lesson is to keep the number of indicators down to a minimum but adequate level. It is far more effective to be able to manage and produce results from a smaller number of indictors than to be overwhelmed by an ambitious, but ultimately unmanageable,lengthy list. Data and information from the above output indicators should not be unduly complicated to collect, but do require consistency and an adequate means of storage. If those indicators begin to yield the expected information, they should provide the basis for assessing the effect and so on. It is, of course, all easier on paper

than in practice and the M and E of social development, because of its more demanding and particular nature, is more prone to fall foul of the inevitable inconsistencies of development projects.

An understanding of where we are with this issue of indicators of social development is scattered across a diffuse body of documentation and literature, and synthesis is difficult. It is quite clear that, while some development agencies have yet to move beyond the discourse and a general understanding of the issues, others are not only experimenting but also seeking to draw some lessons from this experimentation. For example, several development agencies have identified and are beginning to operationalise appropriate indicators for social development. There is certainly no shortage of examples of indicators which agencies are using to monitor and ultimately evaluate the outcomes and impact of their social development projects. The following will give a flavour of the substantial progress to date of developing indicators in particular areas:

- Self-management, problem solving ability, democratisation, and self- reliance as phenomena of empowerment (Shetty.)
- Organisational growth (Howes and Sattar 1992)
- Awareness building and access to services (Franco et. al. 1992)
- Strengthening of partner organisations and stimulation of co-operation (Priester et. al. 1995)
- Attitude change (Richards 1985)
- Autonomy, membership, knowledge base and broadening the base (Uphoff 1989)
- Access, participation and mobility of women, marriage, decision-making, awareness, self-esteem and group development (CARE 1994)

Indeed such is the proliferation of available indicators of social development that Khan (1994) has suggested that we could now group them into **generic indicator groups.** Khan equates social development with 'people learning to change their behaviour' and with 'institution building', and suggests a series of generic quantitative and qualitative indicators which should be able to monitor a number of changes over time: recruitment into programme (enrolment), continuing interest (attendance), gain new knowledge and skills (learning) and change behaviour (adoption).

Examples of INDICATORS of Group Empowerment	
Before the Process	**After the Process**
Individualism, Lack of Collective Action	Internal Cohesion and Sense of Solidarity
Lack of Critical Analysis	Ability to Critically Analyse and Discuss
Economic, Social and Political Dependence	Internal Structure and Element of Self-Management
Lack of Confidence	Collective Activities
Suspicion and Isolation	Ability to Deal with an Relate to Others

Operationalising Indicators

This and other similar examples are now fairly common in the literature; what is less common is evidence on how the use of these indicators has worked out in practice. This

is where the breakthrough needs to occur. It would appear that at the project level there are examples of experiments with the operationalisation of the above kinds of indicators, but this is not widespread and many projects probably have not moved beyond the stage of indicator identification. The key issue with indicators which have a substantial qualitative dimension is their **operationalisation** which has a series of steps beginning with their translation into recognisable and verifiable phenomena or actions which can be monitored. The overall process can be understood as below and needs to be followed in sequence if the indicators are to yield the information required in order to understand progress and change.

Selection of > Activities > Identification > Continuous > Adjustment > Info. > Interpre- >Use
Indicators | | **of Verifiable** | **Monitoring** | **of Indicators** **Storage** **tation** **Learn**
| | **Activities** | | | **and**
| | **and Actions** | | | **Analysis**

It is with the latter stages that the breakthrough would appear to be needed. There is still a noticeable tendency to believe that the task has been completed once the indicators have been selected; and yet, in reality, the task is only just beginning. Furthermore, these latter stages cannot be solely externally constructed and it is here that the problems are largely found. The structuring of a monitoring exercise on the lines of the above implies a more participatory and dynamic approach, one which may not be based on the conventional understanding of 'indicators' and one which will have to be very much in the hands of project level staff and local people. These latter two facts demand a design which is intelligible and workable at those levels and not simply the introduction of an externally designed system. Indeed it is the **design** of the system to apply the indicators which is key to the whole process, and we shall see a number of examples of this in the next chapter.

An area in which quite considerable experimentation has taken place is **participation** as an indicator of social development. In one sense this progress is to be expected given the fact that the notion of 'participation' is currently prominent in development thinking and practice. Works by Cohen and Uphoff (1977), Oakley (1988 and 1991) and Rifkin et al. (1988) have been further developed by Montgomery (1995) who has summarised much of that earlier work. For example, he suggests that qualitative indicators of participation fall into three broad areas: (a) Organisational Growth, (b) Group Behaviour and Group Self-Reliance and (c) Empowerment. Montgomery's suggestion is similar to that of Khan (above) in terms of the apparent emergence of a series of generic qualitative indicators of participation, which are now quite familiar in project documentation. For instance, the Partnership Africa Canada (1995) study on impact is a useful review of similar kinds of indicators of participation; and in terms of the less complex quantitative indicators of participation, Valadez and Bamberger (1994) have usefully summarised a common set of indicators of community participation in the context of World Bank supported projects.

Reviewing the practice, there appears to be **two distinct ways** in which social development projects determine or select the 'indicators' or 'means' which they intend to use in order to monitor and assess progress and change:

- The more common and conventional approach is that in which **indicators** are **selected beforehand** and serve as the basis for initial monitoring. The usual criteria may be applied and a list is produced. Invariably in this approach reference is made to 'participation' in indicator selection but, given the fact that the concept of an 'indicator' is probably not familiar to all stakeholders, the authenticity of many such exercises is debatable. Increasingly, however, 'participatory' indicator selection is beginning to break the mould, or at least exercises are taking place by which stakeholders might be asked how they might judge the outcomes of project activities, and their responses are then translated into 'indicators' by project management. By definition, relevant and 'monitorable' social indicators are notoriously difficult to determine, but as a fundamental principle they have to be determined within the context in which they are to operate and not be entirely external constructs.

- In the past few years an innovative and potentially extremely influential approach has begun to take shape which eschews conventional practice in favour of the use of **open-ended question(s)** as the means for determining how progress and change are to be identified and assessed. The origin of this approach would appear to be Davies's (1995) earlier work with the CCDB, which we have discussed above, and which is now being replicated on a minor but potentially significant scale. In place of indicators, a simple question is put to stakeholders:

     'During the past month, in your opinion, what do you think was the most significant change that took place in the lives of the people participating in the project ?'

This potential responses to this question are then broken down into three areas: changes in people's lives; changes in people's participation; changes in the sustainability of people's institutions and their activities. Stakeholders' responses to the above questions are in two parts:
(a) **descriptive,** what, who, when, where and so on
(b) **explanatory,** stakeholders' subjective assessment of the significance of the changes during the reporting period.

A number of current initiatives by several major European NGOs in the area of 'indicators' may well begin to alter the course of practice in the next few years. To date the practice of social development M and E has often come unstuck at the stage of the selection of indicators. Now these initiatives appear to be tackling the stumbling-block head on and examining how social development process can be understood at the project level. Several established practices are up for review; for example, determining of the means to assess change, the level at which monitoring takes place and the testing of a minimalist approach. The emphasis on stakeholders' understanding of the changes which have occurred is reminiscent of the 'before-and-after' approach to the description of social development which perhaps spearheaded the search for a more effective way to monitor social development than the use of predetermined indicators. Indicators have come to be seen as 'sacred cows' of M and E; project documents invariably include a

section on 'indicators' and log frames ask for 'objectively verifiable' ones. It could be that the major practical breakthrough in the evaluation of social development will be a relaxing of this rigid demand, greater experimentation with more open-ended 'indicators' and the use of such tools as '**project histories'** and '**time lines**' in monitoring progress and change. Furthermore, updating indicators during the process of a project and systematic learning from the outcomes of monitoring are also key actions which would greatly enhance current practice.

INDICATORS OF INTERNAL EMPOWERMENT

Objective   **Indictors**

DELF-MANAGEMENT   **MEMBERSHIP GROWTH AND TRENDS**
                                    CLEAR PROCEDURES AND RULES
                                    REGULAR ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS
                                    MAINTAINING PROPER FINANCIAL ACCOUNTS

PROBLEM-SOLVING   **PROBLEM INDENTIFICATION**
                                    ABILITY TO ANALYSE

DEMOCRATISATION   **FREE AND FAIR SELECTION OF LEADERS**
                                    ROLE FOR WEAKER MEMBERS IN DECISON-MAKING
                                    TRANSPARENCY IN INFORMATION FLOW

SUATINABILITY AND   **CONFLICT RESOLUTION**
SELF-RELAINCE   **ACTIONS INITIATED BY GROUP**
                                    LEGAL STATUS
                                    INTRA-GROUP SUPPORT SYSTEM

INDICATORS OF EXTERNAL EMPOWERMENT

BUILDING LINKS   **INDICATORS**

WITH PROJECT   **INFLUENCE AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF PROJECT**
IMPLEMENTING   **REPRESENTATION ON PROJECT ADMINISTRATION**
AGENCY   **DEGREE OF FINANCIAL AUTONOMY**

WITH STATE AGENCIES   **INFLUENCE ON STATE DEVELOPMENT FUNDS**
                                    INFLUENCE ON OTHER STATE DEVELOPMENT
                                    INITIIATIVES IN THE AREA

WITH LOCAL SOCIAL   **REPRESENTATION ON THESE BODIES**
AND POLITICAL   **LOBBYING WITH MAINSTREAM PARTIES**
BODIES   **INFLUENCE IN LOCAL SCHOOLS, HEALTH CENTRES**

WITH OTHER GROUPS   **FORMATION OF FEDERATIONS**
AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS   **NETWORKING**

WITH LOCAL ELITES AND   **LEVEL OF DEPENDENCE ON LOCAL ELITES**

OTHER NON-GROUP MEMBERS	DEGREE OF CONFLICT ABILITY TO INCREASE POWER
(SKETTY, undated)	

COLLECTING AND STORING INFORMATION

We have already discussed above both the assertion that M and E systems decline progressively once they have been set up and the observation that the system often breaks down due to a lack of data and information. The collection and storage of data and information for ongoing evaluation purposes could be described as the 'engine room' of M and E; if it does not function properly, the entire system grinds to a halt. There is currently no shortage of guides to and descriptions of the range of methods of data and information collection. Valadez and Bamberger (1994) and Gosling and Edwards (1995) have produced comprehensive guides in relation to M and E; and these have been substantially reinforced by the repertoire of PRA techniques. In the past decade a whole new genre of data and information collection techniques has been developed. These eschew the more formal, quantitatively biased and discipline-based approaches in favour of techniques more suited to the demands for stakeholder participation and to the complexities of 'measuring' qualitative change. It is probably true to say, however, that their current high profile belies the situation on the ground where the collection of information is still a critical problem. Furthermore, techniques such as PRA are widely used and are strong on information collection for planning but appear less appropriate to monitoring and evaluation.

An important question to be asked in the use of the above techniques is '**how much information'** needs to be collected and recorded in order to be able adequately to assess progress. We have noted also that the M and E of the qualitative objectives of social development involves the **description** of actions and phenomena over time, and this task raises the same question. In both information collection and description, whether by using indicators or other less structured means, the issue becomes that of achieving a **balance** between being overwhelmed or not having sufficient information with which to make a judgement. There are, however, no universal rules for confronting this dilemma and it is a question of determining the minimum amount of information and description, taking into account the nature of the project and the resources available, which could produce evidence adequate for the purposes of evaluation. Perhaps the most important issue is to ensure that, at the very least, the question is addressed at the project level and that some assessment is made. Current evidence would suggest that this question is rarely asked and that little consideration is given to such issues as time, resources, staff and stakeholder familiarity and minimum information requirements before an 'evaluation process' begins to function. Davies's (1995) reference to 13 indicators and 25 pages of questions is an apposite example against which to consider these observations.

On the assumption that the above issues are being addressed, the next operational question concerns **how** the information and description are to be **organised** and **stored**

for eventual analysis and interpretation. In this respect the works of Lofland (1971) on Analysing Social Settings and Patton (1987) on Qualitative Methods in Evaluation are useful texts for the general principles of practice which could be adopted. In suggesting these works, it should be noted that the context in which they are presented – education and social welfare services in the USA – is entirely different from that of a typical 'small' development project, but the basic principles which they adopt can be adapted to this latter scenario. Once the indicators (or not!), their operational characteristics and activities and methods of collection have been determined – and presumably the question of who will do all of this – then the issue of storage becomes crucial. When we ask the question 'how' the information and descriptions are to be stored, this will probably be through the use of **files** and some kind of **filing system.** Questions then arise as to the different types of file, what is to be included in the files, how often will things be filed, who will be responsible and so on. They can really only be answered in the context of a specific project when such issues as the staff resources available, staff familiarity with such techniques, timing and level of sophistication have been considered. The whole process may appear at first glance to be demanding, but if it can be pitched at the right level and be modest in its expectations, then it should be less demanding than the not infrequent excessive information demands made on field offices.

Framework of an Internal Project Information Storage System for a Process of Empowerment

Establish an INDIVIDUAL MONITORING SYSTEM for each group/organisation within which the process will be promoted

RECORD on a MONTHLY BASIS the following information:
 - any meetings of the group/agency
 - main issues discussed
 - attendance

Establish an INDIVIDUAL FILING SYSTEM for the following key indicators of the process of empowerment:
 A. group / agency activities
 B. changes in group / agency behaviour
 C. actions undertaken / articulation
 D. extra-group / agency relationships

SEPARATE INFORMATION SHEETS for each of the above on a MONTHLY BASIS
 A.1.1. (first month)　　A.1.2. (second month)
 B. 1.2. (first month)　　B. 1.2. (second month)

Unfortunately there are few, if any, widely available written examples of project level information storage and retrieval systems, appropriate to the qualitative needs of social development evaluation, which could provide the evidence of how such systems function and how they tackle questions like those raised above. In more quantitatively focused M and E systems, the use of computers to tackle the mountains of data is increasingly

commonplace; with qualitative material the techniques are largely manual. The key features of a qualitative system are that its updating should be built into staff and stakeholders daily activities, that it should be accessible and that it should not become a static exercise in information collection but rather a dynamic activity linked to project and institutional learning. Whatever its nature, if a system that is 'friendly' to project staff and stakeholder is not in place, the analysis and interpretation of the changes which may have occurred will be more difficult.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The final stage of the evaluation of social development will involve the analysis and interpretation of the description and information collected. While the more quantitative dimensions of the indicators used will be measured and a numerical value attributed to the change which is seen to have taken place, analysis and interpretation are different exercises. We will need to analyse the material collected in the light of both the initial situation and the indicators used, and then to interpret the findings in terms of what they tell us about the possible change which has occurred. The purpose of the analysis is to organise the material and this will facilitate interpretation. The exercise bears some similarities to 'open-system evaluation' in that there is a continuous questioning and an attempt to understand the 'ripple effect' in terms of the impact of a development intervention. However, a 'ripple effect' does not assume that there is an automatic linear progression from output–outcome–impact; in the analysis 1 + 1 does not always add up to 2, but maybe 3 or more since there may be other unanticipated outcomes of a development intervention.
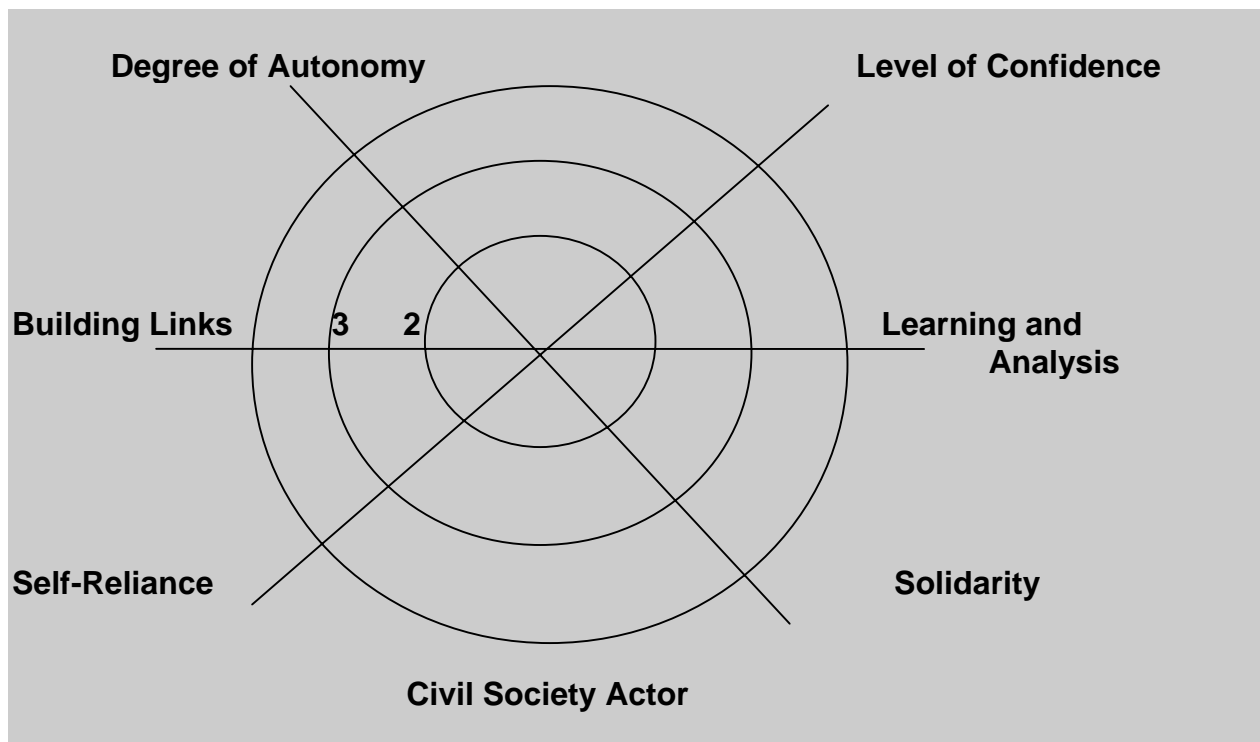
QUANTIFYING EMPOWERMENT

External Links
3. Group has excellent interaction with many relevant agencies that can help it achieve its goals

2. Group has some good interaction with several other agencies

1. Group has a few interactions with some agencies

0. Group has no reliable interaction with other agencies

Group Self-Confidence
3 All members appear to have gained in confidence

2. Most members appear to have gained in confidence

1.Some members have gained some self-confidence from the group

0.Members do not appear to have grown in confidence

SPIDER DIAGRAM OF EMPOWERMENT

Organisational Growth

Degree of Autonomy   Level of Confidence

Building Links   3   2   Learning and Analysis

Self-Reliance   Solidarity

Civil Society Actor

An important assumption in this process, of course, will be the existence of some understanding of the **'initial situation'** against which change can be analysed. Essentially the analysis and interpretation will seek first to structure and then to provide an explicit explanation of the nature, magnitude and pattern of change which might have occurred within the given context as a result of the intervention. The key issue, therefore, is the use of qualitative indicators in the determination of what constitutes 'success' and 'failure' and the influence of language, culture and values in this process. An examination of the still somewhat limited evidence on this latter stage of the evaluation of social development reveals two key practical issues:

(a) The potential for **subjectivity** in the description and observations made on the project and its progress and the need, therefore, to ensure that recording is structured as much as possible around the indicators, or some other proxy means. But even this may not overcome the potential problem given the inherent difficulties involved in assessing what constitutes 'change' and the fact that events and actions can be both explained and interpreted differently. Explanation and interpretation are expressions of people's values and concerns and it will be important that those of the different stakeholders are brought out and examined and compared. In this exercise Riddell's (1990) comments are apposite; '.if judgements made about qualitative aspects of projects are not substantially challenged by the relevant actors or groups, then purist worries about objectively assessing these factors become largely irrelevant'.

(b) **Qualitative processes of change**, by definition, can often unfold **slowly** with the result that periodically the recording might lack substance. In such circumstances there

is the danger that inaccurate recordings may be made by staff anxious to see some progress.

(c) The recording of description and observations can be a demanding task for which some project level workers will be more suitable than others. In the actual exercise of analysis and interpretation, there are also a number of issues which have been raised by the practice:

- The process of ANALYSIS - INTERPRETATION - SUBSEQUENT ACTION should be a **participatory exercise** involving both project group members and staff. The forum for the exercise is usually open discussions or review meetings, often under the guidance of a facilitator and structured around the two dimensions of the exercise and the indicators. Both individual and collective memory will be important aspects of analysis and interpretation with different stakeholders playing a role in retrospectively drawing out the major conclusions on what has been the impact of a particular intervention. This role may not come easy and it is probable that a trial period will be needed to give all stakeholders and staff the opportunity to understand the exercise and to develop the skills necessary to play an active role. Davies's (1995) work with developing an appropriate monitoring system with CCDB explains the detail of stakeholder involvement and how descriptions of people's 'life experiences' were examined successively at different levels – project, head office and donor – and were subject to an iterated process of analysis that eventually selected a small number as illustrative of the changes which had taken place.

- Analysis and interpretation should take place **regularly** and not be left to annual mega events. The regularity of the meetings will be dictated by factors particular to the context and to the project, but almost certainly periodic exercises of verifying what is happening will take place every three months or so. A regular three-monthly half-day exercise, which allows a project to develop an understanding of what is unfolding, is to be preferred to the annual review which can often stall at the project's inability to structure in one go all the changes which may have occurred during the year. In his approach to assessing the impact of CONCERN's work in Tanzania, Wardle (1996) underlined the importance of regular meetings, without which continuity of interpretation cannot be built up.

- Wherever possible the verbal analysis and interpretation should be translated into some kind of **visual diagrammatic form.** In this respect there has been a very useful development of visual techniques in the past decade and there is much with which we could experiment. In particular the range of techniques associated with PRA provides a useful base from which to start (Gosling and Edwards 1995). Similarly, Patton's (1987) concept of the Process–Outcomes Matrix offers a broad diagrammatic format within which the conclusions of the analysis and interpretation can be presented. The 'before-and-after' approach, which compares particular characteristics or actions associated with a specific indicator (e.g. group organisation) both before and after a period of project activity (Shetty 1996.) is commonly employed. Another technique involves the 'spider diagram' which plots

the expected changes of a number of objectives on a series of five circles spaced at fixed intervals and marks the progress of each objective on a scale of 1–5.

- Finally, as the analysis and interpretation unfold over a **period of time**, it will be useful to begin to structure an overall framework within which the changes occurring can be located. For example, it might be possible to identify particular stages of the change taking place, which could be noted and described as a way of understanding how the change is unfolding and perhaps intensifying. In this respect Galjart and Buijs' (1982) earlier work on interpreting the different stages of the evolution of a process of participation – Mobilisation, First Action, Construction and Consolidation – provided an overall framework of stages in which this evolution could be understood. Given the difficulties inherent in determining if and when a particular stage of one of a project's objectives has been reached and what level and kind of change it might signal, projects are increasingly using numerical values and narrative to explain the unfolding process.

Indexes, scales or other forms of diagrammatic representation of qualitative progress have been present but not widespread over the past decade and, where such techniques can be authentically used, they can be invaluable for understanding how a particular process is unfolding. In their use, however, it has to be assumed that judgements are made on the basis of continuous and detailed recording of the evolution of the 'phenomena' under examination and that they are not the product of summary appraisals. In other words, the evidence must be available to support the progress which they suggest.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This section has suggested that a basic principle of the M and E of social development is that the approach should be 'minimal but effective'. To be effective there must be a recognisable 'system' in the sense that there is a logic, coherence and structure to the approach; *ad hoc*, spontaneous or discontinuous actions will not provide the consistency necessary to monitor the processes involved. However, given the nature of the processes to be monitored and the need for flexibility and adaptation, the system must neither overwhelm the actors involved nor cripple the project with its incessant demands. It is, in fact, a question of 'getting the balance right'; that is, monitoring a small but acceptable number of 'indicators', collecting the amount of data and recorded description which is adequate to the need and building periods of analysis and interpretation into project activities. In all of this, it is important to take the 'broad view' by considering the exercise as a whole and to ensure that all involved have this view; otherwise the M and E can become a series of independent components, the design of each of which may not obey the overall principle.

In particular, in terms of a process of 'empowerment' we need to ask a number of **key questions** concerning the more critical aspects of its M and E:

1. What are the **major factors** that can (a) **support** or (b) **constrain** the ability of a development agency to set up a minimum but effective M and E system in order to monitor and assess the impact of a process of 'empowerment'?

2. Having identified indicators of a process of Empowerment, what do you think would be the **four key steps** in operationalising them ?

3. What role do you think **community** or local **people** could play in the M and E of a process of 'empowerment'?

SECTION 3:

MONITORING AND EVALUATING PROCESSES OF EMPOWERMENT: A CASE STUDY FROM ETHIOPIA

The case study by Terry Bergdall (1996) reports on the monitoring and evaluation system used for the Community Empowerment Programme (CEP) in Ethiopia. It is intended to illustrate a concrete example of the operationalisation of a monitoring and evaluation system in the context of a development programme that set to 'empower' communities. CEP has adopted a flexible adaptive approach to evaluation which is based on perceptions of change, rather than confining itself to a narrow set of pre-determined indicators. The system was carefully thought out at the start of the programme and aimed to address the following questions:
- how to make monitoring participatory?
- how can stakeholders at all levels be involved?
- how can information be a basis for organisational learning?

Useful practical lessons can be learnt from this case study through the author's description of how the monitoring and evaluation system actually operates, including how both quantitative and qualitative methods have been incorporated.

Institutional Learning in a Process-Oriented Programme: Monitoring and Evaluation of the Community Empowerment Programme in South Wollo, Ethiopia

The 'Community Empowerment Programme' (CEP) is a pilot project funded by the Swedish International Development Cupertino Agency (SIDA) as an integral part of preparations for a major long-term support programme to the Amhara Region in Northeast Ethiopia. It has operated in five western *woredas* (districts), of the South Wollo Zone since April 1994.

As a pilot project, CEP is an experimental activity for discerning effective approaches for catalysing local initiatives and community responsibility for development in rural areas. CEP was not designed or launched as a total package with a detailed 'blueprint.' In contrast, it emerged after a series of activities and continues to evolve as a 'process-oriented' programme. It began by holding a series of 'Community Participation Workshops' (CPW) within *kires*, the small traditional self-help organisations found across Ethiopia that provide assistance to community members during important social events like funerals and weddings.

From the beginning, monitoring and evaluation have been seen as crucial elements in the enterprise. As consultants engaged by SIDA to support the programme, we have attempted to address several key questions as we have guided monitoring and

evaluation work within the project. It has been our assumption that an effective monitoring and evaluation system must be (a) quantitative, (b) qualitative and (c) enable institutional learning to take place. The monitoring and evaluation work of the past two years, therefore, has addressed these three primary concerns. First, it has focused on quantitative issues: 'what has happened in programme areas after implementation began, when did it happen, where did it happen, how much of it happened?' Second, it has focused on qualitative issues: 'what important changes have occurred and how are these changes perceived?' Third, and perhaps most important, it has focused on issues related to organisational learning: 'what new collective understandings have emerged about participation, community empowerment and bottom-up development through programme activities?'

The Internal Monitoring System

The CEP internal monitoring system was created in April 1995 and comprised collecting quantitative and qualitative information. In addition, the monitoring and evaluation system included background information and writing 'documentation reports' of particular activities taking place within every community involved in the programme. An aspiration of the monitoring and evaluation design was to engage all of the programme's stakeholders in a process of institutional learning. The stakeholders included the *kires* (communities); various levels of government; SIDA and the consulting consortium overseeing the planning process for the future long-term programme.

All learning involves the receiving, sorting, and retaining of information. For individuals and groups alike, 'knowledge' is the result of a complex process of managing vast amounts of information. Behaviour, the way people act and do things, is very closely linked to their understanding and perception of the world in which they live. Change in perceptions, i.e., 'knowledge', is a prerequisite to lasting change in behaviour. By extension, social change involves a collective consensus about agreed upon perceptions and their importance. The monitoring and evaluation system within CEP was, therefore, conceived of as more than a mere tool for obtaining information about the progress of a particular programme; it was envisioned as an important mechanism for fostering change. At its broadest, this is the implied meaning of 'institutional learning' within a social development programme.

Quantitative Monitoring

Numbers are fascinating. There is the perception among many people in the development community that monitoring and evaluation is simply not serious if it does not provide a lot of numbers to be examined and analysed. Even though the consultancy team of which I was a part was rather sceptical about the significance of collecting a lot of numbers, we wanted to give appropriate attention to the gathering and analysis of quantitative monitoring information. As will be seen, the more we worked with assisting the project to create its design for quantitative monitoring, the more we became enamoured with its illusive potential.

As the monitoring effort began with CEP, a number of challenges in creating a quantitative system were identified. These included the need to determine key indicators relevant to the objective of the programme, to create a manageable system which was focused and limited in the amount of information collected, and to devise a simple and effective system for collecting, storing and retrieving information. The initial design of the quantitative system was, however, overly ambitious in its attempt to gather data in relation to a series of questions:

- What has been done in the community?
- How much has been done by the community?
- Who did the work?
- What kind of local maintenance has been done following the development activities?
- How much local investment is being made?
- What are the facilitation capabilities and commitment of *kire* co-ordinators?

The initial design called for the tracking of 27 typical development activities (e.g., terracing, spring protection, planting seedlings, etc.) which emerged from the action plans produced by *kire* members at the earliest CPWs. Perhaps most ambitious of all, the design called for comprehensive collection of information about all activities undertaken with the community and then distinguishing between activities accomplished on the basis of 'local initiative' and those through 'mobilisation'.

Local initiative referred to development undertakings that were planned and implemented by small groups of people. This did not eliminate the possibility of some external advice or assistance, but such help was to come in response to the local initiatives: community people remained the primary actors and were essentially responsible for organising and implementing work on their own. Fundamental 'ownership' of the project was theirs. Local initiatives could be undertaken by the *kire* organisation itself or by smaller groups or individuals within the *kires.*

Mobilisation referred to development undertakings that were essentially conceived of, planned, and organised by external agencies, be they government bodies, governmental 'development agents' or non-government organisations, even though such undertakings might be accomplished with the 'participation' of community labour. Realisation of development 'quotas' or 'targets' planned by officials outside the immediate community (i.e., the kire) were considered examples of mobilisation. 'Food for Work' was considered a mobilisation activity too, because, if not actually planned by external officials, the primary stimulus for the activity was food payments originating from outside of the community.

The intention of this data collection was to provide a large range of options for data analysis and comparison. Some of the anticipated possibilities were:

- absolute and relative frequency of 27 development activities which could be further broken down into frequencies of mobilisation and frequencies of local initiative;

- the types of development activities most typically planned by women, men and youth;
- comparisons of types of development activity for mobilisation and local initiative both before and after the CPW;
- the total amount of work done through mobilisation and local initiative in each of the 27 development activities, with comparisons of totals both before and after the CPW;
- the type of maintenance of each development activity for mobilisation and local initiative, both before and after the CPW;
- both material and cash investment by the *kires* in development activities for mobilisation and local initiative before and after the CPW (after the CPW, this could be analysed relative to each of the three follow-up visits);
- the number of *kire* co-ordinators trained in facilitation skills by the categories of women, men and youth;
- *kire* co-ordinators' actual participation as facilitators in the workshops during follow-up visit number three in each kire;
- assessments of each kire's capability of continuing the CEP process on their own once visits by the facilitators have been completed;
- the analysis of all this information in the aggregate or disaggregated by *woredas* and other geographical divisions.

In June and July 1995, the computerised database for the quantitative monitoring system was created and tested; the cumulative data to that point was entered, questions were raised about the data and the means of verification. This revealed several serious questions about the ambitions and design of the quantitative monitoring system. These were thoroughly discussed by the Lead Facilitators and MAP consultants resulting in several conclusions about the data to be monitored.

- It was initially thought to be important to be able to make two comparisons: one between what had happened relative to local initiative work for the two years prior to a kire's Community Participation Workshop (CPW) and what happened in the two years afterwards; a second between accomplishments through mobilisation efforts and those through local initiative efforts. However, data for both comparisons proved to be problematic. *Kire* members could not be precise relative to any of the information categories, nor was there any way for the facilitators to verify the data.

- Another category of data originally envisioned was the tracking of material and cash investments made by the *kires* to see if there was any substantive change over time. This also proved problematic, with estimates by *kire* members clearly imprecise and varying greatly from *kire* to *kire* and from *woreda* to *woreda*. Again, there was no one to accurately quantify or verify the data being reported.

- Finally, all data collected had focused exclusively on action plans created by the *kires*; nothing was systematically being collected about priority development needs. There was also a lack of clarity on the key question in this regard – should the

listed needs be only those that the *kire* thought it could deal with through its own resources and know-how, or should the development needs be irrespective of the kire's ability to resolve them?

Consequently, major revisions to the quantitative monitoring system were made in March 1996. The decisions made and the actions taken for collecting data were the following:

- Given the problems of collecting and verifying accurate data, all information relative to past accomplishments, be they through local initiative or mobilisation, were eliminated. Eliminated, too, was any attempt to quantify material and cash investments made by the *kires* in their development activities. All data collection on mobilisation work was also eliminated; only data pertaining to local initiatives were retained.

- It was decided that information would be collected on development needs by recording priority needs identified in CPWs irrespective of a kire's ability to resolve them. Though this data began to be collected, it was not entered and tracked in the computerised database due to the complexity of entering and tracking such diverse data. Compiling and reporting information on the priority development needs was done manually as required.

These revisions resulted in the collection of quantitative information that could be more accurately and verifiably collected and reported on. The information remained, however, quite extensive. The primary improvement was thought to be in the reliability of the data – it did not require 'guesstimates' by *kire* members, and it was verifiable. Data on action plans was simply a matter of reporting, and data on accomplishments could be physically inspected and measured.

In summary, all of these revisions basically amounted to tracking community initiatives occurring after CEP interventions. In addition to tracking the attendance at these events, information is also compiled about 'action plans created during CPWs and follow-up meetings' and 'local initiatives accomplished beyond specific projects planned at the CPWs or follow-up'.

The question still remains, however: what do all of the numbers really mean? The quantitative data thus far compiled raised many interesting questions which need to be illuminated before one can fully understand the significance of the numbers. Below are some of the key issues in interpreting the data:

- Though the distinction between 'local initiative' and 'mobilisation' is stressed in the collection guidelines of the internal monitoring and evaluation system, there is uncertainty as to whether or not the reported numbers really reflect this distinction.

- Not only are there big difficulties in identifying and quantifying 'local initiatives', there is an even a bigger problem in, if not the impossibility of, isolating the crucial

stimulus behind such initiatives: though the CEP monitoring and evaluation system is careful not to claim 'credit' for these activities, any serious interpretation of the data needs some assessment of other possible stimuli besides CEP which might account for these local initiatives.

- Attempts at establishing some type of 'control sample' for gaining a better understanding about the quantitative information of communities after CPW and follow-ups reveals something different from what might be expected in any event, even if no CPW had been held.

A follow-up qualitative study is now being planned in a random sample of *kires* where CPWs and follow-ups have taken place to help resolve these issues and to add to a more knowledgeable interpretation of the quantitative information. The major objective of the proposed study will be to add qualitative information to the CEP internal monitoring system so that the numbers reported in the quantitative data can be better understood. Specific sub-objectives of the study will be to investigate and report upon:

- the communities' understanding of 'local initiatives' as reported in the monitoring data;
- an assessment of the reliability of these reported numbers and a qualitative indication of the 'margin of error';
- possible stimuli besides CEP which might account for reported initiatives and a discussion of their importance;
- some comparative indication of the significance of 'local initiatives' reported after CPWs and follow-ups with those in a small sample of *kires* where CPWs have not taken place.

To enhance the direct learning opportunity of the field-work, this follow-up study will be undertaken by a special team of appointed regional officials (most likely from the Bureau of Agriculture and the Office of Women's Affairs). The team will conduct its field-work in six different randomly selected *kires* where CEP has taken place and three nearby 'control' *kires* where it has not. A minimum of three days will be allotted to the team in each of the selected *kires*. Information will be gathered by group discussions, in-depth interviews and personal observations. It is anticipated that findings of this study should provide valuable indicative information for interpreting the extensive quantitative information collected by the programme. The involvement of the regional officials should also greatly add to the participatory nature of the monitoring and evaluation work.

Qualitative Monitoring of CEP

Quantitative information is essential in the monitoring of any development programme, but as the above section illustrates, it has obvious limitations. While such data can more or less provide an indication about 'how much and how many' it is difficult for naked numbers to answer 'so what'. Quantitative information tends to abstract human experience and strip it of its context. Qualitative information serves as a complement to the numerical tracking of local development initiatives by bringing development work 'to

life' through stories and anecdotes. These in turn are crucial clues to understanding the dynamics of empowerment. Creating an effective qualitative monitoring system, however, raises a number of questions.

First, how can the monitoring system be participatory? The focus of monitoring activities, even when done in a qualitative way, are often defined by people very distant from the activities which are being monitored. Indicators are identified by specialists, consultants or senior staff who collect information and analyse the results. Programme participants and field staff, if involved at all, are typically asked to review the conclusions of these specialists and offer comments at the end of the process. Participatory monitoring, if it is to be genuine, needs to find practical means for participants and staff to be 'part and parcel' of the entire system on a continuing basis, from beginning to end.

Secondly, how can stakeholders at all levels of the programme be involved in the monitoring process?   This is an expansive dimension of the participation question above. The stakeholders of most programmes are many and varied. Creative ways for involving them in practical aspects of the monitoring system need to be found.

Thirdly, how can the information from the monitoring system become a basis of 'organisational learning'. Information is only mildly interesting if it is not put to practical use.   There need to be mechanisms for learning from experience and modifying the programme accordingly. Rather than such modifications coming merely from conclusions drawn by senior staff, personnel and stakeholders throughout the entire organisation need a practical way to be involved with the changes.   This implies a process for reaching a general consensus about the strengths and weaknesses of programme performance, directions it needs to go in the future, and practical steps to be taken to reach the desired end result.

The design of the monitoring and evaluation system took these questions into serious consideration. The primary approach for qualitative monitoring focused on recording and tracking perceptions of change ; this approach built upon the research work of Rick Davis, CDS, Swansea. Change, for several reasons, was thought to be an appropriate subject for qualitative monitoring. With a broad aim to improve the quality of life, monitoring of change can help keep the 'bigger' picture in view. The content of reported change, however, remains specific, tied directly to particular communities.

Change is also a relatively simple concept for people to consider. It requires few predetermined factors. Questions about changes often lead to a host of unanticipated topics, thereby easily enabling people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives to say what is of importance to them. Impressions come easily when comparing conditions 'before' and 'after' and, because it is so uncomplicated, many people can be involved. Yet asking simple questions about the reasons for change is a quick springboard into deeper thinking about more complex issues.

The model adopted by CEP attempted to involve people at all levels of the programme directly in the monitoring process. It included participants at the *kire* workshops (who in

other contexts might be called the 'beneficiaries' or the 'target group'); CEP facilitators and staff; government officials from the *woredas*, zone and region and representatives of the donor organisation, SIDA. It was the intention of the design to involve people from all of these groups in the monitoring and analysis of information by (a) making selections of what they considered to be the most important changes occurring in active CEP *kires* during a particular reporting period and (b) then explaining the reasons for their choices.

In brief, the design of the monitoring process involves the following steps. Every level of the programme is asked to select what it considers to be the most important changes to have occurred in their particular geographical area during a specific reporting period. This begins at the *kire* level. The resulting selections are collected together with selections from other groups at the same level and then forwarded to the next level where the selection process is repeated. At every stage, only four selected changes are forwarded to the next level. The process moves from the *kires* through the *woredas* to the zone and finally to the region. Along with their selection, every group explains why they made the selections they did. After all selections and explanations have filtered their way up the monitoring system, explanations and reflections begin adjourned back down through the chain by memos and group discussions.

Building from the bottom-up, a minimum of 288 important changes are identified by *kire* participants during a single reporting period (4 changes x 6 *kires* x 3 facilitation units x 4 *woredas* based on work in the original four pilot *woredas*). From these, the selection process eventually results in 16 significant changes to be reviewed by the zonal steering committee. Explanations about the choices accompany every selective step.

In the beginning, facilitators tried to collect stories concerning **three specific types of change:**

(a) changes in attitudes or images
(b) changes with regard to sustainable development
(c) changes relative to physical or economic well-being.

A fourth change was not stipulated which left its subject matter entirely open to the discretion of *kire* members. *Kire* participants at CPW follow-up meetings, however, found the different categories to be confusing and redundant and the facilitators had difficulty in explaining them. Disliking the awkwardness of the discussion, the facilitators began to give it slight attention or dropped it altogether from the agenda of the follow-up meetings.

Other problems were revealed, too, with the qualitative monitoring design during a review meeting with the Lead Facilitators in Dessie, 4–15 March 1996. One of the biggest was related to the involvement of woreda administrators and officials. They were confused by their role in the monitoring process and repeatedly expressed hesitation about deciding the importance of reported changes when they had not seen these changes with their own eyes. Reviewing unconfirmed stories and making

judgements about them seemed to *woreda* personnel to be an empty gesture. After the first monitoring meeting, they were increasingly uninterested in participating in the exercise.

A lengthy discussion of these problems led to a number of modifications to the monitoring process. The categories of change were dropped; people were just asked to identify the changes they thought to be most important.   The quarterly facilitator meetings became the primary occasion for consolidating stories from the *kires* and selecting the changes across the entire *woreda* which they thought to be most important. These stories were expanded to include changes observed among extension officers working the programme areas. *Woreda* officials were also asked to participate directly in verification trips.

After modifying the process, follow-up meetings with the *kires* included a review and discussion of the one story of change selected by *woreda* officials to be most significant. This took place at the end of the meeting and served as both 'feedback' and an opportunity for further reflection. After telling the story, the facilitators led a discussion with *kire* participants based on the following questions:

- What surprised you about this story?
- If you could ask questions of the actors in this story, what additional information would you like to have?
- In what ways do you think this story represents an important change (if you agree that it does represent an important change)?
- If something like the events reported in the story were to happen in this kire, what would you do the same and what would you do differently?
- How might such actions lead to an important change in this kire?

Then in conclusion, the participants were asked to identify the most important changes that had taken place in their *kire* as a result of activities associated with the programme.

What impact did this have on the *kires*?   Debriefing sessions with the facilitators indicated that people were certainly interested in hearing what other *kires* had accomplished and what the woreda officials thought to be most important.   The conversation also appeared often to spark the competitive spirit of *kire* members. After discussing the story, people were eager to explain their own accomplishments in doing self-reliant development. The facilitators also thought these discussions led to renewed decisions among the participants to assume responsibility for the new action plans they had just created earlier during the follow-up meeting. In a sense this was an attitude of 'if they can do it, we can do it better'!

Relative to the *woreda*, officials often approach their verification trips with scepticism. Though they had heard many interesting stories about change, they were not convinced that such things were really occurring. Once in the field, they were surprised by what they saw. To date, there have been no instances of these officials coming across false reports.   Indeed, reports indicate that the *woreda* officials have repeatedly been

surprised by the motivation, commitment and accomplishments of small local projects completed by *kire* members through the exclusive use of local resources and knowledge.

In conclusion, the qualitative monitoring of CEP, based on 'perceptions of change,' utilises a highly inductive approach in which unpredicted indicative events become the basis for drawing conclusions about results. This is valuable when programme objectives of 'empowerment' are often wrapped in ideas such as increased participation, self-confidence, responsibility, capacity for problem-solving, etc. Such conceptual categories are extremely difficult to evaluate. Rather than being confined to a narrow range of predetermined indicators, the CEP approach has the possibility of being flexible and adaptive to changing circumstances.

This is in sharp contrast, of course, to conventional monitoring approaches which are deductive in orientation, i.e., those that exist with a conception of a desired state and which then attempt to identify empirical indicators of its occurrence.

As the field experience indicates, the qualitative monitoring system employed by CEP practically reinforced power at the bottom and is an alternative to conventional approaches in which experts far from the field often define the monitoring subjects. It has given those closest to the experience being monitored the opportunity to guide the process by making their choices and interpretations at the beginning rather than at the end. Officials above are put into the position of responding to a diversity of explanations generated from below. Consistent with the aims of CEP as a whole, the basic monitoring agenda is thereby firmly set from the bottom rather than the top.

SECTION 4:

METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS FOR EVALUATING EMPOWERMENT: LESSONS FROM THE PRACTICE

This section presents a number of examples of recent studies into assessing NGO interventions in social development. They illustrate valuable lessons concerning the actual collection, analysis and use of information. Each report discusses the usefulness of different methods and instruments in undertaking monitoring and evaluation. While none of the examples focuses specifically on empowerment nonetheless they are concerned with the operationalisation of evaluation and the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches. The first example is extracted from an **ActionAid** report and is based on a DFID funded ActionAid research project on methods and indicators for measuring the impact of poverty reduction. It involved studies in Bangladesh, India, Ghana and Uganda. It draws out useful lessons on undertaking participatory impact assessment and an annotated extract from the report is presented below. The second example comes from the draft of a new **Oxfam** book on Impact Assessment. This is based on a major research project by on a research project on impact assessment carried out by Oxfam and Novib in conjunction with partners in nine different countries. The extract presented here provides some reflections on the main lessons to emerge in relation to tools and methods for data collection. The final study comes from the **Danish NGO Impact Study** and presents a review of the methods and instruments used. This was based on a study of 45 different projects in Bangladesh, Tanzania and Nicaragua. In each country, a Country Study was carried out which reviewed a wide range of different types of projects supported by Danish NGOs. These were complemented by and In-Depth Study in each country which undertook a much more detailed study of a single project.

PARTICIPATORY IMPACT ASSESSMENT - ACTIONAID

Key Lessons From The Research

Filtering and organisational culture: It is important not to focus exclusively on primary stakeholders but also pay more attention to the intermediary organisations. Whatever the precise methods that are used to seek information from people, it is clear that these results have to be 'filtered' both through the individual or group of local agency staff who are collecting this data, and then through these organisations themselves. All organisations have both systems and an underlying 'culture' of assumptions, values or accepted 'norms' on which these systems are based; these systems and values can either support or weaken an agency's ability to listen to, and respond, to their 'clients' assessment of their impact.

Towards a culture of impact assessment in NGOs: Impact assessment is commonly seen both as part of an agenda primarily driven by donors, and is also sometimes dismissed as a rather academic exercise. In addition most local NGOs have time consuming reporting and accounting systems (many of them imposed on them by their donor agencies) which leave staff little space or incentive to hear, understand, and act upon the people's perceptions of their interventions. For most local NGOs reporting, whether for their Head Offices or for their donors, is a chore, and for many evaluation and impact assessment are assumed to be of greater interest to donors and Head Officers rather than to the staff themselves. In theory, however, it should be possible for any organisation to develop an Impact Assessment culture in which staff at all levels are encouraged and empowered to identify, monitor and report on impact, using both their direct contacts with communities and also their own judgement. Indicators of impact against which staff may be required to report may be necessary but may well not capture a project's expected or undesired impacts. The process by which data on an indicator is collected, and the extent to which those collecting the data understand its significance, are likely to determine whether or not the data itself is of any value in impact assessment.

The need for greater criticism of the method themselves: We had not realised before undertaking this research the hold which a relatively small number of PRA approaches seem to have over development workers in most countries, and the need for much greater discretion to be used before any particular tool is used. Many of those involved in this research found it harder than had originally assumed to differentiate between the performance of different methods. In Bangladesh there was some awareness of differences between the methods used, for example, in terms of the time people took to do different PRA exercises and the ease with which they understood how to do them. But there was an unwillingness to choose between them when advocating their use to others. Their preference was to suggest combining packages together, rather than choosing between them. This is in conflict with the need to reduce the total amount of time taken by these exercises, a problem in all four countries. In Uganda a range of different preferences for certain methods were expressed by staff but there was no consensus of opinion. In Ghana a wealth of different methods were used but no conclusions were reached on which, of all the methods, the staff felt were most effective. The findings suggest the need for future research to focus more explicitly on a critical review of PRA methods themselves, with a view to establishing which are most helpful in helping both beneficiaries and agencies understand the impact of different interventions, and which should be kept in reserve or even discarded.

Indicators. Throughout this study we have continued to debate both the extent to which participatory approaches should focus on indicators as such, and also whether use of such indicators alone is likely to result in a clearer understanding of impact by poor people. The conclusion we reached was that broadly indicators are usually necessary but rarely sufficient. thus they may be valuable as points of reference and discussions, but the choice of indicators needs to be based on a solid foundation of strong dialogue between NGO staff and their 'beneficiaries'. There is an obvious danger that if donor

agencies start demanding beneficiary-determined indicators, that long lists of such indicators will substitute for the detailed and continual interaction between agency staff and communities. One of our worries in this research was the reliability of the indicators identified by people themselves. Would people be consistent in their choice of indicators over time, or would these change, for instance according to seasons? the study found both that people were surprisingly consistent in their selection of indicators, but that if an NGO has been working in a particular area for some time, it should not expect people to come up with indicators very different from the ones it has been using itself.

Gender. The research has brought out some useful lessons regarding gender. A particular effort was made in all four country projects to meet separately with different sub-groups (men/women, male/female youth) in villages. In some cases (Ghana, for example) this decision reflected the perspective that men and women have different interests defined by their gender roles: women will provide information about water and immunisation, men about bullock ploughs and migration, but in so doing the research team accepted and reinforced gender roles rather than challenged them. In this way, both the documentation and the analysis give much less attention to the differences in their views concerning common issues. Relative to the amount of attention given during the research to meeting separately with groups of men and women the amount of information finally produced (in the form of analysed data) about their differences in views has not been very substantial. Overall, the problems is not so much a lack of gender awareness by field staff and researchers, but the lack of sufficient perceived demand by higher levels within agencies like ActionAid for gender differentiated results. If this demand had been in place it could have acted as a counter influence to the pressures felt by staff to aggregate and summarise research results from multiple meetings in multiple villages. The challenge therefore is to maintain a strong gender analysis not only during the data collection stage of a research project like this but also through the process of interpreting the data and working out its operational implications.

(Source: Participatory Impact Assessment by Hugh Goyder, Rick Davies and Winkie Williamson, ActionAid 1998)

OXFAM IMPACT ASSESSMENT BOOK

The How: Tools And Methods

A wide variety of tools and methods were used in this study. Perhaps the most important conclusion is that the selection of a judicious mix and sequence of tools and methods is heavily dependent on being clear about the purpose and focus of the assessment and designing that assessment process in a way that is appropriate to the context, the project in question and the organisations involved. The ability to develop appropriate method mixes and sequences and the ability to adapt and innovate as the study progresses seem to be as important as the knowledge and skill required for individual methods.

There are perhaps a number of key findings that relate to the broad families of methods explored in this Study:

Firstly, it is evident that full use needs to be made of existing data whether project data, or information available about the context from other sources. The production of synoptic documents pulling together many years of project reports and files, proved especially useful in some cases. In addition local government sources, education and health records, data from agricultural research stations, despite severe limitations, also proved an important source of information.

Secondly, it was also the case that even where existing information was of high quality and a great effort had been put into compiling baseline data there was nearly always a need to reconstruct at least part of the history of, not only, the projects but also the changes experienced in the lives of men, women and communities. this was of course even more necessary when project plans and documents were weak or non existent and/or in emergency situations where rapid changes in the context may have led to changing priorities and actions which may not always have been documented. An important number of tools and methods reviewed in Chapter 4 illustrate ways in which this was done.

Thirdly, although large scale household surveys suffer many limitations and have suffered quite a bad press in recent years, the case studies indicate that they can serve a useful function if focused, pre-tested and adapted, if adequate training and preparation of enumerators is undertaken, if they are properly cross-checked and sequenced with other more qualitative data, and if there is adequate capacity to analyse the results. Mini-surveys as described in Chapter 3 and the questionnaire use in the Wajir study, which both used a mix of participatory tools and standard questions seem to offer useful alternatives to fully fledged surveys.

Fourthly, the broad range of interview, workshop and focus group methods that were adopted in the case studies threw up some critical questions regarding the advantages and disadvantages of individual versus group processes. These issues are rarely addressed in many of the manuals on participatory research or study design. Yet from the case studies it was quite clear that there were examples of a) individuals answering the same questions differently in group or individual settings, b)individuals disagreeing in private with conclusions reached by groups in public, c) particular groups, notably women, young people and members of the least well-off households, who were consistently excluded from, or ignored during group exercises. On the other hand there were also examples of group exercises leading to a) the generation of new insights for participants sometimes based on sharing of sensitive information, for example on domestic violence which had been hitherto unshared, b) strengthened solidarity and common purpose and c) bringing together previously marginal voices in a way that allowed them to be heard.

Fifthly, direct and participant observation as a method also often does not receive much attention in monitoring and evaluation texts and manuals. Yet in a number of studies the advantage of 'resident researchers' and people simply 'hanging around' and keeping

their eyes open is quite evident. In particular observation of this type helped to build trust and rapport with local people and project staff; allowed new insights to be gained that were unlikely to be obtained from asking questions or facilitating discussions; permitted a deeper understanding of relationships both within communities but also between the community and other agencies and organisations; and also permitted an important degree of cross-checking of information collected in other ways. Observation is highly depended on the skills of the observer and is resource intensive, on the other hand these skills can be nurtured and developed and this sort of approach can be less demanding of local people's time. Given the concerns raised below regarding the time consuming nature of some of the participatory approaches adopted this is worth bearing in mind.

Sixthly, although a broad and comprehensive range of participatory techniques were used in the case studies there are perhaps a limited number which seem to be particularly relevant and useful for impact assessment purposes. These would include time-lines, well-being and preference ranking, impact flow diagrams and trend analysis. We have also seen how participatory work of this type needs to: give greater recognition to existing power and social relations within communities; pay greater attention to people's time constraints and the opportunity cost to them of getting involved; and to combine these tools with other methods and sources of information. As we have noted above there is a need to develop clearer standards and criteria for assessing the quality of processes of participatory inquiry.

Seventhly, the use of individual, community, project and organisational case studies was prevalent in nearly all the countries involved. They are particularly useful in complex situations where many variables inter-relate and where outcomes and impact are liable to vary across different populations. Well chosen case studies and cross-case study analysis can provide a high added-value particularly if they relate to broader policy questions which are of major interest.

Finally, there remains the whole issue of attribution, cross checking and the importance of feedback. None of the tools and methods used on their own solve the problem of determining attribution, and even taken together they cannot prove it. However, together, if properly cross-checked, they can provide a body of evidence that can be agreed, disputed or amended, which can in turn lead to a reasoned and plausible judgement to be made.

(Source: Impact Assessment and NGOs: Learning for a Change? by Chris Roche, Oxfam, 1999)

IMPACT STUDY OF DANISH NGOS: REVIEWING METHODS AND INSTRUMENTS OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The decision to use the Impact Study to 'test' appropriate methods and instruments of impact assessment was a valid objective and one which it was hoped would provide much needed evidence on their operationalisation. In this sense the Study was experimental in nature and its findings on these methods and instruments should be

seen in this light. Positively most of the actors involved in the Study willingly joined in its different exercises and activities and we encountered no reluctance to participate. Of course for many staff, this was the first time that they had been involved in such an experiment and there was a novelty factor. But we were sufficiently impressed by the enthusiasm of the participation to wonder why NGOs and other development agencies don't use such methods more often! Within the context of their own cultural practices, local people in particular openly gave their views and showed that everybody has something to contribute. The methods and instruments that we reviewed were more time consuming and demanding than the more conventional evaluation team approach, but they generated a greater sense of involvement of all the actors rather than just the external team. Essentially the methods sought to value the opinions of project staff and beneficiaries.

During the Impact Study a range of different methods and instruments were used in order to collect data and information from many different sources. The Impact Study employed **four basic methods**: (a) documentation review and analysis, (b) contextual analysis (c) beneficiary assessment and (d) self-assessment by project staff, management and Danish NGO representatives. In order to apply these four methods, the study employed an array of different **instruments**, each of which will be examined in some detail below. In most of the projects in the Country Studies a conscious effort was made to use the full range of methods and instruments, but it was not always possible. In the In-Depth Studies, on the other hand, the research teams selected the methods and instruments that they considered to be the most suitable. Generally, all of the studies employed the four basic methods to some extent, but not all of the instruments. Occasionally something happened which made it impossible to include a particular instrument or, for other reasons, its use wasn't so successful.

METHODS

Documentation Review

This was the basic first stage of the six studies in the Impact Study. Each of the study teams collected together and analysed existing documentation on the projects to be studied. This initial review enabled the study teams to understand the historical evolution of the project and to identify the key issues on which the study should focus. The documentation review was also critical in that it gave the study teams an opportunity to assess internal project systems of data and information collection. Most importantly, however, the documentation review was used to begin to construct a detailed picture of project performance in relation to the variables and issues being studied. This picture was crucial for formulating the key questions around which each study would be structured.

Documentation reviews took place under different conditions for both the Country and the In-Depth Studies, in the sense that the former were dealing with multiple projects and usually did not have the time to search for or a wait for important documents. **Availability** of and **access** to documentation**,** therefore, become crucial issues for the

Country Studies. We found also a very wide variety of approaches to the **identification** and **storage** of project documentation. With many of the larger projects there was often no easily accesible system of project identification and retrieval.

Contextual Analysis

While the Country Studies undertook a broad review of the 'context' of each of the three countries in which the Study took place and the Nicaragua In-Depth Study focussed upon one key theme of project interventions, the Bangladesh and the Tanzanian In-Depth Studies undertook a more detailed contextual analysis of both the immediate and the wider socio-political environments in which their respective projects operated. Such a contextual analysis can provide the critical parameters against which the 'impact' of a development intervention could be assessed. In this respect 'impact' is not just a function of progress – or otherwise – of the objectives of a project but can only be understood in relation to those other forces which can influence development or change within a particular context.

Beneficiary Assessment

The Impact Study, and in particular the Country Studies, was designed to ensure a major contribution by project beneficiaries in assessing the impact of the projects studied. In the past five years or so there has been an increasing emphasis on beneficiaries' 'perceptions of change' as a crucial element in impact assessment studies. It should be pointed out, however, that most of the studies in which this assertion is made, were based on single programme or project experiments over an extended period of time and not the **multi-project, one-shot approach** of the Country Studies. Beneficiary assessment, therefore, was used by the Impact Study as a means of 'putting a human face on' and 'giving some life to' project assessment which otherwise would have been based on inadequate documentation. Its use acknowledged the view that those who directly experience the benefits of a development intervention are best placed to assess its impact. Since the objectives of a project are to bring about changes in their lives, beneficiaries are the most appropriate people to comment authentically on its outcomes.

Certainly in terms of willingness to collaborate with the Impact Study, beneficiary assessment was a 'success' and the Study benefited greatly from the fact that hundreds of beneficiaries took the time and the energy to talk to us. However an ideological commitment to use this method should not influence its limitations in the context of a Study like ours. In the first instance, given the lack of any previous history of the use of this method in the projects studied – apart from discusions which take place during project visits – and the fact that it was our decision to to use the method, the whole exercise was largely externally driven. In most instances beneficiaries had no idea that they were going to participate in a beneficiary exercise until the study team arrived. Furthermore, there was virtually no opportunity for the study team to influence the selection of those beneficaries who would participate, with the result that in many projects we did not feel that a cross-section of beneficiaries had been involved.

Furthermore, with no chance to build up any kind of relationship with the beneficiaries and to explain the purpose of the exercise, it was at times difficult to focus on their perceptions of **change** as opposed to their view on community needs. Finally and most criticially, however, the manner in which we were obliged to pursue the method, gave us no opportunity to adapt it in terms of **language** and **culture** to the environment of the beneficiaries.

Ideological commitments to use beneficiary assessment in the understanding of impact must be accompanied by its use in a thorough and rigorous manner which will give us confidence that its results are well founded. Overall, we feel that the beneficiaries added a valued dimension to the other methods and instruments used in the Study. Furthermore, we feel confident that the 'perceptions' of the beneficiaries have contributed enormously to what otherwise could have been a static and one-dimensional assessment. But if it is to now become a part of the monitoring system, then it will need to be conducted in a more rigorous manner.

Self-Assessment

This form of assessment is very similar to that above, except that it gives the opportunity to those more directly involved on the delivery side to give their views on project performance: project management and staff and Danish NGO staff with some direct line involvement in a project. This method has become fairly widespread in many projects, but rarely is it done under the title of 'self-assessment'. More commonly, periodic major review sessions or more frequent monthly reviews of progress are the means whereby staff come together to exchange views on project progress. In this respect, self-assessment in the true sense of the term, is qualitatively different, since it is more structured and more focused on assessing performance across a range of variables. Too often internal project reviews are very open-ended, are not structured around key issues and often spend more time on forward planning. Generally project staff willingly joined in the 'self-assessment' exercises, and for many junior staff members it was the first time that their views had been sought in this way.

'Self-assessment' is the opportunity for project management and staff to build up a **continuous** and **structured** picture of how a project is progressing. This does, however, present the challenge of trying to be 'objective' in a very 'subjective' based method. In this respect we found that staff had experience of critical self-assessment. Inevitably, when 'self-assessment' becomes a one-off exercise as during the Impact Study, staff are obliged to try and summarise lengthy processes and substantial project activities into a single response, and this was not always successful. If this method is to be used, then it has to be continuous and consistent to allow staff to build-up a picture of project performance over time.

INSTRUMENTS FOR ASSESSING IMPACT

Group Meetings: This was the most commonly used instrument across the Impact Study, apart from the Bangladesh In-depth Study in which the individual interview was

the principal method used. In chapter 2 we can see that over 500 beneficiaries were involved in some form of group meeting as part of beneficiary assessment in each of the three Country Studies. Given the limitation of time in these studies, it was impossible to use a more individually based self-assessment since there was no possibility of drawing up a more 'scientifically based' sample. Hence, after initial discussions at the time of the Study Workshop, project management usually 'arranged' for groups of beneficiaries to meet with the study team and to discuss a number of questions. In this way the Impact Study was able to seek the views of a considerable number of beneficiaries in a relatively short period of time. Generally there was a good gender balance in the groups and, particularly in Nicaragua, they were quite interactive. The meetings were undertaken on the basis of a set of open questions and discussions were allowed to 'develop', with the study team carefully ensuring that they didn't go off at too far from the issue. At times the beneficiaries appeared genuinely intrigued by the whole experience.

While, as we have reported, there was a useful gender balance in the group meetings, inevitably the men tended to dominate, particularly in Bangladesh and Nicaragua. Furthermore, since we had little chance to influence the composition of the groups, some seemed to include the better off and **more influential beneficiaries** who were able to turn the discussions onto issues that were to their particular interest. Also it was inevitably difficult at times to keep the group focused and a number of beneficiaries saw it as an opportunity to go into detail on the needs of their community. Clearly this instrument will always be a basic tool of any built-in beneficiary assessment in a project and we must assume that, in such circumstances, it would be used in a slightly more rigorous manner.

Family Interview: Given the importance of trying to understand how a project had directly affected the lives of beneficiaries, we also 'interviewed' a small number of beneficiary families on several projects. The continuous monitoring of a representative number of families at the community level is a common instrument for tracking in detail this direct effect. However, we found no examples where this instrument was being used on any of the projects in the Country Studies, although there was evidence that the LIFT project regularly monitored beneficiary families. While we feel that this instrument potentially has an important use in beneficiary assessment and the LIFT In-Depth Study in particular based a great part of its inquiries on Household Families. In the Country Studies we encountered the same problems as with the group meetings. The study team had no opportunity to help select the families for interview, most were quite unaware of what the exercise was to be and, based on observations and responses, we concluded that the families selected did not represent a cross-section of the community. The emphasis often appeared to be to impress the study team with the more eloquent beneficiaries and their families. However the fact that, in most of these interviews, it was the man who spoke for the family, gave us an additional perspective on **gender relations** at the family level. However the family interviews did give us an opportunity to observe the family environment and to assess the possible impact of the project in these terms. Usefully these family interviews can then be written up as mini case studies, which help to illustrate a text.

Direct Observation: In the absence of enough formally r

corded evidence, we decided that we would use direct observation as an instrument to supplement information that we gathered using the other instruments. We did this in a continuous fashion and used the observations to add some 'real-life' detail to our findings. For example, in visits to communities and to beneficiary families, we observed what we could of what would constitute any sign of benefit from participation in the project; eg. type of household possession, level of cleanliness of the community, signs of soil erosion control and so on. Of course, we had no means of **verifying** our observations and, accordingly, we have not based any conclusions solely on them. But we found them a very useful way of contextualising the benefits and of proving direct examples of any benefits that may have occurred.

Use of Key Informants: Each of the three Country Studies used key informants to provide an additional, informed and yet hopefully 'independent', or less directly involved, view of the project and the benefits and changes that it might have brought to the local communities. Typically these key informants were schoolteachers, local government officials or other senior figures in the local area. On balance we found that most of them <u>did</u> have a point of view or a comment on the project and, in many instances, they introduced a perspective which neither project beneficiaries or staff brought out. For example, key informants could compare the project's efforts with those of similar initiatives that may have taken place by other projects; they could introduce a 'political' element and give their views on the relative strengths and motives of some of the actors involved; or they could relate the activities of the project to what they felt were the key local needs. While similarly we did not have a lot of control over the selection of key informants, in general we found that most presented a balanced view on project performance, although we did get one or two cases of hand-picked informants with rose-tinted spectacles!

Quantitative Analysis: While many of the variables and issues of the Impact Study had strong qualitative dimensions – sustainability, gender, democratisation, civil society, partnership and so on – we tried as far as possible to use also relevant quantitative data as evidence and to illustrate our arguments. In the Country Studies this was particularly the case when we reviewed, for example, Inputs, Outputs, Effectiveness and some aspects of Impact on Poverty. Furthermore, we have introduced into our analysis a series of tables in which we have quantified the content of existing project documentation on the variables and issues being studied. We have already seen that reporting on the Danish NGO projects is heavily biased towards Inputs and Outputs. Similarly, many of the existing 'impact' studies have a dominant qualitative content. We have tried, where possible, to achieve a balance and we would argue that the tables, for example, are a useful means of understanding the magnitude, and to make comparisons across the sectors and the countries, which narrative alone might find it difficult to do. The LIFT project In-Depth Study in Bangladesh made particular and effective use of extensive questionnaires to collect data, which might indicate the impact on the project at both the Local Extensionist and Household family level.

The above five categories represent the **main instruments** that the Impact Study used. We should note that use was also made of a number of other instruments including **field diaries, seminars with key informants and market surveys.**

 (Source: DANIDA: Danish NGO Impact Study: INTRAC, 1999)

CONCLUDING COMMENT

Essentially we can conclude that there is <u>no </u>single method or instrument that we can use in order to monitor, and ultimately evaluate a process of empowerment. The evidence from both studies and from the practice is that we cannot simply prepare a questionnaire – the classical instrument of development research – and expect to be able to understand the evolution of a process of empowerment. The process does not easily reveal itself; nor is it easy to quantify. Qualitative processes of development demand qualitative approaches to their monitoring and also a radically different framework of evaluation. **Basically 'empowerment' cannot be evaluated <u>if</u> it has not been monitored.** A relevant monitoring system is fundamental to being able to understand whether the process is developing or not. However there are relatively few examples of monitoring systems for a process of empowerment. Remarkably development agencies are strong on the rhetoric of 'empowerment' but universally weak on its monitoring. There is little evidence that many development agencies have been able to set up effective systems for monitoring qualitative processes. Certainly the knowledge and broad methodology are available. The critical issue is in designing and implementing a minimum but effective system.

Question:

What do you think are the most useful METHODS and INSTRUMENTS, which could be used in the M and E of a process of EMPOWERMENT ?

SECTION 5: EVALUATING EMPOWERMENT :
A PRACTICAL EXERCISE

It is not enough to have a broad understanding of the issues involved in the M and E of a qualitative process such as 'empowerment'. This understanding then has to be **operationalised** down to the programme or project level. To date this has proved the major challenge to development agencies. The practice to date suggests that many agencies are now coming to grips with the issues related to the M and E of 'empowerment' but seem unable to translate this into operational systems. In too may instances this operationalisation stops at the identification of 'indicators' without recognising that 'indicators' have to be adapted to project activities and used in a way that generates the data and information that will allow us to effectively monitor a project's progress. It is important, therefore, that we appreciate the **overall process** involved in the M and E of 'empowerment' and are able to design and implement a monitoring system that would allow us to monitor it effectively.

In order to do this, we are going to **design a monitoring system** for a particular project. We shall divide the workshop into groups around **4 different CASE STUDIES.** The basic **context** of each project and the **problem** that it is supposed to address are summarised on a single sheet of paper. Each of the project has as one of its objectives the **empowerment** of the local community / local people / women. Based on this information, each group will design an approach to monitoring and reporting on this process of 'empowerment'. The **stages** involved in the exercise are as follows:

On the basis of the Introduction to the project context and problem, what do you think will be the CRITICAL FACTORS that the project will have to take note of or to address if it is to attempt to 'empower' its target group.

Determine the OVERALL PURPOSE of the project in terms of the EMPOWERMENT of all / part of the local population. Write out this purpose in no more than one paragraph.

SPECIFY up to THREE OBJECTIVES, which you would set for the project in order for it to promote the empowerment of the target population. Be sure to indicate exactly what is the target group of the empowerment process.

Identify and describe no more than TWO INDICATORS that you would use for EACH of the 'empowerment' OBJECTIVES outlined above. These indicators would then become the basis of the project's monitoring system.

DESIGN a MONITORING SYSTEM, which would enable you to operationalise the INDICATORS and explain the METHODS and INSTRUMENTS   that the system would use. Also set up a system that would allow you to regularly COLLECT information and data on the indicators as the means to monitor the process of Empowerment.

Indicate what specific TECHNIQUES or TOOLS that you may use in assessing the data and information and that would allow you to understand how the process of Empowerment is evolving

CASE STUDY 1: BANGLADESH

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

The following are the basic facts and figures concerning the Project Context :

*   The project location is on the southern delta of the country, a peripheral location in Bangladesh, bordering the Bay of Bengal.
*   The area is frequently hit by floods as well as cyclones that cause damage to agriculture, homestead gardening, housing and infrastructure.
*   Communication in the region is difficult because of the many rivers and canals and a road system that is seriously wanting.
*   Agricultural lands are not very fertile, partly owing to salinity and lack of irrigation facilities, and consequently the agriculture is less intensive with mainly one annual crop of *Aman* paddy.
*   The majority of the population live in poverty, their livelihoods primarily based on agriculture, and with landholdings that are barely sufficient for survival.
**   In the rural parts land ownership hence is an important determinant of wealth and poverty, the landless and the marginal farmers being among the poorest.
*   Fishery (in ponds, rivers and the sea) has always been an important secondary source of livelihood and food, whereas vegetable gardening has been little developed.
*   Culturally the area is less conservative than some other parts of Bangladesh, *purdah* is less strictly observed and muslim fundamentalism not widespread.
*   A small hindu minority lives in the area; usually the hindus live in their own *paras*, but the relations between hindus and muslims are generally good.
*   The area has not been receiving a lot of foreign aid; for some years Danida has been the leading donor supporting a number of different projects.
*   Most of the major NGOs of Bangladesh are active in the area, mainly with savings and credit programmes.

These factors can be viewed as a set of *conditions* and *constraints* - both for people's livelihoods in general and for the implementation and effect/impact of the project. But within the given conditions improvements in the lives of people are to a certain extent the outcome of their own *actions*. People are not just passive objects of 'development' or 'target groups' of projects. The impact of any development intervention thus depends on how various groups and individuals take advantage of the assistance offered. This obviously depends on their individual and socially defined capabilities, but it must also be viewed in the context of other elements of their *livelihood*, including other development projects. Typically poor people's *coping strategies* in this area combine small-scale agriculture with a range of other livelihood sources. Cultivation of vegetables (and for the local extensionists seeds and seedlings) is one option available - articulated strongly by the Project. Fishing, livestock rearing, crafts, rickshaw pulling, agricultural labour, road work and petty trade are other available options - some of them supported by other development projects - and most poor households combine several of these for their living. .

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

In broad terms the overall **aim** of the project is to increase the **economic security and nutritional well being** of 28,000 small farm households by means of intensive homestead gardening and agroforestry practices. Furthermore the project aims also to try and **empower** the poor and marginalised local farmers and to help them to participate more effectively in development initiatives. The main objectives of the Project have primarily been done through **training** of local extensionists, the organisation of a network of tree and vegetable seed suppliers and support for the strengthening of local organisations.

The Project began in 1994 and continues to date. It has concentrated its efforts on two main groups of **actors**:

Local Extensionists in the expectation that they would then pass on the knowledge gained to small farmers in the area. These Extensionists are responsible for setting up seed supply businesses and thus make them available to small farmers. Most of the Extensionists are also small farmers but they tend to have larger than average holdings. In this respect Extensionist household income tends to be higher than that of other local farmers. Most of the Extensionists are men, but there are some female ones.

Household Farmers: Most of the household farmers who participated in the project were either small or marginal (1 hectare or less) although a small number of larger farmers were also included. While most of the households gain their main income from farming, trading and labouring are also important sources of income. Only a very small number of local small farmers were able to participate in the project; the vast majority was not involved.

The **basic approach** of the Project is a variant of the farmer-to-farmer extension model: Project staff select and train well-endowed farmers in bio-intensive gardening methods and agroforestry so that they in turn can act as Local Extensionists and provide extension to other farmers, Household Farmers. Initially the project was implemented in a fairly rigid and non-participatory way. It was based on a predetermined 'package', embodied in the approach, containing certain agroforestry techniques and a fixed amount of training. In particular began to be more sensitive to gender issues and also to recognise that its whole 'empowerment' approach had to seen in the broader project context and not just in terms of project outputs.

CASE STUDY 2: TANZANIA

PROJECT CONTEXT Error! Bookmark not defined.

Kibondo is situated 260 km North of Kigoma on the road to Mwanza, hence in a very remote region of the country, compared to the urban centres. Kibondo is the District capital of the northernmost district in the Kigoma Region. The town is located on the top of the hill overlooking the plains in the vicinity, a strategic rather than a practical location that the Kibondo population owes to the German colonialists, who established the small town as district centre. From Kibondo there is about 15 kilometres to the Burundi border as the crow flies. Dar es Salaam is approximately 1400 km away, a journey which takes 3 days by car.

Kibondo has a bad reputation of being remote and undeveloped. Furthermore the people of the region have been considered to be undeveloped by successive governments. "The Waha are backward, disease-ridden and ignorant" states the district Commissioner in 1953 in an administrative memo. After independence, to be assigned as government employee to Kibondo has always been seen as a bit of a punishment. The interpretation of the Waha as backward is equally reflected in current development projects. In the early project documents it is equally stressed how "local development is halted by the excessive alcohol consumption by the population", and how lack of development is to be addressed through "awareness building".

Kibondo was assigned as a labour reserve for agricultural labour in the big colonial and early post-colonial plantations in especially the Tanga, Tabora and Kagera Regions. It is furthermore an environment where farmers have good reasons to be extremely sceptical towards external development agents' propositions and demands. A lack of continuity in agricultural policies, combined with a short-term perspective and lack of will, has made farmers very sceptical towards *any* external interference in their agriculture. This situation has led to a tendency where people with a more "progressive" vision, have always attempted to flee the District, investing in their labour instead of in their land. Furthermore the Kibondo region has recently been dramatically influenced by the influx of very high numbers of Burundian refugees. This has allowed the economy to boom, and initiated a process of social change with a variety of winners and losers.

THE KIBONDO DEVELOPMENT PROJECT Error! Bookmark not defined.

The Project was launched in 1992 by what is now known as the first project phase lasting from 1992- 1996. The project has covered 20 villages with a population of 64,200 people, over 70% of the total village population in the district. Initially the development agency had begun work in the Kibondo District in 1986 as part of the Kigoma Project mainly working with refugee impacted areas dealing with helping those who were adversely affected by refugees. Development activities in the area between 1986 - 1988 were mainly afforestation, agricultural extension, and promotion of the use of draught animals. The Project has recently entered a second phase running from 1997 to 2001. Both phases have had budgets of just below 2 million US$.

The Project activities in its initial stage were based on supporting the Kibondo District's **agricultural production** of crops – in particular coffee -coupled with financial assistance to some residents aimed at enabling them to start small income generating projects.

Other activities include introduction of new types of food crops, fish farming, tree planting, and infrastructural work in the villages. The main methodological approach of the Project has been based on two main principles: namely piloting and demonstration. These two aspects remained the central strategic approach throughout the entire first phase of the project (from 1992-1996). Piloting was intended as a method by which few villages in the district were selected where project activities could be concentrated. The main intention of this method was to select these few villages, give them all the necessary support needed and affordable by the project as a way of teaching and showing other villages ways of improving and changing to modern farming and other economic activities. In the villages both piloting and demonstration were introduced at the level of individuals in each village.

In each village a few individuals were selected as model farmers, known to the project as **Contact Farmers** (CFs). Like the twenty villages at district level, the CFs were to be the main focus of the project extension staff, through whom the project staff would expedite their extension services to the villagers. It was anticipated further that the CFs would also train their fellow villagers better ways of farming while at the same time villagers were learning from CFs the best farming practices introduced by the project extension officers. The results have seen the creation of a particular project society at village level. This consists of three groups of social actors: the **contact farmers**, who have benefited from the project and received substantial inputs and subsidies, the **"new farmers"**, and the *holoi poloi* – or large majority that feel that they have been overlooked by the project. It is however worth noticing that the contact farmers are only 665 out of a population of 52.000The second phase of the project proposed a significant change of approach; from a demonstrating and supporting approach to a more **participatory** and **empowering** one. This new approach is intended to involve the local populations in designing development programs and in determining and influencing their outcomes. It hopes furthermore to support local farming groups in terms of developing their organisational skill and in building links and alliances with other similar groups. Perhaps most critical is that during the second phase the Project has decided to abandon the system of giving agricultural handouts to farmers and instead encourage them to form groups and come up with proposals of how they want to enter into partnership with the project. In its second phase, therefore, the project sought to develop a strategy of empowerment that would help to break the dependency of the project groups.

CASE STUDY 3: HEALTH DEVELOPMENT: NICARAGUA

PROJECT CONTEXT

The South Atlantic Autonomous Region (SAAR) covers an enormous area of Nicaragua's Atlantic coast. It has a population today estimated at some 260,000, which

is a fourfold increase over the past 25 years. The increase is almost wholly due to the massive influx of migrant campesinos from central Nicaragua to the agricultural and cattlelands of the Atlantic coast region. The influx has been spearheaded by Mestizos who now greatly outnumber the indigenous ethnic groups. The SAAR represents one of the vast agricultural frontiers of the country which is only now being opened up and introducing a whole new pattern of life into regions which had for centuries being thinly populated and largely in the hands of small ethnic groups.

The municipality of Pearl Lagoon (PL) lies some 35kms north by boat from Bluefields, the capital of the SAAR It has a population of about 7,000 inhabitants in 17 communities distributed around the banks of the Laguna. The municipality is multi-ethnic in composition with Creoles, Miskitos, Garifunas and Mestizos; the dominant language is Creole, but Spanish and Miskito are also spoken. In terms of social stratification the Creoles are the dominant group, both in numbers and economically. The Miskitos and the even smaller population of Garifunas are less influential, while the numbers of Mestizos is still small although clearly growing. Crop production, fishing and some timber felling are the main economic activities, all mainly for domestic consumption with small surpluses traded in Bluefields. PL is among the SAAR's more prosperous municipalities with a notable increase in commercial activities - fishing, tourism and, it is suspected, drug trafficking - and the increasing wealth, which is largely in the hands of a few and concentrated in the municipal capital , is quite noticeable. Elsewhere along the banks of the lagoon, things have changed little. Illiteracy is high, livelihoods largely subsistence based and isolation a reality. River transport is the basic means of moving around in the municipality, but this is quite precarious for those communities distant from PL. Inevitably there are tensions between the different ethnic groups, with the Creole population being linked more to the existing political-administrative structure, while the Miskitos and the Garifunas remain largely marginalised. Furthermore the ever growing numbers of Mestizos and their increasing penetration into the area gives rise to concerns in terms of the future relations between the different ethnic groups.

The Health Situation in Pearl Lagoon

The health situation of the population of PL is directly related to their poor economic standing and the general living conditions of the communities around the Laguna. The prevalence of the main diseases in the area are directly related to the generally poor hygienic conditions in the communities; contaminated water, widespread human waste, no rubbish disposal, poor health service provision and widespread mosquito infestation. The municipal capital is reasonably well equipped with a doctor, nurses and a well-run health post. The rest of the municipality is served by five health posts and a mobile brigade which visits the more distant communities every two months. The health posts are normally staffed by a health auxiliary, they have few resources and staff mobility is high. While some 80% of the population of PL is within two hours by boat of a health post, the service is generally precarious and poorly resourced. The health service generally is fully stretched to maintain even a minimum service outside of the municipal capital and there are few prospects that its resources will be increased in the immediate future. In epidemiological terms the municipality manifests most of the health

characteristics usually found in resource poor countries and, in particular, in low-lying tropical regions where populations are scattered and health services difficult to mobilise and administer. The main diseases and illnesses which afflict the population are respiratory and intestinal, both of which are the principal causes of deaths among children aged 1-5 years. Among the other main health characteristics of the municipality are the following:

- infant mortality stood at 76 x 1,000 in 1991
- maternal mortality figures are not known but are felt to be low
- diarrhoea and dehydration are serious among under 5s particularly in the very hot months
- there is an extremely high incidence of sexually transmitted diseases
- it is estimated that about 35% of under 5s suffer from some degree of malnutrition
- high fertility rates with average family size of 5-6 children
- increasing problems of alcoholism and drug addiction

While the municipal capital is relatively stable, overall basic hygiene and sanitary conditions in the communities around the Laguna are extremely precarious. Housing is largely rudimentary and most houses have no latrine. There have been some improvements - with external support - in community water supplies in some communities but most continue to use contaminated wells or other sources which have not been treated. Inevitably there are simply not the services available to help the communities to improve and to maintain their environment.

THE PROJECT

Phase 1 : 1991-94 : The project emerged as a result of a direct request from the Nicaraguan government to an international NGO to support efforts to improve the health status of the isolated communities on the Atlantic coast. In the first phase the overall **aim** of the project was seen as :
> *To improve the health status of the peoples*
> *living in the communities around Pearl Lagoon*

The target population was to be the under 6s and pregnant women. In terms of strategy the health project was to be **participatory** and seek to **empower** local communities in order that they might become more involved in taking actions to solve their health problems. In the first phase the project had two main components:

Health Promotion and Prevention: training of community leaders, health committees, health workers and traditional midwives; community hygiene, latrines, wells.
Health Service Support: support to existing network of health service, provision of a mobile service in the communities

Given the limited nature and resources of the government health services in the Laguna, the project represented a substantial injection of resources and could expect to make a

noticeable impact on people's health. The Project, however, sought not to provide merely a curative service but also to strengthen existing services, to promote people's **participation** through action research and to improve basic hygiene at the community level.

Phase 2: 1995-97 An external project evaluation in 1994 recommended that the project be continued for a further period of two years in order to consolidate the community promotion and training processes and in order to establish the local conditions for its sustainability and continuity. The broad objectives and strategy of the second phase were largely the same as the first one, with the exception that more emphasis was put on (a) **empowering** local communities to take more responsibi;lity fpr health development (b) health promotion and prevention and (c) less on simply resourcing the existing health service.

CASE STUDY 4 : EGYPT

NATIONAL CONTEXT

The failure of the model of economic development following the Egyptian revolution in 1952 resulted in the late 1960s in a major re-conceptualisation of development. Redistribution, basic needs and participation were identified as essential components to ensure more efficient and effective development projects. Sadat's open door programme welcomed external assistance and capital investment, which had important implications for the development of community participation in urban sector projects. However, the implementation of many necessary long-term reforms was postponed into the early 1990s, when Egypt started a structural adjustment programme with the guidance of the IMF and the World Bank. The programme was expected to minimise the role of the state in managing the economy, leaving the market to be managed by the forces of supply and demand. Based on this, the Egyptian government has developed a strategic framework for economic stabilisation, growth and social efficiency.

In Egypt, most poverty estimates are related to a consumption-based poverty line, based on the cost of a diet that provides minimal nutritional requirement in addition to some allowance for basic non-food expenditures. The estimate of the proportion of the population below the poverty line in the mid 1990s in Egypt varies from 23 % to 48 %, partly due to different methodologies. This measure does not take into account access to essential public resources and services. The UNDP introduced in 1996 the concept of capability poverty, which refers to what people are able to be, do, choose and achieve. The 1996 Egyptian Human Development Report estimates that 34 % of Egyptians were on or under the capability poverty level in 1995. Rural areas have a higher level of poverty than urban areas, and the departments of Upper Egypt are consistently at the bottom of the list. However, the incidence of poverty in the departments of Greater Cairo and Alexandria is higher than in any other region in Egypt. They have over 3.3 million poor people among them, constituting about one fourth of the national total.

A primary step taken by the government to address poverty was the establishment of the Social Fund for Development in 1991 which, although promising, still reflects the centralised approach to government planning. Its main objectives are to promote income and employment generating activities initiated by local communities, to provide basic social services and to improve local participation through labour intensive techniques. The Community Development Programme seeks to improve services at the community level in low-income areas, in partnership with NGOs and local beneficiaries. The government has also taken a comprehensive approach on the political/social level to encourage the establishment of local community co-operatives and private voluntary organisations. While in 1986/87 around 450 organisations were registered with the government, by 1993 more than 1500 organisations were registered, and the figure reached around 15,000 by 1998. These are all organisations concerned with social services such as childcare, family care, care for the elderly and the disabled, cultural activities and literacy programmes. However, of these 15,000 organisations, 25 % are literally inactive, 25 % are active only part time, 27 % have limited success as providers

of small regular services, while the rest have established local community programmes of various sizes and importance.

Egypt has a long tradition of a highly bureaucratic and centralised government, and progress and development have always been associated with exclusive forms of governing and politics. The state still maintains control over private organisations, enforced by the law. Any society has to be registered in the ministry and one of the conditions is a commitment by the proposed society not to engage in any political activities. The state authorities may limit activities of professional associations, trade unions and local societies, such as public meetings and publications. There is a great disparity between economic and political liberty, and the majority of civil society still remains excluded from decision-making processes.

One promising way of enabling civil organisations to play an effective role is the establishment of **contractual** agreements between the community and government or external assistance. Through the 1980s the Egyptian government started to modernise methods of reaching the local poor by depending mainly on the community's own initiatives and local resources. The National Programme for Integrated Rural Development (Shorouk) was launched in 1994. The programme aims at mobilising people towards increased participation, leading to community development based on an agreement between the community and the government authorities. Traditionally **contract** is understood as an agreed format that describes the nature of the relationship between two or more parties. The parties could be a seller and a buyer, an owner and a renter, or an employer and an employee. At the formal level, a contract would be in a written explicit form with the names of the parties, their nationality, occupation and residence. The rights and obligations of each party and the terms of the agreement would be included. However, especially in rural areas, hiring labour for cultivation, work in small workshops, or work as electricians, plumbers and similar work, may not involve a formal written contract. Instead, a verbal agreement would be set to describe the relationship between the parties. Whether on the formal or the informal level, the provider of the asset or service always has the upper hand in setting the rules and the conditions of the contract.

THE PROGRAMME FOCUS

This national level Programme is called the "Improving Living Standards" programme run by the Implementing Agency (IA) and funded by USAID. It is a pilot urban development project designed to upgrade living conditions for urban residents by providing support for Egyptian Private Voluntary Organisations (EPVO). The first phase was implemented between February 1995 and June 1996. The Programme aims at strengthening the capabilities of local EPVOs by providing training, technical assistance, needs assessment and financial resources. The Programme is inspired by the belief that strong EPVOs are the vital link to the local community. It aims at creating a mechanism for collective action and participation among the neglected groups in the target area, and to link them to activities, funds, or sources of income entitled within the Programme. The relevant contractual agreement is between the IA and the target organisations in the

area, which then liaise with the different beneficiaries. The beneficiaries participate in the activities implemented by the local organisations in co-operation with the IA. The Programme targets three of the oldest districts of Cairo: El-Rashidy, El-Kharg, and El-Salmiya. El-Rashidy is home to over one million people and is a typical example of a traditional, once prosperous, district of Cairo that is now suffering economic decline and social degradation. El-Kharg is a culturally mixed area with many rural migrants. It is poorer than most of El-Rashidy and desperately in need of essential services.

The various projects within the overall "Improving Living Standards" Programme are as follows:

- The Programme's Institution Building Programme applies proven methods of training and technical assistance as well as more innovative means such as the posting of local management assistants inside the voluntary organisations and the promotion of peer-education between the associations in the project. It aims to increase administrative skills among approximately 23 local EPVOs and promote strategic plans of action for the next 5 years for a minimum of 15 EPVOs.
- Self-Help Initiatives are innovative approaches to community development services, and cultural activities emphasising self-help and local participation. The EPVOs taking part in the institution building programme receive grants to undertake activities such as health services, childcare, water and sanitation, employment and business generation, and educational and cultural services.
- The Local Economic Development Programme promotes income-generating activities. A credit fund makes small loans available to low income individuals and also to youth and established small and medium entrepreneurs, through contractual agreements. For the latter group, a business development support programme will be offered. A major concern is to link the local entrepreneurs with financial institutions and the larger business community in Cairo.
- The Networking Programme is seen as a cornerstone in efforts to develop a broader platform for participation, democratisation and social equity. Area based networks of local associations will be essential channels for creative and productive interactions among the network members. They can learn from each other's experiences, collaborate on particular projects and work together on awareness and advocacy campaigns.
- Community Resource Mobilisation is based on the idea that in order to achieve sustainability initiatives have to allocate human and financial community resources. Private voluntary organisations are expected to provide 25% of volunteers and funds. A volunteer awareness and promotion campaign will be organised, as well as training for volunteer programmes and fund raising.
- The Project Documentation and Promotion Programme contributes to the overall sustainability of the project by attracting more institutions and donor support, and by promoting replication of the model. This will be done through the production and distribution of written and audio-visual materials, outlining the methods and lessons learned throughout the project. In addition to this, effort will be done to reinforce existing links with government agencies.

The "Improving Living Standards" Programme is an example of the **contract approach** being used in Egypt. An analysis of the extent to which it helps previously excluded groups gain access to development resources will inform an assessment of the usefulness of the approach within the context of urban Egyptian communities. To-date, however, the Programme has not been able to establish any kind of monitoring system to be able to understand to what extent it has been able to promote effective community development and also, hopefully, to **'empower'** local residents. Such initiatives could begin to break the culture of silence and exclusion that is so pervasive in Egypt at the community level.

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