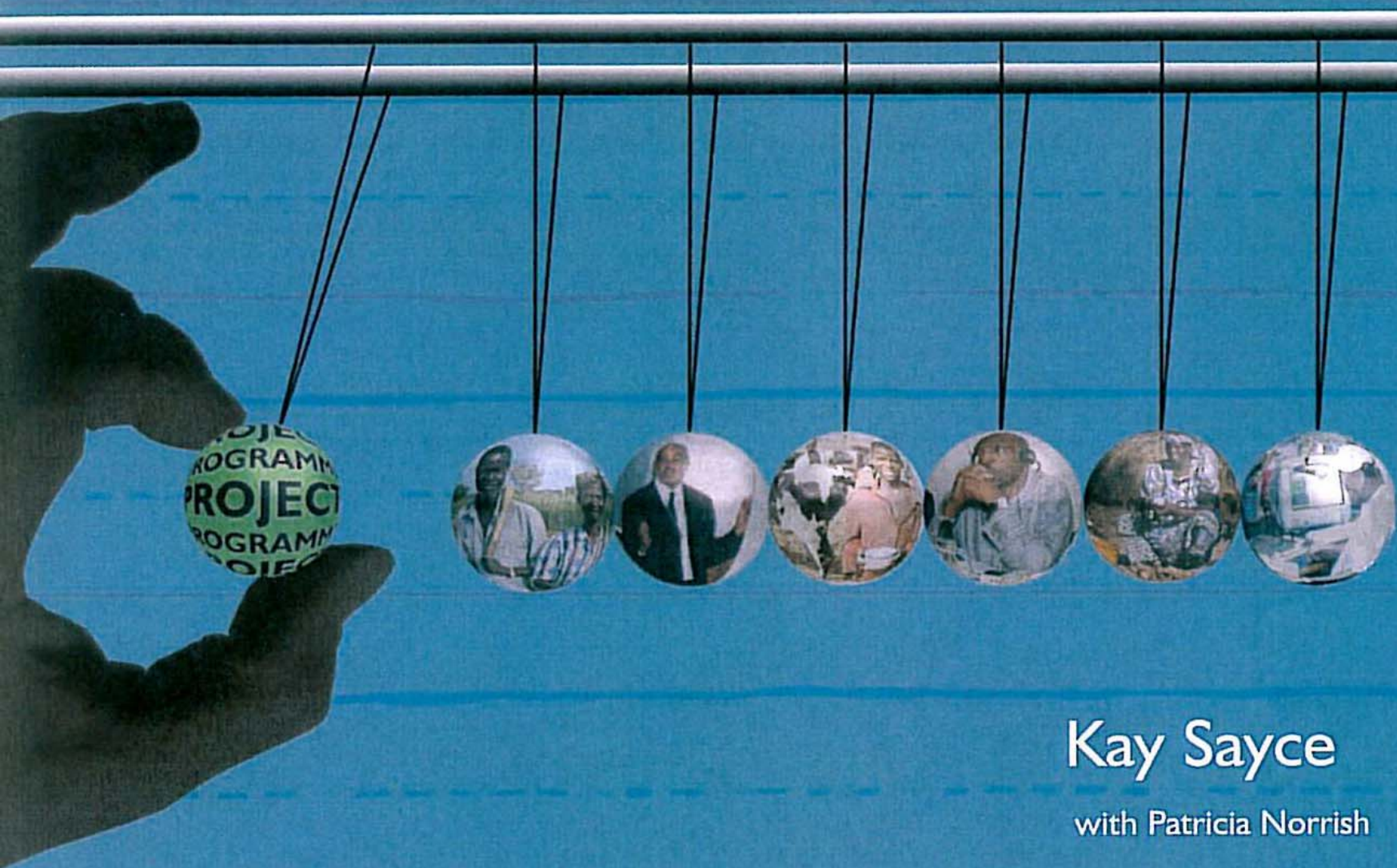


PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICE

AN ANTHOLOGY OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT EXPERIENCES



Kay Sayce

with Patricia Norrish



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Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (ACP–EU)



The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) was established in 1983 under the Lomé Convention between the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) Group of States and the European Union Member States. Since 2000, it has operated within the framework of the ACP-EC Cotonou Agreement.

CTA's tasks are to develop and provide services that improve access to information for agricultural and rural development, and to strengthen the capacity of ACP countries to produce, acquire, exchange and utilise information in this area. CTA's programmes are designed to: provide a wide range of information products and services and enhance awareness of relevant information sources; promote the integrated use of appropriate communication channels and intensify contacts and information exchange (particularly intra-ACP); and develop ACP capacity to generate and manage agricultural information and to formulate ICM strategies, including those relevant to science and technology. CTA's work incorporates new developments in methodologies and cross-cutting issues such as gender and social capital.

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Foreword

Impact assessment has become increasingly important in recent years, first as a fashionable pursuit and now a basic requirement for all who are accountable in spending tax-payers' money for developmental purposes. This is reflected in the virtual hemisphere, where Google now provides some 152 million entries on impact analysis and about 14 million entries on impact assessment.

For most people in the development community, however, the term 'impact assessment' still represents a myth or at best an illusion. Like many famous mythical or imaginary characters, it has a strong appeal that may dip now and again, but never seems to disappear. Every section of the development community — researchers, project managers, trainers, information and communication specialists, and donors — has to grapple, at one time or another, with the demand to measure the impact of their activities, be they projects, services or funding.

Agricultural research institutions around the world have often responded to the demand to show impact by engaging in elaborated and sophisticated (mainly economic) calculations such as internal rates of return. But there is little evidence that such reports, usually claiming high returns on investment, have ever been taken seriously by the general public. In view of the lukewarm reception or outright rejection of quantified measures of impact, a new trend has emerged calling for more qualitative assessments. This shift has been particularly noticeable with institutions involved in knowledge-based activities, such as the provision of information for development.

No doubt some people will argue that a myth is safer in the hands of storytellers than with number-crunching scientists who are able to manipulate their models to get the desired result. But not all is lost to the rational world, because the development community is starting to accept, albeit grudgingly, that an important aim of any investigation of how society operates is to learn from past experience (acknowledging the wise saying that 'those who ignore history are condemned to repeat it'). The door is beginning to open to anecdotal information and opinions, if not as definitive proof, at least as pointing in the right direction — 'there is no smoke without fire'. In this brave new world of impact assessment, those carrying out impact studies will have to listen more carefully to the people they interview, respect and make do with the evidence laid before them, learn to draw on information from a range of sources, expect the unexpected and, above all, share their findings more widely to promote learning in development organisations.

This book of stories on impact assessment, written by a journalist/editor, with guidance from an experienced development practitioner, is illustrative of CTA's efforts to promote a culture of organisational learning. It is both entertaining and informative, conveying a serious message

in a light style about what might have gone wrong with past attempts at impact assessment. Most significantly, the book shows that, with the correct approach, impact assessment studies can help to shed much-needed light on the intricate social and technical fabric that converts inputs into activities, activities into outputs, outputs into outcomes, and outcomes into impact.

I hope you will find this publication enjoyable and useful.

If you are interested in finding out more about CTA's work on the subject of evaluation methodology, I would strongly recommend our publication *Smart Toolkit for Evaluation Information Products and Services*. CTA's work in this area aims primarily to contribute to building up the capacities in ACP countries to promote an evaluation culture among practitioners in the field of information and communication management.

Dr Hansjörg Neun
Director, CTA



Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to all those who helped me put this book together. At the top of the list is Patricia Norrish, who not only used her considerable network, built up over several decades as a development practitioner, to find suitable studies, but was also unstinting in her enthusiasm for the concept of the book and in her support and advice from beginning to end, particularly when the going got tough. She played a major role at the workshops, took part in most of the Europe-based interviews and helped shape the commentary on the material gathered. Thank you, Pat.

Always there with support and advice, and always prepared to offer their valuable time, were Rick Davies and Rob Vincent. The insights they provided on the subject itself and on useful sources of information made a significant contribution. Advice and time were also always forthcoming, and much appreciated, from Doug Horton and Michel Menou.

The search for studies and for an idea of the sort of book that would appeal to a wide range of people involved in development work took me to Uganda and the Pacific. In Uganda, my host was Adiel Mbabu at the Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa (ASARECA); in the Pacific, my hosts were Mohammed Umar at the Institute for Research, Extension and Training in Agriculture (IRETA) in Samoa, Lucy Fa'anunu at the Ministry of Agriculture, Tonga, and Cema Bolabola at the University of the South Pacific, Fiji. Providing contacts, setting up meetings, arranging trips, laying on transport — whatever it took to ensure that my visit was interesting and productive — they did it, and I am deeply grateful to them all.

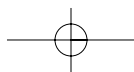
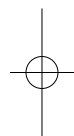
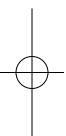
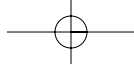
And then there were those who conducted all the face-to-face interviews outside Europe: Cema Bolabola in Fiji, Geoffrey Ebong in Uganda, Don Griffiths in Thailand, Maritza Hee Huong in Trinidad and Tobago, Hilda Munyua in Kenya, Yudhistira Panigrahi in India, and Shirley Randall in Vanuatu; the phone interviews with non-English speakers in Latin America were undertaken by Pilar Santelices. The enthusiasm and competence with which they all handled the challenge was extraordinary, considering that, in most cases, our acquaintance was almost entirely e-mail based. I thank them all.

To the interviewees, all 61 of them, I am particularly grateful. Their stories are the book. Their willingness not only to give up valuable time to tell their stories, but also to agree to go public with their views in the spirit of making a worthwhile contribution to our understanding of impact assessment, was inspiring.

I am also grateful to those who participated in the workshops on the project. The workshop discussions influenced my decisions on how to gather and compile the material for the book. Many of those already mentioned attended these workshops; other participants I would particularly like to thank are Modupe Akande, Paul Engel, Bruce Lauckner and Byron Mook.

At CTA, I wish to thank Gesa Wesseler for her contribution to these workshops and for conducting one of the interviews, and Ibrahim Khadar for responding to the need expressed for such a book by commissioning me to research and write it and providing the back-up required to complete the task. I hope the book proves to be a useful addition to the literature on impact assessment.

Kay Sayce
London, May 2006



Introduction

This is a book of stories.

It is a collection of experiences — recounted through interviews and transcribed into stories — in assessing the impact of information-related development projects. It does not provide sanitised or ‘averaged-out’ accounts, but puts them down as told, warts-and-all. It makes no attempt to push particular theories, promote certain practices or provide easy solutions.

It simply lets the storytellers — 61 of them, from right across the development spectrum — tell their stories. It lets their opinions, approaches and experiences come through in the stories. It then casts an eye over some of the issues emerging from the stories, not by way of prescription but rather as guidance. And it leaves you, the reader, to interpret the stories, to decide what you think they reveal about the main issues in impact assessment, about the purpose of impact assessment, about when and how it should be done, who should do it and, not least, why it is the subject of so many interpretations and so much debate.

The debate has been going on for some time. In recent years, as the pressure to show project impact has mounted, the debate has got louder, attracting a range of views from all domains of the development spectrum as to what impact is and how to measure it. The views of those who call for impact assessment, of those who think and write about impact assessment, of those who do impact assessment on the ground and of those who are assessed to see if there is any impact — each group has its own perspectives, persuasions and priorities. The differences are both practical and theoretical. Even the terms used differ. What is one person’s ‘method’ is another person’s ‘tool’. What is one person’s ‘tool’ is another person’s ‘indicator’. Words such as ‘concept’ and ‘framework’ become interchangeable. The term ‘impact’ itself — a rather “brutal word [that] brings up an image of a hammer hitting a surface” (PARC, 2004) — is interpreted in different ways; some people prefer not to use it all, choosing instead ‘change’ or ‘effectiveness’, and seeing projects not as entities that have an impact but as processes that contribute to change.

What sort of views are being expressed in this debate?

Let us eavesdrop for a moment on a discussion that is going on between three people standing in the margins of a workshop on impact assessment, waiting for the session to start, three people whose wealth of experience in conducting and writing about evaluation puts them at the cutting edge of the impact assessment debate.

66 *A: What would you characterise as good proof of impact? Would it be sustainable change in behaviour?*

B: A good story.

C: A good story! Yes!

B: No, I'm serious. A good story which reads: "We came in and we identified this working relationship with this organisation and we gave them some funds and then they did these things with these people here and then this happened and then later on we got news that this was going on..." A story which takes you through the whole process of causation and through the network of actors, to a plausible account of something that happened that was of significance in the lives of the people that we intended to be affected. By 'plausible account' I mean one that's more detailed rather than less detailed and one that people are willing to make public rather than just express privately. If you have a detailed account you're willing to go public on, that's as near as we get to plausibility. And plausibility is the closest we can get to proof.

A: And the attribution question?

B: In a story, attribution is about telling things in context — historical context and surrounding context. It's not proof, but it contextualises things to the point where you have some confidence in the interpretation. I'm not saying don't do before-after comparisons. What I'm really interested in is internal comparison. Example: an agency sets up savings and credit schemes in dozens of districts. Some do well, some don't. Which means there are probably differences in impact on people's lives. So let's look at the correlation between the internal variations in the performance of the schemes and in the rates of change in poverty in those districts.

A: That's being confident about the fact that things are multi-caused.

B: The key thing with this example is that you've got a large-scale project that, in theory, is doing a lot of identical things in different areas. There are enough cases to make convincing comparisons. But if you have just a one-off project, it's difficult to do internal comparisons. You don't have enough cases to make convincing comparisons.

A: But you could learn a lot from those comparisons. The context would be different even if your model wasn't. If there was more acceptance of this approach, I think there'd be an urge to look at these things in more detail.

If you have a detailed account you're willing to go public on, that's as near as we get to plausibility. And plausibility is the closest we can get to proof.

This discussion and those on pages 7–8 and pages 165–166 are drawn from a recorded conversation among three development practitioners whose long experience in evaluation has involved them in many international workshops and other forums on the subject.

C: Wouldn't that conflict with the design? A lot of development work seeks to be able to generalise and take an idea and make it work elsewhere. But context is so important — it's perhaps the most important thing in evaluation!

A: We've come across that in work on communication for social change. You've got to look at something that works and then scale it up. We've been thinking about the whole issue of association, where you look at things working in different contexts and then link them up together, and get the horizontal picture. It's more like an appreciative enquiry, looking at what's working and recognising that context is really important. That isn't your kind of 'do it well and then replicate it and then scale it up' model.

C: That's the model that a lot of development agencies want, though.

A: Yes, and it reflects a sort of naivety about how much you can control, rather than accepting that in a complex context you can play only a facilitating, nudging role.

B: Is replicability important? There's a big difference between replicability of whole projects — rare in my experience — and replicability of particular items of knowledge that have come out of those projects. I'd have much higher expectations of projects producing lots of little bits of replicable knowledge about how to do things.

C: That's probably the most you can hope for in most cases.

A: We tend to generalise some of the good process, but you can't generalise the detail of how it unfolds.

B: I'm a bit worried about generalising about process. My experience with the 'lessons learned' lists generated by projects is that they are soporific in the extreme!

A: But if it's process, not lessons learned, if it's about communication, feedback, learning — then there are things there that you can use.

B: Sure. It's worth trying to capture lessons learned. All I'm saying is, why do we manage to capture such boring lessons about processes that, on the ground, are actually quite interesting? People create these generalised statements, but in doing so they lose the detail.

A: And without context it doesn't really mean anything anyway.

B: On this whole question of learning and follow up, I have to say that my experience of development projects is that there is a huge amount of interest in the planning stage, an adequate amount of interest in the implementation stage and then, when it comes to ending a project, people start leaving the ship like rats. And all the interesting experiences and the

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accumulated constituency of interest of people around the project are just sort of quietly abandoned as people move on to the next big project. That's the overwhelming problem for me, the 'short-termism' of projects. And the focus on looking for the immediate, very short-term signs of change, signs of impact. But you can't really map those changes. The impact is going to happen further down the line.

C: Much of this also relates to good communication skills. I don't mean just face-to-face communication skills, I mean writing policy briefs, building tools for people to use, building databases, and so on. The importance of communicating what's happened. Wanting things to have a longer-term sustained impact and the implications of this for local groups and organisations.

*B: Good point. One of the things I've picked up recently, which influences a lot of what I do now, is that it's no longer M & E. It's M & E & C — monitoring and evaluation **and** communication.*



That's a rich mix of issues. The literature abounds with definitions of impact assessment and views on what the main issues in impact assessment are. Chris Roche, in his *Impact Assessment for Development Agencies*, based on many years with Oxfam (UK), comes up with what it is perhaps one of the neatest definitions: "Impact assessment is the systematic analysis of the lasting or significant changes — positive or negative, intended or not — in people's lives brought about by a given action or series of actions." (Roche, 2002). Roche puts attribution and aggregation high on his list of core issues. For Sarah Earl and others at the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada, in their book *Outcome Mapping*, learning and accountability are at the top of the list (Earl *et al.*, 2001). The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington categorises the main issues into six groups: scale, attribution and time horizon; supply-side versus demand-side approaches; importance of surprise; choice of indicators; case study/methodological research issues; time lags; and *ex ante* and *ex post* assessments (IFPRI, 2002).

It was this plethora of issues, and an urge to examine whether some consensus could be reached on what the main ones were, that attracted the attention of the Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) and gave birth to the concept of this book.

The concept

Based in The Netherlands and operating under the Cotonou Agreement between the European Union (EU) and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions, CTA had started to become

actively engaged with other agencies in exploring evaluation approaches in the late 1990s, by which time a clear distinction between performance evaluation (assessing the efficiency of a project) and impact evaluation (assessing the effectiveness of a project) had already become apparent. The Centre commissioned studies and organised meetings and workshops to encourage exchanges of views and experiences, not only to contribute to work in this field, but also to strengthen its own capacity to evaluate its products and services, all of which are geared towards improving access to and management of information for agricultural and rural development in ACP countries (CTA, 1998, 2002a, b; CTA *et al.*, 2000).

The Centre soon found that whenever the subject of evaluation was raised, hot on its heels came the subject of impact assessment, and brows became furrowed and opinions heated as everyone expressed different views on the subject. So it decided to commission a book that would open up and look at these different views, look at what people were arguing about, and why. A book that would step into the middle of the debate among all those involved in impact assessment and, if done well enough, help to carry the debate forward.

And so a broad strategy for compiling the book was devised. A search for recent impact assessment studies would be launched. In deference to the CTA mandate, they would be studies of information-related projects (broadly defined as projects where the key element was the exchange of information through a range of media — books, newsletters, radio, extension materials, training, seminars, telecentres, ICTs). They would reflect a bias towards agricultural development in ACP countries, but would also cover other disciplines and other regions.

Having identified the studies, the next step would be to find the actors in those studies and ask them to tell their stories. The stories should be rich and personalised, retaining their individual idiosyncrasies and, together, reflecting a diversity of actors and their domains.

Thus, the actors would be the entry point, while their stories illustrating their perceptions and practice of impact assessment would be the tool used to capture the main issues and illuminate the debate. Using a theatrical analogy, the donors, policy-makers, researchers, project managers, evaluation practitioners and the project 'beneficiaries' who supply the evaluation data would constitute the cast, reacting in different ways to each other and to the plot.

It was considered that such an approach would expose not just the gaps in perception among the actors involved in impact assessment, but also the illusions about the subject that cloud opinions and hamper collaboration and progress. It would also highlight the need to recognise that assessing impact is a complex and dynamic process, set in the context of constantly shifting goals and horizons. In addition, making the actors' domains the basis of the book would introduce a much-needed practicality into the impact assessment debate.

The compilation

A wide net was thrown to gather impact assessment studies. Evaluation specialists were consulted; an electronic discussion forum ('DGroup') was set up; workshops were arranged; trips within Europe and to ACP countries were undertaken; online and printed media — websites, newsletters, journals — were explored for studies and used to advertise the search for studies. In all, some 30 impact assessment studies of information-related projects, conducted recently enough for the actors still to have a good recall of the experience, were found.

The criteria that then determined the selection of a core group of studies for the book were, in the main, all about spectra. Taken together, the studies should cover as many information exchange media, actor domains and evaluation methodologies as possible. They should come from Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific and beyond. They should reflect different stages of the impact assessment process. And implicit in all of them should be the likelihood that the stories that the actors had to tell would cover a wide range of issues and opinions.

There was one more criterion, a crucial one. The actors involved in each study had to agree not only to the inclusion of their studies in the book, but also to the inclusion of their names alongside their stories. The question of anonymity had been raised at the workshops, with many workshop participants predicting a walkout if storytellers being asked for warts-and-all accounts were not given the option of anonymity. But this was to be a book of real stories of real experiences told by real people. Anonymity or aliases would obscure that reality, that sense of getting as close to the action as possible.

As it turned out, few people balked at the idea going public with their stories. Instead, the importance of the subject and the need to de-mystify it and to share ideas on it induced levels of cooperation and enthusiasm for the project that greatly exceeded expectations.

The actors' stories were gathered first-hand. A set of guidelines for the interviewers was drawn up, emphasising the need to couch the interview in such a way as to ensure that the story being told would accurately reflect the storyteller's — not the interviewer's — perspective. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face, in the language of the storyteller; a handful were conducted by telephone. The notes from the interviews were taken down verbatim as far as possible. When put into a story format they were little changed, except to add a link here, an explanation there, correct a minor grammatical error, or delete a sentence or two that had no bearing on the subject. There was no attempt to standardise the length or sequence of the stories, or to temper the emotions displayed or tamper with the nuances used.

As such, the stories are a sort of dialogue among a group of actors who were recorded telling it as it is.

The conversation

Let us revisit those three people at the impact assessment workshop. The session has ended and they are heading for lunch. Their discussion continues.

66 *B: If I can be pretentious in the extreme...*

C: Do you have to?

B: ...before Copernicus, everybody thought the planets and the stars all rotated around the Earth. In development work, we have the project and around the project there are stakeholders and they all rotate around the project. So we think. But actually, when you start taking more of a network viewpoint, you see that there's this stakeholder here and there's that one there and there's a government body over here and an NGO over there and a private-sector body here. In fact, there are dozens of them, everywhere, and they don't rotate around us at all! We're just part of a complex network and the whole thing that we want to get moving suits some parts of the network and not others, is conducive to some ends, not to others.

C: And there are all those people who are just passing through. We, as projects, are in fact just passing through. And the stakeholders can take or leave what we have to offer. This reminds me of a project where the idea was to help local NGOs provide more timely, more useful information. But suddenly those NGOs said, "Oh look, there's all those other people producing information too and there are all those other people wanting information, so let's get them all altogether." That was an unexpected outcome. They forged ahead with it, but it wasn't what the donor had in mind. The donor thought the NGOs would adopt a whole methodology, but no, they went their own way — and that's important for sustainability. I think impact sustainability happens when people adopt things on their own terms.

B: On sustainability... in a 5-year project that ended a few years ago, we managed to get a commitment from the donor to do an ex post evaluation. Classically, from an impact assessment point of view, ex post evaluations should always be done, but actually, when you look out there, they're as rare as hens' teeth! We asked the NGOs to come up with their own predictions about the fate of their interventions 3 years after the project had ended, and this became the focus of the ex post impact assessment. So, rather than just going in there and doing a general search around for impact, the evaluator can work with quite specific predictions about what's going to happen.

A: For me, much of the debate in recent years has moved away from having a very controlled approach to looking for impact and towards looking at what processes are in

Classically, from an impact assessment point of view, ex post evaluations should always be done, but actually, when you look out there, they're as rare as hens' teeth!

place that will allow people to determine their own future, create their own impact, which is ultimately about values, and that's where we start getting into sticky territory.

C: Because whose values are we talking about?

A: Exactly. You've got people going on about rights-based approaches and then people who say substantive freedoms are the only things you can really measure. I think that's where the debate needs to go, but then you stumble upon the fact that development is really about foreign policy. Just a big sticking plaster, maybe, substituting for some kind of endogenous process of change. We should perhaps just be facilitators on the sides trying to nudge things along in the right direction. But then again, who are we to do that?

C: There is a theme to this caricaturing of two different positions. One is the external evaluator coming along with a framework and assessing things in terms of that framework. At the other end of the continuum, you've got the totally facilitated, wholly locally owned participatory process. My feeling is that the territory somewhere in the middle is where we — those of us doing impact assessment — should be.

B: That takes me back to networks. One of the issues in the design of networks is the proportion of strong local connections versus the more distant connections, and this makes a huge difference to the behaviour of networks. And it's very interesting in evaluations to look at this balance of membership. When I looked at a mid-term review of a project recently, I saw a lot of representation of international consultants and a small representation of local consultants. But the literature on networks says if you want to facilitate learning throughout the whole network you need a strong mix of local connections and a few sparse distant connections. So, completely the other way around.

A: And if the impact you are looking for is poverty reduction and capacity development, then there are certain relationship dynamics and power dynamics within the network that you should look for together.

C: This has implications for what we were talking about earlier — lessons learned — because it's much easier for the international circuit to pick up lessons learned, with so much now on the web. It's much easier for us to get the feedback from evaluations than it is for the people on the ground.

B: Yes. So perhaps we need to talk about 'downward accountability' rather than 'feedback'. Feedback is something you ask for and you're lucky if you get it, but downward accountability is something that people — the people on the ground — have a right to expect. Maybe we need to rethink the language that we use in impact assessment.



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The core issues

From the conversations, the studies, the literature, the online forums and the workshops, a list of what seemed to be the most important impact assessment issues began to emerge. It became the ‘before’ list, set down before the stories were gathered. It was, at best, a guess. We would have to wait till all the stories were in to see whether or not it matched the ‘after’ list — the list that would emerge from the stories.

The ‘before’ list:

- *Learning and accountability*
This is about WHY an impact assessment study is done, what its purpose is.
- *Attribution*
This is about WHO takes credit for observed impact.
- *People and participation*
This is about WHO is involved in the impact assessment study, and the nature, context and challenges of that involvement.
- *Indicators*
This is about WHAT indicators (if any) are used, how they are selected and who selects them.
- *Scale and scope*
This is about WHERE the assessment is conducted (the area it covers, geographically) and HOW MUCH it seeks to address in terms of the different levels of impact.
- *Time and timing*
This is about WHEN the assessment is conducted (during or after the project, or both; if after, how long after) and HOW MUCH planning, implementation and reporting time it involves.

What do we mean by ‘learning’? It has become a bit of a buzzword in both the corporate and public sectors. In the development community, development can be seen as “learning our way into a sustainable future” and current thinking is that we need not only to learn from mistakes made, but also to learn better and to learn faster (Engel and Carlsson, 2002). We are talking here about both individual and collective learning at all levels of the development spectrum. There is a close relationship between ‘learning’ and ‘accountability’, some people seeing them as simply “two sides of the same coin” (OECD, 2001) — in this case, the feedback coin. ‘Accountability’ is generally taken to be ‘upward accountability’ from the project to the donor in terms of the use of resources.

By 'attribution', we mean "how organisations can find out to what extent any changes they observe were brought about by their actions" (Roche, 2002). There is pressure on institutions to show the changes for which a project can be credited. A central point here might be, to put it bluntly, who cares? This sentiment underlines the stance taken by Earl *et al.* (2001) in their promotion of the 'outcome mapping' approach, in which "the connection between the results of a programme's activities and the desired impact becomes rational, not empirical. The intended 'impact' of the programme is its guiding light and directional beacon, a test of its relevance — it is not the yardstick against which performance is measured. Thus the threat of failing to discover 'hidden attribution' is eliminated when feedback on performance concentrates on improving rather than proving, on understanding rather than on reporting, and on creating knowledge rather than on taking credit."

The interviewers for the stories in this book — development practitioners in Europe and in Fiji, India, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda and Vanuatu — worked from a set of guidelines and open-ended questions that, it was hoped, would tease out views on the issues in the 'before list', while encouraging interviewees to raise other issues. The guidelines are reproduced in full in Appendix 2.

And the 'after' list? That — or something like it — forms the conclusion of this book, after the stories. It is not a list based on an in-depth analysis of the stories, but rather a brief interpretation of the stories that the storytellers have told, of the issues they have raised. There will be other interpretations — including your own — which, given the subject of this book, is appropriate for, as noted by Roche (2002):

"Impact assessment is a negotiation of different interpretations of what has happened."

It is time to move on to the stories. Each group of stories is prefaced by a summary of the study to which the stories relate. There are 11 studies, beginning with one where, at the time of the interviews, the project was new and the impact study was still at the planning stage at the time the interviews were conducted. In the second study, things had moved on a little, with the project partly in place and those who were to assess its impact undergoing some training in how to do it. In the other nine studies, the projects had been completed or nearly completed by the time of the interviews and the impact assessment studies were being, or had been, written up. In each study, the stories appear alphabetically according to the name of the storyteller.

Impact assessment studies and stories

There are 11 studies, each with between four and eight stories told by people involved in those studies. The job descriptions given for the storytellers are as at the time of the study. The meanings of the acronyms and abbreviations used in the stories are given in Appendix 5 and are not spelled out when the storyteller used the acronym.

Each set of stories is prefaced by a summary of the study. The names in bold in these summaries of the impact studies are the names of the people whose stories follow the summaries.

STUDY 1

CATALYSING ACCESS TO INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN AFRICA (CATIA) PROGRAMME

The study

In early 2003, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), in collaboration with Canadian, Swedish and US agencies, launched the CATIA programme — Catalysing Access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in Africa. The goal of this 3-year programme is to act as a catalyst for increasing access to ICTs and improving pro-poor ICT policies. It consists of nine component projects covering internet capacity, internet access via satellite, international ICT decision-making, national ICT policies, computer hardware and open-source software, a network on ICT policy-making, radio-broadcasting, community radio, and a network for generating and exchanging local content. The first six projects are being managed by Atos KPMG Consultants (AKC), based in South Africa, and the remainder by local NGOs, with DFID responsible for overall coordination.

A logframe was included in DFID's call for proposals from independent evaluators to conduct an ongoing assessment of the programme's processes and procedures ('internal performance') and its outputs, outcomes and impact ('external results') in seven priority countries, which should culminate in a final report at the end of the programme. The call noted that "it is important that the independent assessor is involved from relatively early in the project cycle, helping to set indicators and the impact evaluation component" and that the evaluation should "involve all stakeholders and be as participatory as possible in its methods". The team would be expected to propose a suitable evaluation methodology (for gathering both qualitative and quantitative data), to define the boundaries between its monitoring and evaluation (M&E) responsibilities and those of the AKC team (headed by **Claire Sibthorpe**) and the NGOs, and to work alongside DFID's own M&E exercises. It would also be expected to work within the DFID logframe, with minor adjustments.

Big World (BW), a team of six consultants with extensive evaluation experience in the information and communication field — including **Simon Batchelor**, **Rick Davies** and **Patricia Norrish** — responded to the call. In its response, BW raised a number of issues relating to the programme's theory of change, a baseline study, the parallel M&E processes, the roles and

The names in bold in this summary of the impact study are the names of the people whose stories follow the summary.

responsibilities of the many people involved, and perceived shortcomings in the logframe. It proposed that, in view of the size and complexity of the CATIA programme and the need to tackle all these issues before the evaluation started, BW should have a 6-month inception phase to familiarise itself with the programme, its projects and its people, and to produce a detailed work-plan and evaluation methodology. This meant that, although the evaluation would not begin until most of the projects had started, the delay would give the project teams more time to build up their strategies and confidence prior to BW's evaluation interventions.

DFID agreed to the idea of an inception phase. It was to run from October 2003 to March 2004, with BW starting the evaluation process in April 2004. With four members of the BW team in the UK and two in Canada, the exchange of views and ideas within the team was conducted mainly by phone and e-mail. BW consultants also met up with **Mary Myers** and other members of the DFID team from time to time, and travelled to Africa to meet project managers and teams. During this phase, the demands of the evaluation task ahead became more apparent, an evaluation strategy evolved and the composition and individual responsibilities of the BW team changed.

It was in the second half of the inception phase that the interviews for this book were conducted. A month or so later, on 1 April 2004, BW submitted its plan to DFID. It was based on a four-stage process, the first three stages accounting for about 25% of BW's time and focusing on analysing the projects' development plans, examining their M&E arrangements and reviewing data being generated by CATIA — partly to see if the results were consistent with the development plans (meta-monitoring). In the meta-monitoring stage, BW would use the 'most-significant-change' (MSC) approach developed by Rick Davies, which is based on asking project stakeholders, "During the past *n* months/years, what do you think was the most significant change that took place in the lives of the people and organisations participating in this project?"

Stage 4 would be an independent verification of CATIA's conclusions about its achievements, and the extent to which these achievements contributed towards the programme goal. The work would be based on the 'outcome mapping' concept developed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), whereby the story leading to an outcome is tracked — in the belief that process is as important as product in terms of learning for development. BW planned to focus on three groups: 'inner stakeholders' (people involved in CATIA), 'boundary stakeholders' (not involved, but directly influenced by CATIA in some way) and 'outer stakeholders' (indirectly influenced by CATIA and key players in developmental change). Workshops would be used to identify stakeholders and map the network that linked them. Interviewing these stakeholders would be an ongoing process, "the idea being to catch the story as it unfolds" and thus produce a more comprehensive account of the impact of the CATIA programme.

The stories

SIMON BATCHELOR. Evaluation Consultant, Gamos, UK

Evaluation experience: *Extensive, including impact assessment*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"To assess the changes for the poor."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at the Gamos office, conducted by Kay Sayce; February 2004*

There are three main subjects covered by the CATIA programme: radio, ICT policy and local content/internet. All this makes up nine projects — projects that have been brought together relatively artificially, some sitting well within the programme, others less comfortably. The radio part is all about capacity building. The policy part is managed by AKC and is an attempt to affect policy without having to throw lots of money at regulators. In my opinion, the local content part is key to the future of ICTs; it is both a separate project and a theme that runs through all the projects. By 'artificially brought together' I mean that the radio and local content projects were going before the others, then the policy ones started; and, for administrative expediency as much as anything, DFID brought them all together under one programme.

CATIA is very complex. It's not a blueprint programme. It has to be managed very closely, be disciplined and yet be very flexible — a difficult combination. As far as impact is concerned, the community radio project and the local content project will have some direct measurable effect on the poor, a 'before-and-after' situation. For the policy projects, we don't expect to see policies changing, but what we will look for is a change in attitudes which could move decision-makers towards policy change. The evaluation is mostly about intermediate impact levels.

There are six of us in the evaluation team. Pat and Rick are the leaders, with lots of M&E experience. At Gamos, Nigel and I have M&E experience, but also a good knowledge of the ICT world. The other two members of the team [Don Richardson and Ricardo Ramirez] are good on the technical side, too, and on multi-stakeholder evaluations. I think it's reasonable for DFID to have chosen an external team. Although we're all from the UK and Canada, we want to contract African consultants to do most of the work in the post-inception phase.

We asked for this inception phase. We need more from DFID on their theory of change and on their logframe; at the moment, much time is being spent on sorting out what are the logframe's higher assumptions. The budget for this phase so far is OK, but that's only because we've not yet brought African consultants on board. In the post-inception phase, there isn't really enough time to evaluate procedures and impact, and we'll probably have to compromise, giving greater priority to the impact side.

We didn't understand their logframe and had lots of other questions. We are relatively senior and this gives us the confidence to challenge our clients. Some consultants have to keep quiet about things rather than risk losing a contract.

We see three main purposes to the evaluation. One is to ensure the taxpayers' money is being spent properly and the poor are benefiting from this programme. The second is to produce lessons that will be of use to the wider community. And the third is to establish whether CATIA is successful or not, and why. As to DFID's purpose, I think they see CATIA as a very risky programme, not least because its outcomes are not clear. One of their purposes is to have a clear view on CATIA some 3 years down the line as to whether it should get funding to move to Phase 2, having shown impact in Phase 1. Policy change is a long process and it is more than likely that if CATIA has started a process of change in decision-makers' thinking, then it will need much longer to consolidate that change into actual shifts in policy.

There is some tension at the moment between us and DFID. They thought we'd come in and do what they wanted. But we didn't understand their logframe and had lots of other questions. We think that they think we are being too challenging. Our approach is that we must challenge the basics and if this means that they dispense with our services, so be it. We are relatively senior and this gives us the confidence to challenge our clients. This is a good position to be in compared to some consultants, who have to keep quiet about things rather than risk losing a contract.

There is no room for a quantitative approach in this project. It's all about capturing the source of potential change.

There have been some difficulties with the projects. AKC's experience is based on managing blueprint projects. There is quite a lot of tension at the moment because we're not planning a blueprint evaluative approach. And AKC are worried, too, by DFID keeping on about the programme being risky. Those tensions were there when we came in. We have exacerbated them by agreeing with DFID that we cannot have a blueprint approach. Also, we are being rather vague about what we want to do and how we want to do it — hence this inception phase! We are process people. Our work will be a process-based approach.

The next layer down from AKC is the project leaders, who get information filtered through AKC and DFID. And they are a bit unsure about who we are and what their role in our work will be. For example, we promised to look at all the project logframes, but we had so many questions that we had to talk to DFID first before going back to the projects; because of the delay, the projects saw us as not providing feedback. At the Kampala meeting last month, it was very clear which projects were feeling favourable towards us and which were not.

I see two main challenges ahead. One is that, with ICTs moving as fast as they are globally and in Africa, there are going to be changes in ICT policies and regulatory frameworks anyway, and in the technologies, whether CATIA is there or not. CATIA is intended to accelerate those changes. The question is how do we measure the extent to which this acceleration occurs, if it does occur. For example, the logframe talks about increased access, but what it really means is significantly increased access — there will be increased access anyway during the 3 years that CATIA operates.

The second challenge is how we measure what CATIA adds to the flow of information to key players. This all has to do with the network analysis approach to impact assessment. We will

focus much of our effort on the 'outer stakeholders', those not involved in CATIA and not receiving any direct input from it. Those involved in CATIA are 'inner stakeholders'; those who are not involved but receive some sort of direct input we call 'boundary stakeholders'. This picks up on the outcome mapping approach. Let's say a Deputy Secretary in a Ministry for Telecommunications goes to a CATIA workshop on VSAT (i.e., he is therefore a boundary stakeholder). The Deputy Secretary comes back full of what he has heard and at some point mentions it to the Minister, who until then knew nothing about VSAT or CATIA (so that person is an outer stakeholder). Later, we interview the Minister and at some point she mentions VSAT — we don't bring it up — and we jump in and ask how she knows about this. The Minister tells us that she heard some details about it from her deputy. And thus we trace the flow of information and build up the network of information flows. This example is, of course, a very simple direct linkage — what will be more difficult to track are long chains of information flow. In this way, we will also build up a picture of the contribution that CATIA might be making to its goals. It's all qualitative. There is no room for a quantitative approach in this project. It's all about capturing the source of potential change.

RICK DAVIES: Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant, UK

Evaluation experience: *Extensive experience in M&E (and runs the MandE website at www.mande.co.uk)*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"The terms 'evaluation' and 'impact assessment' get muddled in usage. I prefer to call it all M&E, with impact assessment being part of the evaluation side, but taking a broader view of the impact on beneficiaries, including unintended and unexpected changes."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, in Cambridge, UK, conducted by Kay Sayce; March 2004*

The CATIA programme is aimed at the poor in Africa, to improve their use of and access to ICTs and bring change in their lives. This part is clear. What is not clear is what sort of use of ICTs is seen as leading to what sort of changes. There are nine components, they cover 25 countries and the impacts are likely at country, regional and international level. The components are not necessarily linked; they've been cobbled together into some sort of package. Some components have sub-components; some of these are operating, others are still in planning. The management structure is complicated. The priority countries are being sorted out, but there's disagreement about this. All in all, this is the most complex project I have ever seen!

Changes in ICT access and policy are going on already, of course. What we will look at is the rate of change, and how CATIA might be contributing to it. For our M&E, DFID talks of internal

procedures and external results. I think their prime focus, though, is on external results, the impact on the ground. And I think too much is being expected of us. DFID is a little uncertain about the project and how to keep it on course, and clearly they are looking to us to help a great deal in this way.

The closest we'll get to seeing the impact on poor people's lives will be the radio components. But even there I've suggested we don't do surveys of changes in people's lives. If a radio programme produces XYZ content and has the mechanisms in place to engage the audience (through audience research, phone-ins, etc.), that's an improvement, and it will lead to changes. On the policy components, it's a question of where we look for changes. DFID seems to expect us to do research *and* evaluation here, but there need to be clear boundaries between the two because they are quite different functions.

When we started, we assumed that CATIA was based on a theory of change, and that our role would be to explicate that. When you do M&E it's not good enough to say, "there was impact", you have to be able to say, "there was impact and this is how they got there." You have to be able to say what the route to impact was. Otherwise, there's no learning or possibility of replication. What's the point of that? Theory-led evaluation is not what most people do, but it ought to be. Someone wrote, "Impact assessment is the back end of strategy. It is where we have to deal with the consequences of poorly digested theories of change. This is why, when we look at the contents of most logical frameworks, we ask ourselves 'What is this s**t?'"

The question of scale comes in here. The scale of the project is part of the reason for its complexity — this is a problem in all large projects, affecting M&E and everything else. And, given this scale and complexity, there is not enough time being allocated to the evaluation. Either the time has to be increased or the expectations of our role have to be heavily cut back. We're discussing this at the moment.

Each component also has to have a theory of change, and should have built its own M&E plans on this and should have the capacity to implement these plans. We will help where necessary. During this inception phase, building the capacity for M&E has become a very important area. It seems that many of the project managers thought we would be doing their monitoring work. We'll suggest they use the 'most-significant-change' (MSC) approach as one means of monitoring their projects and we'll ask our local consultants to use an open-ended MSC approach in their questions about changes.

On the composition of our M&E team, what matters is not where you come from but what skills and experience you have. On the ground we'll need people who know the priority countries and have the skills and experience suited to the tasks we'll be taking them on to do. Selecting these consultants has been held up because we haven't yet finalised the priority countries. We can do four countries, not all 25! We have come up with a suggested list, but DFID has expressed concerns about this, such as possible language problems. Our big problem is time. We've done

Theory-led evaluation is not what most people do, but it ought to be. Impact assessment is the back end of strategy. It is where we have to deal with the consequences of poorly digested theories of change.

a time budget. If you take the number of days allocated to M&E work, you get very few days per quarter for working with each component as it is, without then trying to cover too many countries. This time budget has been very useful. There needs to be realism about what we have to do and what the components are expected to do.

A big challenge in all this is to achieve understanding between all the parties concerned about what our role is. Our role is still not clear to many of the components. We've had only two meetings — one in South Africa and one in Uganda — to put our ideas forward to many of those involved in CATIA, but it was only 20 minutes each time. Not enough! There's been lots of discussion about the inception phase and draft report, far more than in any project I've ever done. I counted my e-mails on CATIA for just the second half of February 2004 and it came to 83! The scale of consultation has been huge.

We are proposing to apply a network perspective to the M&E. It's linked to IDRC's outcome mapping approach, where they talk of 'boundary partners'. In CATIA, we have to identify the inner, boundary and outer stakeholders in the projects. Behind the idea is an actor-oriented approach. When talking of theory of change, there is a tendency to talk of abstract changes, leaving the actors out of it. So our focus is on identifying the actors and the links between them.

This is going to be a good opportunity to test and develop new ideas in M&E — test the applicability of the network approach, look at the theory of change being used by each component. We have agreed to put up all our findings on the project website. There still needs to be discussion on the CATIA programme's communication strategy. At the moment it's fairly internal; the project managers have not articulated an external dissemination strategy, who their external audience is, or how to reach it. Two issues here are transparency and learning. The project managers should be the driver of all this.

This inception phase has been difficult — the time pressures; the differences in personal style; intense involvement of DFID in the inception report, reflecting their anxiety about whether we can do what's wanted or if we are going to put a dampener on the whole project. There are such gulfs in our understanding of M&E. For example, when I suggested that AKC, the management company responsible for the policy components, should decide which components needed most M&E help, AKC didn't seem to like this and DFID said we should be deciding, not AKC. There are also great differences in our understanding of implementation risk, and the implications of this for our work. And we should have sorted out roles and responsibilities from the start; this has been a big problem.

The goal of most development projects is to have an impact on people's lives, but often this is not what is assessed because you can't get there. What you are looking at are the changes that will ultimately have a bearing on people's lives. And that's OK. With CATIA, there's a long way between ICT policy and access changes and the effect these will have on people's lives. DFID can justifiably ask what is happening at beneficiary level, but it's unlikely in a project like this that we can get to that level.

The goal of most development projects is to have an impact on people's lives, but often this is not what is assessed because you can't get there. What you are looking at are the changes that will ultimately have a bearing on people's lives. And that's OK.

MARY MYERS. DFID Consultant, CATIA programme, UK*Evaluation experience: Extensive, particularly in radio**Definition of 'impact assessment': "An exercise to see whether a project has met its objectives, and what effect there has been beyond those objectives."**Interview: Face-to-face interview, at DFID, conducted by Kay Sayce; February 2004*

CATIA is a 3-year programme, funded by DFID. It began in February 2003 and has nine projects. The target group is Africa's poor — rural and urban. CATIA is pan-African, but we've selected seven priority countries — DR Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal and Uganda. Three projects have a direct contract with DFID. The others are being managed by AKC, a management company. The AKC projects started a little later, in June 2003.

I'm an adviser to the CATIA programme, with David Woolnough; we're consultants contracted by DFID. My responsibilities are to manage the two radio projects and to coordinate the work by the assessors, Big World (BW). I wrote the 'call for bids' and drew up the terms of reference. In the call for bids, we asked for details on methodology, staffing, budget and timing. We chose BW although their proposal was a little vague, and they asked for 6 months to understand CATIA and decide on a methodology. I knew some of their group and was impressed with Rick Davies' fresh approach to evaluation, his 'most-significant-change' approach, his ideas on validating anecdotal material — all very qualitative. A qualitative approach is the only approach for assessing a programme like CATIA; there isn't really a place for much number crunching with this sort of programme.

The assessment ends when the programme ends. This is so that, if the assessment is positive, it will help us get more funds for a Phase 2. We think that, ideally, CATIA should go on for at least 7 years. So the length and timing of the assessment is directly linked to these considerations.

How BW do the assessment is up to them. Like us, they're feeling their way a bit on this. It was BW who came up with the need for an inception phase and we went along with that so long as we get a good work-plan at the end of this phase. We did have a say on timing, in that we wanted them to come in as early as possible. I've seen too any evaluations that are inadequate because they came in late or at the end of a project. In BW's logframe, there are some deliverables in the first 6 months; for example, we want them to look at the projects' individual logframes and help to solidify them. You need to work on the basis of the logframes. We also said that working well with the other actors is fundamental. They can't go off on their own track. They have to work out their evaluation approach in partnership with DFID, AKC, the project managers, etc.

We chose external assessors because we want to see the evaluation process as a partnership between CATIA and BW, but we also want an objective perspective on CATIA. In this

I've seen too any evaluations that are inadequate because they came in late or at the end of a project.

ICTs–Africa–evaluation community it was quite hard to find people not linked in any way to CATIA! The objectivity of the assessors is very important to us. DFID would have preferred more African experts in the BW team, but BW says it will subcontract a lot of the work to African experts. This is an African-based project and we need Africans involved in the assessment for many reasons, not least because it will help to build trust.

I do foresee difficulties in BW working closely with CATIA and yet remaining objective, and we'll have to watch this closely. BW must watch this too. There is a great fear about being evaluated, and BW needs to work with everyone in such a way that they don't feel they are being policed. We've encouraged the CATIA projects to see BW as being there not to judge them but to help them learn and improve the project outcomes.

There is a great fear about being evaluated, and the consultants need to work with everyone in such a way that they don't feel they are being policed.

There has been some resistance to BW, some suspicion about its work. BW is not being transparent enough about what it is doing. And perhaps, at DFID, we are not giving the projects enough information about BW. But BW is beginning to establish friendly relationships with project people now. There are just a few slight difficulties. The budget question, for example. Who pays for the baseline that BW wants to do and the projects say they didn't budget for? What is needed is for everyone to be talking to everyone, not channelling concerns through third parties. It's all about human interaction, which is always delicate and needs care.

The project teams vary in size; some are too small to do M&E alone and will need help. This relationship between the individual project M&E processes and the BW process is all being thrashed out right now. It is likely that BW will deal with the higher-level logframe assumptions, the big questions; for example, does better internet access result in better pro-poor radio programming? And the projects will do the usual monitoring, such as hits on websites and other tasks they can do which BW wouldn't have the time to do.

In an ideal world we'd like, of course, to see the effects of CATIA on ICT access and pro-poor ICT policies. But, realistically, it's not likely. The programme is short, only 3 years. And BW has already indicated that they are going to use an outcome mapping approach, which looks not at the direct effects, but at behavioural changes connected with communication flows and with changes in access and the policy environment. So, to this extent, they are backing away from measuring direct impact. They have said that this is as far as they can go. David wants more on showing direct impact. I'm more into how we use the BW evaluation for learning. For example, BW has asked about the theory of change underlying CATIA. They are right to want it to be more explicit. In this way they are nudging all of us and this is good for the programme. They should be talking to all the actors involved so as to establish the theory of change.

BW faces several big challenges. One relates to the time required to talk to project stakeholders across Africa. This is a big practical challenge. They are already finding it hard to have enough face-to-face meetings with the project managers, but this is something they must do to build up trust with the managers. A second challenge relates to procedural difficulties within the BW team. There are six of them, which I think is too many, and they are all over the world, in

Canada, the UK, and some travel a lot. The third challenge is the budget: are they going to be able to make it cover all they need to do? And the fourth challenge is to ensure that they talk to the right people. This may sound obvious, but it is fundamental. They will be identifying inner stakeholders (people directly connected to the projects) and outer stakeholders (people further down the line, such as rural radio listeners), and will be talking more to the outer stakeholders and looking at the communication flows from outer to inner. They also, of course, have to ask the right questions. It's going to be hard for them to pin down exactly who they should be talking to and what questions they should ask.

The evaluation is being done mainly for DFID and for the CATIA project teams. And for David and me. We'll use the website to put the findings in the public domain, and we'll share them with IDRC who are implementing their Connectivity Africa project, which complements CATIA. DFID is not sure whether ICTs can benefit the poor. We need studies to tell us if they do. We need evidence for and against. This assessment exercise will, we hope, give us some evidence, either way.

PATRICIA NORRISH. Evaluation Consultant, UK

Evaluation experience: *Extensive in the communication field, including impact assessment*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"It's about seeing what effect you've had on the people you intended to have an effect on, and whether it is the intended effect."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, in consultant's office, conducted by Kay Sayce; March 2004*

The aim of CATIA is to increase access to ICTs in Africa in a way that will ultimately improve the lives of the poor. I was keen on doing an inception phase for the evaluation because when we read the tender there was a lot we didn't understand. The project title gives the impression it's one coherent programme, but actually it's nine components and the links between them are fairly tenuous. Someone must have a view of how it all fits together, but I can't see it yet.

And the purpose of the evaluation is unclear. The contract refers to us as an M&E team, and covers impact as well as performance evaluation. I'm not sure we are going to be able to show impact in just 3 years. Someone recently mentioned something about a CATIA Phase 2. So our study will obviously be important for that. All we can do in the current phase is the groundwork. Behind all this is that fact that technologies don't stand still, so it will be difficult to pinpoint CATIA's contribution to the changes that are ongoing anyway.

When I saw the DFID tender for the evaluation, I contacted Rick because of his expertise in M&E and he has a view on ICTs' evaluation. We then brought in the others, who between them

had experience in ICTs, local content, policy work and multi-stakeholder consultation in large information and communication projects. DFID was keen on including Africans to do the actual work on the ground. We hoped we could bring in these local consultants during the inception phase, but this has not been possible. One of the difficulties has been that because we are unclear about CATIA itself, it was difficult to come up with the terms of reference for the local consultants. There is a bit of a gender issue here. The DFID team is one man, one woman, so that's OK. Our team is five men, one woman, so not so OK. We must ensure a good gender balance among the local consultants.

We see part of our role as meta-monitoring. The individual projects will each be doing their own M&E, and this will be fed into our work, and from this we will develop the overall picture of where CATIA is going and what effect it is having. There have been some problems with understanding how the individual M&Es will work alongside us, and budgetary questions — who pays for what — have arisen and still need to be resolved. These sorts of things need to be clarified at the outset, or you run into disputes, particularly in big programmes like this one.

A major aspect of the study design will be to use a network analysis approach to the evaluation. There's a lot of work out there now on network analysis, but no one has actually written it up yet. The notion of networks is common to development work, of course, so applying it to evaluation seems a logical step. DFID's response to this has been positive. My feeling is that DFID isn't really interested in what approach we use, just so long as we tell them what it is. I firmly believe one should not have blueprints. What you need to be clear about is what it is you want to have answers to. There's a lot to be said for good old plain interviewing. In recent years, there has been a proliferation of tools, tools for this and tools for that, dozens of toolkits. The cupboard is stuffed with toolkits! But each project is different, and for each you need a different combination of tools. You can't just pick up a toolkit or a blueprint and apply it.

What I like about this study is the opportunity it provides to try new approaches. For example, using the 'most-significant-change' (MSC) approach. It's a very flexible, adaptable method, not a blueprint, has a strong qualitative content, but can also take in a quantitative aspect. It introduces some rigour into the qualitative approach, which is something we've all been looking for. How exactly we'll apply it is not clear yet.

It's going to be very difficult to show the link between CATIA and improved ICT access and poor ICT policy-making. You are not going to get a one-to-one correlation. All the work in the policy field shows this is not how it happens. The more important question is: Does it matter whether or not we can show a correlation? People get too hung up on trying to show the link between a project and changes. There is an accumulation of things that lead to change, and somewhere there is a tipping point, something that leads directly to decision-making. How do you pin down that tipping point? People draw 'decision-making trees' to show how farmers make decisions, but this is not real. What is real is the drip, drip of information that leads, at some point, to change. All we can do with CATIA is to say it will make — we hope — a contribution to policy change. On ICT access, that might be a bit easier. Following the process of information

A major aspect of the study design will be to use a network analysis approach to the evaluation. The notion of networks is common to development work, of course, so applying it to evaluation seems a logical step.

being downloaded and turned into local content. There is training involved, and it's easier to see how people use the skills acquired in training and how that changes their work.

A problem we've had from the beginning was a lack of evidence for the statements DFID was making. Our questioning them about the evidence has led to hackles rising! And they've sometimes been a bit obstructive. They seem torn between being top-down and participatory. For example, we suggest a list of priority countries for the study and they disagree. They hired a very professional group of people to do the study, but now they keep getting in our way. They hadn't thought through how the projects would do their own M&E. Nor are there any communication strategies in place. There does seem to be a change lately, though; the tone in e-mails between us and DFID and the project managers has improved. Perhaps the lack of clarity stemmed from DFID not being clear about what exactly they wanted. Perhaps they were saying less than positive things to the project managers about us, and *vice versa*. What we needed at the outset was a workshop bringing us all together for the specific purpose of team-building and sorting out roles and responsibilities. This need to get everyone on board is a major thing, and should have been done. Relationships in projects are so important if things are going to work.

I see two main challenges ahead. One is that we — DFID, us and the project teams — should all be on the same side. The other is how to reach the true stakeholders, the people whom the project should be having an impact on. How do we identify them? How will we know we have identified them correctly? The socio-cultural and political context of each African country differs, you can't generalise. So, that's the big challenge — identifying the beneficiaries.

As to the findings from the study, that's not something we've thought much about. We need a strategy for that. It's not clear whose responsibility it is to disseminate the findings from the study. There will, of course, be ongoing feedback during the evaluation.

How do we reach the true stakeholders, the people whom the project should be having an impact on. How do we identify them? How will we know we have identified them correctly?

**CLAIRE SIBTHORPE. CATIA Programme Manager, Atos KPMG Consulting (AKC), UK
(based in South Africa)**

Evaluation experience: *Limited, apart from evaluating a telecentres project*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"How far a project can reach the poor and how we can tell when it has."*

Interview: *Telephone interview, conducted by Kay Sayce; February 2004*

CATIA (Catalysing Access to ICTs in Africa) is driven by DFID mainly, but there are other donors, some working through DFID, others directly funding some of the CATIA projects. They include SIDA, IDRC and USAID. The aim of CATIA, ultimately, is to benefit the poor through

improved ICT access and policies. CATIA consists of six components focused on ICT policy and regulatory reform, and three more practical components. AKC, with its consortium, is responsible for the implementation of six of the nine components, as well as the coordination of the programme as a whole. CATIA is trying to be a catalyst for processes aimed at promoting affordable access to ICTs in order to enable poor people to gain benefits from the opportunities offered by ICTs. It is a 3-year project, so it cannot really do more than contribute to a process.

There is quite a bit of debate within CATIA at the moment on impact — on how the programme can affect poor people, how far CATIA can be expected to reach the poor and how we can tell when it has. We are working, for instance, on policy reform, which is a long process. Within the timeframe of CATIA, it's very unlikely that any policy changes that can be attributed to CATIA will have reached the poorer communities. It will also be hard to attribute policy changes directly to CATIA. Therefore, we are more interested in the impact of our work on the people we are working with, on changes in behaviour and policy approaches. This is probably a more realistic way of measuring the impact of the programme. Some of the questions that have come up include how to link what CATIA is doing with impact on poor people at this stage and how the evaluators are going to take into account all of the other factors that will come into play, apart from the CATIA intervention.

*It is a 3-year project,
so it cannot really do
more than contribute to
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The understanding is that DFID is funding an assessment of CATIA that will help to show how this type of investment in ICT access and policy reform relates to the poverty reduction agenda and how it benefits poor communities. It is beneficial for DFID to invest money to find an answer to these questions. They are starting an impact evaluation at the beginning of the project instead of doing it halfway through or, more usually, at the end of the project. This is a good approach and will inform the assessment process as well as CATIA.

I know very little about the evaluation design of the independent assessor at this point. The evaluators started their inception phase after the CATIA projects had started, and there has been very little interaction with them. The interaction started just a few weeks ago; until then we knew very little. We submitted all the project logframes to them for feedback, in October, and have recently had some feedback on these, although we would have liked this earlier. I don't think there has been much interaction by the evaluation team at the individual project level. I know the evaluators will be hiring local consultants to interview stakeholders about impact and are planning to pick a few countries where this process will be carried out. We have had discussions about our role in identifying stakeholders. I will be interested to see the degree to which local consultants are used. I think it's fine to have a mix of people — Africans and non-Africans — to bring in the different perspectives and experiences.

I would have liked more interaction with the evaluation team during this inception phase. It's very important that we understand each other and are all properly informed and willing to share experiences. It would be a great loss if this understanding were not there. We've had no input, really, into the evaluation approach; they've sent us questions to answer, but we've not been part

of the design. I hope that when it comes to carrying out the evaluation there will be closer interaction, so that they properly understand what it is we are doing and trying to achieve. The projects are doing their own M&Es; it would have been useful to know more about what was being planned for the main evaluation so that we could match the M&E plans to this, and make sure we aren't duplicating things. There has been a little tension about the M&E issue. It's nobody's fault, though, it's a question of timing. The evaluation is starting later than the projects, so we are further along than they are. It's a pity it didn't start at the same time as the programme. We are waiting for their report at the end of the inception phase. It may mean more work for us as we may have to change things to take their work into account.

The evaluators are wearing two hats — one is to provide support for us in our own M&E of the projects and the other is to evaluate the programme and our work. This dual support and policing role may cause some tensions for them.

Having said all that, we were very excited by DFID's decision to bring in an evaluation team, especially because we are limited to doing M&E more at the output level. We see the team's work as potentially of great benefit for the projects. A very positive move.

I see several major challenges for the evaluators. The first — an immediate challenge — is to fully understand the programme, its core principles and aims. The second is to establish that there has been an impact from CATIA on poor people at the community level. I think this will be almost impossible, because of the time frame, only 3 years. To truly see the impact at community level, I think the team should come back some years after the project has finished. Measuring the impact at the more intermediate level is less problematic. The third challenge is to link the changes seen to CATIA, as opposed to the many other factors that could be responsible for those changes. In Kenya, for example, there is some ICT policy reform taking place already — how will they measure to what extent CATIA had anything to do with that?

I don't know what the plans are to disseminate the evaluation findings, but we are very keen to know what they are so that we can plan our meetings at project level around when we will be getting feedback from the evaluators. We want to make use of their findings as the project moves forward and not just see them at the end of the programme.

I think DFID genuinely wants to use the findings to inform its work on ICTs, to provide guidance on whether a major investment in ICTs in Africa will benefit the poor. There is still the problem of CATIA being too short, though, and thus the programme and the evaluation being unrealistic in terms providing DFID with the answers it's looking for on ICTs and poverty alleviation.

They are starting an impact evaluation at the beginning of the project instead of doing it halfway through or, more usually, at the end of the project. This is a good approach.

STUDY 2

REFLECT INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES PROJECT, INDIA

The study

The aim of ActionAid's Reflect programme, launched in the mid-1990s, is to strengthen the meaningful participation of poor and marginalised people in decisions that affect their lives. It works through village groups ('Reflect Circles'), helping them to develop communication skills, become engaged in the wider social change processes and acquire the knowledge and confidence not only to assess their own needs but also to assess the impact of efforts to meet those needs. A key element of the programme is creating space where people feel comfortable meeting and discussing issues relevant to their lives. The programme sees information and communication technologies (ICTs) as potentially powerful tools for marginalised communities to increase their ability to learn and to make their voices heard.

The Balangir project in Orissa, India is one of three ActionAid pilot projects (the other two are in Burundi and Uganda) focusing on introducing ICTs through Reflect Circles. Recurring drought has made Balangir one of the most poverty-stricken districts in the country. ActionAid's intervention seeks to strengthen, through a lengthy process of training and facilitated discussions, the Circles' communication capacity by providing ICTs that they themselves have chosen and encouraging them to use this capacity to mobilise their communities on land, labour and drought-related issues and to challenge government strategies with information generated at the village and district levels.

Overseeing the Reflect programme is **David Archer**, based at ActionAid's headquarters in London. The coordinator of Reflect's ICTs project is **Hannah Beardon**. The Balangir project manager when Phase 1 began in January 2003 was **Alok Roth**, working through the project coordinator in the Balangir field office, **Subrat Rout**. In Phase 1, a baseline study was conducted and project activities were geared towards developing proposals for implementing Phase 2. In Phase 2 (2004–2005), the Circles were to select the ICTs best suited to local needs and, towards the end of 2005, they would assess their impact on the communities. The focus of the Phase 1 activities, therefore, was to equip the Circles, through training and discussion, with the tools and skills they would need to assess their communication needs, to plan the Phase 2 activities, to select indicators against which to measure the impact of these activities and,

The names in bold in this summary of the impact study are the names of the people whose stories follow the summary.

ultimately, to conduct the impact assessment. Among the members of these Circles were **Tapaswini Sahu** from Dholmahul village and **Jayaram Bariha** from Kudopali village, both of them members of Balangir's Central Drought Action Committee (CDAC).

For this book, participants in the Balangir project were interviewed towards the end of Phase 1, to provide an example of an impact assessment approach — in this case, a bottom-up, rights-based approach — at the planning stage. With planning emerging as a core factor in impact assessment, it was considered that a more in-depth look at planning, through the eyes of some of those involved in it (as in the case of Study 1, pages 12–25) was warranted.

The process followed in Phase 1 of the Balangir project involved training facilitators who would achieve a balance between guidance and support, and provide technical advice at appropriate times without defining the outcomes of the Reflect Circles' analyses. The facilitators then worked with the Circles, through discussion groups which met at least weekly, to explore the value and use of information, to develop participatory tools for identifying information gaps and communication needs, and to assess various ICTs and their potential uses. They encouraged the Circles to talk about project expectations and helped them to map out a set of indicators against which they could later measure the impact of the project. Throughout the process, links were maintained between the Reflect Circles in Balangir and those in the other two pilot projects in Burundi and Uganda, as well as with government and other agencies, such as the Collective Action in Drought Mitigation in Balangir (CADMB).

By the end of Phase 1, the Balangir Reflect team was expected to have a detailed plan for Phase 2, based on the Circles' discussions and decisions, covering:

- what type of information the villages required and what technology was needed to access it;
- what mechanisms and technology were required to document local knowledge;
- proposed expenditure in Phase 2 on a communication centre (or whatever materialised from the planning process);
- how the centre would be managed, monitored, used and sustained;
- how the impact of the centre on the Reflect villages would be measured at the end of the project in late 2005.

The proposals put forward at the end of Phase 1 included a list of six impact indicators — broad at this stage, to be refined once the villagers start using the ICTs. The indicators related to improved land rights, increased awareness of migrant labourers' rights, the formation and registration of migrant-labourers' associations, reduced child migration, a reduced death rate from starvation, improved food security among the young and elderly, and the use of only local labour in all government development projects in the district. Impact in all these areas was to be measured by Reflect Circles, with support (where needed) from ActionAid, CADMB and CDAC.

The stories

DAVID ARCHER. Head of International Education, ActionAid International, UK

Evaluation experience: *Extensive, including impact assessment*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"The only perspective from which to see impact is that of the community itself. What they think impact is, that is what matters. No one else's perspective really does, as no one else sufficiently understands the complex dynamic of their lives."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at ActionAid, conducted by Kay Sayce and Pat Norrish; October 2003*

Reflect is a process-based approach to adult learning and empowerment inspired by Paulo Freire. The process determines the impact. We used to have this idea of the impact chain — input, output, outcome, impact — but this isn't realistic. Impact is the big, big picture. It's not instantly measurable. And it's very difficult, when one *can* see impact, to attribute it to the original project anyway. People, NGOs, like to think they, in particular, have made an impact. That's nonsense. They don't look at the work of others. De-contextualising is a real problem with all evaluations. Projects don't talk about what else is happening around them, what other agencies are doing; or if they do, they belittle their efforts somehow, so they can take credit for impact. This is human nature. You can't stop it. The important thing is to recognise it, to take it into account. And recognise that no individual agency can claim to cause impact, only to make a contribution to impact. That's the most that any of us can claim.

The most important thing is to recognise the power relations involved in project work. From whose perspective are we trying to measure impact? Whose impact? And who's doing this measuring? This is all value-laden stuff. As far as I'm concerned, only the community's perspective of impact matters. But we need to recognise how value judgements distort the picture because of the power relations involved. Often, you can ask people at grassroots level what they think changed and they'll say what they were led to believe — by the development agency — would change. It's part of the mythology around development projects. People are told a project will change things for them, so when asked if it did they simply buy into the mythology and say yes, things changed as a direct result of the project.

So, we must talk about power relations with all those involved in the project. Impact — if by that we mean the big picture — is about whether power relations have changed. Did people's roles change, their self-perception, their confidence, to the extent that they now have the power to speak out, to demand, to get things done? If so, that's impact. I believe stories are very important. Getting participants in projects to relate their stories helps you find the connections between events. Those connections give you an idea, an impression, of impact. If you get lots of stories you begin to see the real connections and, thus, the overall story.

We used to have this idea of the impact chain — input, output, outcome, impact — but this isn't realistic. Impact is the big, big picture. It's not instantly measurable.

In all this, donors are a big problem! They don't find impact a comfortable subject. They have considerable power with governments in developing countries, but it should be a country's citizens and civil society organisations that have that power, at national level, not foreign donors. Donors should have far less power than they do at national level. DFID is slowly showing signs of being aware of this. There are significant power relationships between any large donor and any agency that receives funding — but these are rarely critically analysed in evaluations — even where projects talk about 'empowerment'.

DFID is funding the Reflect/ICTs project in Burundi, India and Uganda. This builds on existing Reflect processes that aim to address communication and power issues in the lives of poor and excluded people. The added dimension in this project is to enable participants in such processes to identify the communication technologies that would be of greatest value to them.

DFID hasn't influenced the project very much, only in the minutiae. It helps provide the framework, and then it's just concerned with small things, the finances, not the big picture. It's quite detached from that.

But there is a tension at the core of this project because it aims to challenge existing models of 'ICTs for development' — and yet is funded by a DFID department that usually funds more traditional models. Many projects in ICTs are premised upon the idea that such and such a technology is good for the people. Just give it to them. Our project was set up specifically to challenge this, to show that such an approach cannot have impact. Just giving people the technology never works. Mobile phones, computers, radios — they will solve everything? We say no. It depends on who makes decisions about the choice of the technology, who has access to it on an ongoing basis and how the communication technology relates to people's existing patterns of communication and their existing lives. Most ICT projects are technology-led and, far from closing the digital divide, are in fact opening it further because they don't address power relations.

Reflect started in 1993 as an approach to adult literacy and empowerment, but has now moved beyond this — moving away from a narrow view of 'literacy' to 'communication'. The emphasis on communication shifts the debate and the focus of evaluation. We don't want people evaluating 'levels of literacy' in a traditional way. Rather, we believe it is important to look at the whole process — at how people's capacity to communicate has strengthened in practice.

How DFID evaluates the impact of this programme is up to them. Part of the standard approach is to use external evaluators who invariably focus on literacy or come up with indicators all over the place, when they have little understanding of the context or people's lives. There is a role for external evaluators from the point of view of objectivity, of course, but they must understand what you are trying to do and they must understand the context in terms of power relations — and their own power. There is rarely much critical self reflection by external evaluators. The whole process of external evaluation is a dimension of the power relations that surround the project, and it seems bizarre not to look critically at those dimensions of power.

Impact is about whether power relations have changed. Did people's roles change, their self-perception, their confidence, to the extent that they now have the power to speak out, to demand, to get things done? If so, that's impact.

Donors maintain their power via their planning and reporting systems. Then they will look at whether your project has 'empowered' people as it said it would. But does anyone have the right to ask about such things when they have so little awareness of their own power? We are all part of the process — we cannot exempt ourselves. No one can pretend to be a neutral observer.

JAYARAM BARIHA. Reflect Facilitator, Kudopali village, Balangir, India

Evaluation experience: *Limited*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"To know about the effectiveness of the project and to learn for better implementation of the project in other areas."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, in Kudopali village, conducted by Yudhisthira Panigrahi; February 2004*

I am working in the Reflect and ICT project in the Agalpur Block of Balangir district. I am playing the role of facilitator and am monitoring the functioning of a circle. Besides this, I am the president of Central Drought Action Committee of Balangir, a forum to fight drought with people's participation. ActionAid-India is providing financial assistance through people's organisations. The poor, the destitute widows and other distressed women of society, the handicapped and poorest of the poor are the stakeholders of the project.

The aim and objectives of the project are identification of the poorest of poor people, providing them with proper information to improve their economic condition, ensuring good governance, stopping distress migration, and operationalising micro-level planning.

I perceive the impact assessment as seeing how the information helps the poorest of the poor to improve their livelihoods. We have started the ICTs project in 100 Reflect Circles on a pilot basis in our district. And if it succeeds we will start it in another 232 villages. So it is very necessary to know about the impact.

I have not been involved in setting the indicators. This project is meant for the poorest of the poor, and so the people involved in the Circle management should be involved in setting the impact indicators. Among others who should be involved in the assessment are the representatives of local government, representatives of NGOs and CBOs, and representatives of people's organisations.

The major advantages of the Reflect approach are getting the right to information, ensuring transparency, straightforward decision-making, and proper ownership by poor people. We have

We have had both successes and failures while implementing the approach, so we have also made an assessment of our failures, and to rectify those mistakes we have taken proper steps. It is a learning process.

had both successes and failures while implementing the approach in this district. We have also made an assessment of our failures, and to rectify those mistakes we have taken proper steps. It is a learning process.

HANNAH BEARDON. International Coordinator of the Reflect/ICTs project, ActionAid International, UK

Evaluation experience: *Extensive, including impact assessment*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"What the target group expects to happen and, from their perspective, what does happen."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at ActionAid, conducted by Kay Sayce and Pat Norrish; October 2003*

I see 'impact assessment' as shorthand for something that doesn't exist. Or depends on the context. It is not neutral. The choice of what to assess is political.

The most important thing about impact assessment is the different perspectives of it that people have. This includes the donors' perspective. I think it is quite important to be clear about the donor's perspective and to understand their motives. It is sometimes difficult to know what donors are interested in, what impact they're after. They are keen to set up indicators, but that's purely for accountability, nothing to do with changing lives. Indicators are just a sort of audit. Donors don't have an impact focus, in my experience.

In this project, there are lots of actors and each has different motivations and parts to play. In my case, for example, it is not direct impact on people's lives that I am involved in, but the research into methods and processes. I am interested in how the process affects ownership and how concepts translate into reality. I want the impact to be much broader than the project. The area of information for development is where I want to see impact.

Impact assessment is surrounded by many perspectives and expectations. You have to recognise all of them and plan for them, or things get too difficult. We must be honest about what everyone is getting out of a project. I'm here partly for what I'm getting out of it. So is everyone else. We have to be open about that, from the outset, and evaluations should reflect the different perspectives and expectations.

There are a lot of dangers ahead in the second phase of the project. Many points in the chain are weak and we could easily end up doing a standard impact assessment. We must be careful to

distinguish between reality and rhetoric, and understand the complexity of power relations. I hope to get out of this the bits that can be formalised into tools for process-based research, tools that address such factors as people's skills, the environment, the dialogue, the context. Context and personal viewpoints are central to this project.

We're looking for impact in our peer group, wanting it to understand what we are doing. I'm interested in the theory. So I have to be sure what is happening in the pilots in Burundi, India and Uganda is comparable. But if you talk to Subrat Rout, you'll see that his aims are entirely different; he is more concerned with the local context. I need to be flexible enough to allow him his perspectives but make sure we all have the same vision and that other perspectives don't jeopardise what we are trying to do here.

If I had to do this again, I would make sure before starting that all the different expectations and perspectives fitted into our approach. It's not a case of there being differences. It's a case of them fitting together. And a major point of our approach is that we must move away from the dependency culture that too many development people inadvertently reinforce. The communities we work with must be allowed to do their own assessments and to take responsibility for them. This is fundamental to the project.

The most significant things about this project for me are that I'm so much more confident now about what we are doing, and I realise now just how crucial information and communication are in development. Looking at all development from the perspective of two factors — rights and information — makes our approach applicable to all development interventions. I feel increasingly confident in saying, in meetings around the world, that information access is possibly the most crucial thing for development.

The donor hasn't influenced our approach at all. Since the funding came through, they've not got involved at all. They don't seem interested in this new learning about participatory approaches to impact assessment. I've no idea what they want to see at the end. All they asked for were indicators. Any interest they do have seems to be on the quantitative side. Our approach probably looks too woolly to them, so there's no liaison, except on bureaucratic issues. This does of course give us a lot of freedom, but even so I'd like them to show a little interest.

Getting the target community to set their own impact indicators — that's an issue for Subrat. How it plays out on the ground will be interesting, but it's not in my control. They need to see how power shifts in the Reflect Circles. The people in India that Alok trained looked good, but of course we recognise that they all have their own agendas. I'd like to know if they are all still following the purpose of the project, whatever their personal agendas.

I'm not really bothered about attribution. The target community will know what the project did for them, what changes to attribute to it. People's lives are so complex, there's just no value in worrying about attribution. What's important is: did lives change? There's no such thing as an

It is sometimes difficult to know what donors are interested in, what impact they're after. They are keen to set up indicators, but that's purely for accountability, nothing to do with changing lives.

impact chain. We really don't want to fall into that trap. More important in everything we are doing is the process and the context, and how to develop all this into a model.

I think our approach is replicable. It will show, for example, that there are ways to make telecentre projects work. Most of them have failed and we can show why. We want to be able to pull out of our approach something on how to make ICT projects work, provide at least some of the pieces of the puzzle. I don't expect the whole of our approach to be adopted, just pieces of it.

The scale of the project doesn't affect the validity of the impact. However many we work with doesn't matter. Linking a process with an outcome is what's important, not how many were involved.

Impact assessment is all about attitudes, not numbers. Changing attitudes in the peer group, and thus changing the structure and process of projects so as to have multiplier effect. The lasting impact is in the way projects are run. If they can be more effective through using something from our model, that's what I want. To feed in something of our learning and thus change the way that projects do things. At the basis of all our work is the question: how do we find out what is wanted by poor communities? This is the question I'm trying to answer. If we get the process right, then there'll be impact.

The communities we work with must be allowed to do their own assessments and to take responsibility for them. This is fundamental to the project.

ALOK ROTH. Programme Manager, Reflect/ICTs Balangir project, ActionAid–India

Evaluation experience: *Research and field experience, including impact assessment*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"Progressive change from an existing situation, positive or negative."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at ActionAid UK, conducted by Kay Sayce and Pat Norrish; October 2003*

The Bolangir project is one where the target group is being facilitated to decide on what ICTs they need and, later, to assess their impact. The impact gets constantly monitored by the target group, to make adjustments where necessary; then, at the end of donor funding period, the target group produces an impact report.

I was the team leader of the Bolangir project initially. I was involved in the whole process, from concept to planning to implementing. But now it can run itself. There are two major stakeholders in this project: the donor and the people — the primary stakeholders. These are the two that

One of the biggest challenges is ongoing commitment. You have to get this right at all levels and all stages. And make all see that impact assessment is part of the process, good or bad impact. Impact can't be understood otherwise.

matter most. They both have to get it right for this project to work. DFID has a huge stake, a huge responsibility to support the spirit of the project. It has to learn to accept the target group's decisions, to respect them and to support them. If DFID can't do this, then the project has no value. There is a third important stakeholder — the government — that the project hopes to influence in terms of pro-poor ICT policy.

Impact assessment is part of the reflective process. The Reflect Circles work through action plans to improve overall community well-being, particularly that of the most vulnerable people. The villages where there are no Reflect Circles act as a control group. This just happened. With our resources we couldn't have a Reflect Circle in every village, so we decided to use those without one as our control. The idea just sort of grew. And it will add meaning to measuring the impact of the project. It'll also help to see what adverse impact there is. You must take adverse impact into account, especially when dealing with the most marginalised. Unless there is qualitative change in the target group's lives and livelihoods there is no impact, and this has to show up among the most marginalised people. They are the ones we should take the measure from, to decide on impact. If the lives of the most marginalised don't change, there is no impact.

Phase 1 is nearly at an end now. The baseline work has been done as the reference point and they are busy getting target groups to choose the ICTs they want. The facilitators help them reach decisions on ICTs through discussion groups. And they have been talking to them about impact indicators, not in detail yet though, not until they actually start using the ICTs and begin to see what exactly to look for, what can be achieved. It's a continuous dialogue. This has all been happening now and they are compiling the information for Phase 2. All decisions by the target group go through to DFID, and DFID has to decide on funding Phase 2.

With this project one keeps learning all the time. This project is my major impact experience in the field. Before that, as a researcher, I saw impact from the research view. I did a lot of work on it, but what I have seen on the ground has made me think very differently about it. It was only once I was in the field that I really saw the importance of placing people at the very centre of impact assessment.

One of the biggest challenges in this project is ongoing commitment. You have to get this right at all levels and all stages. And make all see that impact assessment is part of the process, good or bad impact. Impact can't be understood otherwise. This commitment issue has come up in relation to DFID. At first they were committed to 3 years. Then they changed this to 1 year plus 2 more years. We had to defend our idea of putting the target group at the centre of decision-making. DFID had doubts about our approach, so they said 1 year first, let's see how it goes, then 2 years.

Once the project is completed, the findings will go to various stakeholder groups, including the local and national government, and they must do the follow-up. It's not for DFID to follow up. It's the government. The government has the resources and it makes the policies. In this way, the work of ActionAid and DFID feeds into government policy straight from the grassroots level, which is how it should be. There has been a lot of interaction with government officials during

the project, and this will continue in Phase 2, so that when the findings are there for them to act upon, they already know all about Reflect.

It is a constant challenge to make them see the people-centred aspect of our work. The culture is not used to poor people, marginalised people, speaking out for themselves. People are used to strikes or marches, but not this sort of speaking out. So, the concept of these people making decisions and evaluating changes and then advocating action was hard for everyone at first — the government officials as well as the target group. It seems quite radical. All we are doing is giving the poor the means to get the information they need to make decisions and speak out.

SUBRAT ROUT. Project Coordinator, Reflect/ICTs project, Balangir Field Office, ActionAid–India

Evaluation experience: *Considerable experience, including impact assessment*

Definition of ‘impact assessment’: *“A methodology to evaluate both the qualitative and tangible indicators set forth for the effective accomplishment of a project.”*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at the Balangir Field Office, conducted by Yudhisthira Panigrahi; February 2004*

This project aims at enabling the poorest of the poor to access information useful for the improvement of their lives and for the assertion of their basic rights. It also seeks to enable them to better produce and disseminate their own materials, to make their voices heard at every level, and to give them control over choosing and managing the communications technology.

A major chunk of the funds comes from DFID through ActionAid–UK. Part of the project is being supported by ActionAid–India. The major stakeholders are the poorest and the most marginalised sections of population — migrant workers, landless wage labourers, tea-plantation pickers, children of migrant workers, *Dalits*, the destitute and the disabled. The majority of Reflect participants are landless people who are distressed migrant workers. The Reflect facilitators and all grassroots-level activists are also stakeholders in the project.

So far as this project is concerned, the impact assessment indicators will relate to such issues as stable incomes and productive employment opportunities, labourers’ rights, social institutions as voices for the poor, increased self-employment, more opportunity for entrepreneurship, reducing child labour and ending forced labour, ending discrimination (especially against girls, women and *Dalits*), and healthier and safer workplaces. These are all qualitative. There are also many tangible indicators, to do with numbers of landless getting legal occupancy of land, numbers of migrant

workers covered by insurance policies, numbers of children being enrolled in schools, numbers still dying from starvation, and so on.

Priority is given to the opinions of the project participants expressed in group meetings, based on the question, 'What do you want to see to happen at the end of the project?'

The decisions about the indicators have been reached through a series of training courses, workshops and meetings with project coordinators, facilitators, members of partner organisations, community organisations — but the priority is given to the opinions of the Reflect participants expressed in group meetings, based on the question, 'What do you want to see to happen at the end of the project?' Some indicators were put forward, unknowingly, by the Reflect participants during the needs assessment studies, but they were not ready to make decisions about the indicators then, since they were not quite clear about the concept of Reflect and ICTs. During the implementation phase, it will be necessary to amend the indicators. They will change from time to time and from place to place. As to the choice of ICTs, the Reflect participants are ready to do this. So far as I and the team are concerned, it is already in the frame, but it is not my or the team's decisions that matter but the decision of the Reflect participants. How the participants will actually assess the project is all a learning process.

I think the project is certainly going to have impact at the local level and the district level, as well as at the State level. However, so far as my interest is concerned, I earnestly wish to see the impact at the local level with the poorest of the poor having changes in their conditions and positions in the society in order to live a life with dignity. Nevertheless, to achieve this goal, greater advocacy through the collective efforts of the Reflect participants is required, starting from village level to district level and up to the State level for policy-influencing measures. It should be the poorest sections who have a final say in local policy decisions and ultimate ownership of the entire developmental process.

TAPASWINI SAHU. Reflect Participant, Dholmahul village, Balangir, India

Evaluation experience: None

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"If the people in other areas accept and replicate our work, then we believe that the work has made an impact."*

Interview: Face-to-face interview, in Dholmahul village, conducted by Yudhisthira Panigrahi; February 2004

At present, I am the secretary of Basudha Vikash Samitee and Vice President of the Collective Drought Action Committee (CDAC), Balangir District. The CDAC is the district-level people's organisation working to mitigate drought in Balangir with involvement of the community. The Basudha Vikash Samittee is a people's network. Its objective is to strengthen people's network

action to ensure good governance, reduce distress migration, build community capacity and operationalise micro-level planning.

I am involved in the Reflect movement in this district as a participant and as a community leader. I was involved in shaping the village committee and the Reflect Circle management. In making the decision about the ICTs, besides my own decision the decision of other Reflect participants should be included — only then would it be the decision of Reflect participants.

It is very difficult to explain the aim of impact assessment of ICTs in the Reflect project. But I believe the best criterion to judge the impact of the project would be checking the distressed migration from this area over the next 3 years. This project is being implemented as a pilot phase in our district. It is necessary to assess the impact to replicate it in other places. The impact of Reflect is felt mostly at district level.

The impact assessment should preferably be done by people's organisations of this area or by their representatives. Or by any other external agencies with knowledge about Balangir and the Reflect approach. As the project is for a period of 3 years, the assessment should be done after 3 years. But how much money is required for this assessment, I cannot say anything. I don't have any experience in impact assessment.

The Reflect/ICTs project is a means of protecting the rights of target group people. This approach can be replicated in other areas by organising the people and giving information through the local folk media. The major advantage of this approach is the free flow and exchange of information from bottom to top, apart from information from top to bottom. We all are working collectively in this project. It is a learning process for us. With cooperation from all, we believe our goal could be achieved.

The best criterion to judge the impact of the project would be checking the distressed migration from this area over the next 3 years.

STUDY 3

NATIONAL AGRICULTURAL MARKETING AND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (NAMDEVCO) INFORMATION PRODUCTS, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

The study

The National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation (NAMDEVCO) was established within the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Marine Resources in Trinidad and Tobago in 1991. Its aim is to develop marketing opportunities for farmers, agro-processors and traders, and provide them with information on marketing and related regulations through various media, including training seminars, radio programmes and its 16-page quarterly newsletter, *The NAMDEVCO Marketplace*, distributed free-of-charge.

In the late 1990s, NAMDEVCO decided to assess the impact of two of its products — the newsletter and the training programme. At the same time, CTA was looking at ways to develop a methodology for assessing the impact of agricultural information. A consultation had suggested conducting case studies in ACP countries; so six country reviews were conducted, from which three agencies were chosen. One was NAMDEVCO (the other two, in Mozambique and Papua New Guinea, later fell through). The call then went out for consultants to develop a low-cost, easy-to-follow impact assessment framework which could be applied to information-related activities in agricultural institutions in ACP countries and, in particular, to an evaluation of:

- a 1-day NAMDEVCO training seminar on the production and marketing of hot peppers, held in May 1999 (an example of face-to-face provision of information — synchronous communication);
- the NAMDEVCO newsletter, specifically the December 1999 issue (an example of distance provision of information — asynchronous communication).

The consultants, **Bruce Lauckner** and **Ranjit Singh**, began work in January 2000. After a review of existing methodologies, they decided to develop their own, drawing on their own experiences and knowledge, although they did not regard themselves as ‘impact experts’ (and later, in an e-mail to the author of this book, asked “Can the experts tell us how well/badly we did?”). Over a period of 4 weeks they developed the methodology and the study instruments

The names in bold in this summary of the impact study are the names of the people whose stories follow the summary.

(questionnaires). The surveys and analyses, conducted with **Ganesh Gangapersad**, the marketing officer at NAMDEVCO, took a further 8 weeks.

The conceptual framework for the methodology was based on the notion of 'response phases'. It was assumed that the nature of the response by target individuals to an information product or event would vary over time, with the individuals going through a series of responses to the information acquired, culminating in adoption and impact. The likely response phases were seen as: initial reaction phase (phase 1: immediate); learning and assimilation phase (phase 2: from a few days to about 2 weeks after the event); trial and adoption phase (phase 3: from 4 weeks to 1 year after the event); and impact phase (phase 4: from 6 months to 2 years after the event).

Within this conceptual framework and given the time lapse between the NAMDEVCO product/event and the impact study, the study would be carried out at different response phases. For the newsletter, which had been distributed only 8 weeks prior to the study, phases 1 and 2 would apply. The training seminar, held 8 months before the study, provided the opportunity to measure response in phase 3 and, to a limited extent, phase 4.

Two questionnaires were developed. They sought to establish the profile of the respondents — readers of the newsletter for the first questionnaire, participants in the hot pepper seminar for the second questionnaire — and their opinion and use of the information provided through the two media. When asked to name the most interesting articles in the newsletter or the most interesting sessions in the training workshop, the enumerators were instructed to do no prompting, so as to ensure that the named articles or sessions were those that had stayed in the memory of the respondents. From the 1,600 recipients of the newsletter, including farmers, food processors and traders, 151 (86% male) were contacted (by telephone or through face-to-face interviews). Of the 139 seminar participants, 75 (82% male) were contacted, most by telephone; among them was **Kyle Otis**, who had a citrus and plantain farm and was looking at diversifying into hot pepper production.

At NAMDEVCO, a change of management and various budgetary and administrative problems prevented the methodology from being applied subsequently to the corporation's information services. At CTA, by the time the study had been completed, the idea of developing a methodology for assessing the impact of agricultural information had given way to the notion that such a blueprint would not be useful; the CTA member of staff responsible for evaluation, **Ibrahim Khadar**, considered that CTA should, instead, develop impact assessment guidelines for CTA staff. The NAMDEVCO study, however, was used as a case study in a subsequent workshop organised by CTA on the evaluation of information-related products.

The stories

GANESH GANGAPERSAD. Marketing Officer, NAMDEVCO, Trinidad and Tobago

Evaluation experience: None

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"In this project, it meant assessing the impact of information disseminated to clients to determine the benefit to the sector for which information was provided."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at NAMDEVCO, conducted by Maritza Hee Huoung; January 2004*

CTA initiated the study. They hired a consultant to review local agencies and select one, and NAMDEVCO was selected. I was involved from 1999 in the development of the study. It sought to assess the use of two NAMDEVCO items — a newsletter and a workshop on hot pepper production — and determine their impact, and to use this as a model for future projects. It was also intended to assist CTA in developing an impact assessment methodology.

NAMDEVCO developed the budget for the study and CTA funded 80%, while NAMDEVCO put in 20%. The time frame was 6 to 8 months, and it was adequate. We met all the deadlines. The funds were also sufficient; we negotiated with the consultants about the amount provided. The main stakeholders were the farmers, since both products were done with the farmers in mind. The technical people and supply companies who are invited to our seminars and receive the newsletter were secondary stakeholders.

I was the coordinator of the study, and I also saw my role as building the capacity of staff at NAMDEVCO to do similar work in future. I participated in the study development, both at the initial meeting at CTA and with the local consultants when they were selected. I also worked with the consultants in fine-tuning the design to suit our local needs. It was an intensive period for me. NAMDEVCO had limited staff, and I had several other responsibilities.

The major challenge was becoming familiar with the concepts. After that, the development of the methodology in keeping with concepts was also a challenge. The lack of human resources at NAMDEVCO and my own workload were also challenging. I requested additional staff to undertake some aspects of the study, but no staff were made available. The consultants helped considerably. They were very supportive and approachable, and undertook quite a lot. They worked at my pace, and collaborated easily. This was crucial in our meeting the deadlines and also in delivering a good study.

The project introduced me to the concept of assessing the impact of information and also taught me how to do it. That was the significant factor for me. It has also helped NAMDEVCO. When I was assigned to the project, evaluation concepts were not part of my work strategy. Since then,

*Face-to-face interviews
are more reliable.
I would eliminate
telephone interviews.
In telephone interviews,
respondents often provide
the easiest response.*

I have moved to another position, in quality assurance, and now use the evaluation process, consciously and unconsciously. My project management requires that assessments are done; there is provision for reporting on every activity and for testing impact. Otherwise, there are some constraints to using the methodology at NAMDEVCO, finance being the major one. That affects both the delivery of services and the assessment work, which requires an additional budget. I don't know how the study findings were used by CTA, but we did have good feedback on meeting the deadlines.

With the experience I have gained, I would do a lot differently if there was the chance to do the study again. The interview method in particular I would change. The time frame and the budget did not permit this, but I think that face-to-face interviews are more reliable. I would eliminate telephone interviews. In telephone interviews, respondents often provide the easiest response. I would also spread the study over a longer period, allowing for additional issues of the newsletter and more training courses, and for a longer evaluation period which is more in keeping with the methodology developed by the study.

The value of the project was its emphasis on impact in the field, not on the training course itself. In other words, the final outcome rather than the event.

IBRAHIM KHADAR. Deputy Head, Information Policies and Partnerships Department, CTA, The Netherlands

Evaluation experience: *Considerable experience, including research experience in cost-benefit analysis*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"Looking at the changes a project might have made — fundamental socio-economic changes with long-term implications."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at CTA, conducted by Kay Sayce and Pat Norrish; January 2004*

It was stated in the CTA Mid-Term Plan 1996–2000 that we should produce an impact assessment methodology, because the first question that comes up in impact assessment is which methodology to use. We decided to do several small studies and a consultation. We thought that if we got some experts together they would tell us what to do. But they didn't. They all had different views. But they did recommend that we should do case studies, so we did six country reviews looking for agencies to work with to develop a methodology.

We settled for three agencies, NAMDEVCO from Trinidad and Tobago, and two agencies in Papua New Guinea and Mozambique. NAMDEVCO was a parastatal that specialised in providing market information and advice to commercial enterprises, and they were keen to see

how their services were viewed by their clients. Also, they were happy to do the study quickly. We left the methodology open because we were trying to develop one, and hadn't found a consultant brave enough to suggest a methodology. NAMDEVCO agreed to all the consultation recommendations. Papua New Guinea and Mozambique fell through for various reasons.

The project posed two main challenges for me. The first is that CTA is not a research institution, so it's hard to convince people that you can't come up with methodologies in a few weeks. I had to explain how much time was needed to do these things. The second was finding a willing partner. Many of the country studies that came back identified institutions that didn't really seem interested in evaluation, but rather in getting funds to build their infrastructure. But NAMDEVCO wanted to learn about evaluation, they weren't after money for infrastructural purposes.

We commissioned NAMDEVCO to do the study. We saw that both they and CTA would get something out of it. We talked about what would happen to the report. There were no plans to publish it. How much time NAMDEVCO used to do this was up to them. We gave them 6 months to complete the job. The activities — the newsletter and the training seminar — were there already. This was a very narrow focus. It was good to have a narrow focus; some in CTA thought it too narrow — looking at the impact of just one newsletter, for example. I don't agree.

NAMDEVCO told us about the consultants they had hired. We set up the terms of reference and then we gave them *carte blanche* to do the work within these boundaries. There was no spelling out of what the methodology should be. They could devise it themselves, take one off the shelf, whatever they thought was best. My role, once the work was commissioned, was to comment on the reports.

I was impressed with the methodology that was proposed. The consultants were not evaluation experts but offered a methodology that had a good scientific ring about it. A nice surprise, although it didn't answer all the questions about impact assessment. They had responded well to the challenge. The focus of the methodology was on the user of the information and the time it takes a user to act on information received — the response factor. I found this theoretically an interesting approach. But it left many questions hanging; as time goes by so other factors come in, so this makes attribution harder. Also, it didn't really address the issue of context. All in all, what the consultants produced was not very sophisticated, but it did have a lot of common sense in it, and relating impact to time-lapse was a good approach. Knowing what happens immediately is important, but when you go beyond that impact assessment becomes more and more difficult. One gets different impact at different stages — short impact, intermediate impact, long-term impact. And when it comes to the impact of information, that is something I find particularly interesting.

What I think was really good about this exercise was how organisations could learn from it. It went beyond methodological issues. It is common, now, to hear of impact assessment being talked of as a learning process, but this was in the late 1990s and that was not such a common view

The focus of the methodology was on the user of the information and the time it takes a user to act on information received — the response factor. I found this theoretically an interesting approach.

then. Even if we didn't come up with a water-tight methodology, the exercise had been a good learning experience. And it showed just how difficult it is to assess the impact of information.

If we could have done this project again, I would have liked more time to look at the methodological options, to see what was available. You can't develop a new methodology in such a short time. And the use of the results — there's still this view that evaluation is just to see if a project is doing OK. The NAMDEVCO results were presented at the Bonn workshop [a CTA-organised workshop on evaluation in 2001], but I don't think NAMDEVCO did anything particular with the results. And I don't know whether they used the methodology.

For CTA, what this exercise did was to guide our evaluation work. People have many ideas about evaluation and impact assessment, but we need to be careful. A lot of what's called impact assessment is just performance evaluation. So, in doing this NAMDEVCO study we built up an experience and used it in advising CTA departments and fed it into the way we work. We are not going to come up with a blueprint, but we are producing guidelines to make staff aware of what impact assessment is. In terms of developing a methodology, we don't expect to do that now.

The more you look at impact assessment, the more you see that you have to find a way to move from the micro to the macro. Generally, we are lacking this macro approach for evaluating information. We could borrow from the evaluation work in other sectors such as health and education, and look at how do they take things up to the macro level in relation to information. But they don't have all the answers either.

The more you look at impact assessment, the more you see that you have to find a way to move from the micro to the macro. Generally, we are lacking this macro approach for evaluating information.

BRUCE LAUCKNER. Biometrician and Statistician, Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI), Trinidad and Tobago

Evaluation experience: *Limited experience in qualitative evaluation; no experience in impact assessment*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"The impact assessment, in the case of the newsletter and training seminar, was essentially an attempt to identify to what extent the product/service had been of value/use to the beneficiaries."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at CARDI, conducted by Maritza Hee Huoung; December 2003*

The project was intended to help NAMDEVCO gain some understanding of what effect its newsletter and training had had on the target audiences, if any. It was funded by NAMDEVCO and they advertised for consultants by selective tender. I responded to an invitation from a colleague, Ranjit Singh, to join him in the assignment. We were aware of CTA's interest in the project. CTA had chosen the newsletter and the training programme for an evaluation study; the

terms of reference for the study included the design of a template for impact assessment, and I was quite aware that this was a CTA input. At this point I need to note that, since the study, I have been a participant in several meetings organised by CTA to explore impact assessment issues; my experience with the NAMDEVCO study is therefore now influenced by my involvement in the CTA work.

I don't now recall the exact figures expended on the project, but the time was 3 months. We exceeded the stated budget, but could not request more. However, this is par for the course with consultancy work. We worked within the time frame given and completed the assignment on schedule. We made some comments on the timing of the impact assessment, though. An impact assessment of a training seminar, which is intended to generate increased production, realistically has to be done over a long term. Our study was done 8 months after the seminar; it would have been better if it had started immediately afterwards and continued for 1 or 2 years. Doing the study when we did gave an indication — in terms of the methodology we'd developed based on response phases — of reaction, trial and adoption, but definitely not impact, the phase we saw as lasting from 6 months to about 2 years after an event.

An impact assessment of a training seminar realistically has to be done over a long term. Our study was done 8 months after the seminar; it would have been better if it had started immediately afterwards and continued for 1 or 2 years.

I came quite cold into this assignment, with no experience whatever in impact assessment. Our terms of reference required a review of impact studies and existing methodologies. We did try to find literature and methodologies; this was not very productive. We found discussions and reports, but no actual work on impact assessment. In my later work with CTA, I again found that there is no actual methodology I would recommend. I believe that my specialist skills in data handling were the reason I was asked to join the team. There clearly was a need for analytical skills. We did the design jointly and NAMDEVCO did the actual data collection. My skills in computer analysis were also obviously well placed.

I did not find the project itself challenging. It required thought and preparation, but that was manageable. I would cite, as a challenge, the problem of data collection in a region that is not meticulous about information gathering. My experience with enumerators told me that they didn't always observe the rules, even when fully trained. On a more general aspect, I think that the overriding presence of CTA and the awareness that they were expecting a methodology which would stand up to scrutiny was a challenge. I personally felt vulnerable that the study was geared beyond the evaluation itself towards creating a blueprint. But the knowledge of that need resulted in our really giving extensive thought to developing the methodology. CTA's request for a single blueprint for two such different products might also have been simply an oversight on their part, which is quite possible when working at a distance.

The most significant thing about the study for me was that I understood so much more about impact assessment by the end of it. It made me aware that researchers need a real understanding of the expected final impact of any activity. It also pinpointed the need for different approaches based on the product/service. A generalised methodology is possible but has to be adapted to the particular situation. The study clearly demonstrated the need for impact assessments as a routine

part of most activities. This does raise questions as to how this work can be funded, but apart from that I feel strongly that impact assessments should be institutionalised, with the institution making them part of routine activity.

If we had the opportunity to do the study again, I would suggest that the time frame for the evaluation should be based on the methodology we presented. For example, we knew that an evaluation of one issue of the newsletter was unlikely to be decisive in understanding its impact, but we had accepted the terms of reference and did our best to complete the project. It would have been unrealistic to ask NAMDEVCO to renegotiate the consultancy for a longer period.

I'm not sure how NAMDEVCO used the results, other than in meeting their commitment to CTA to develop a framework for the evaluation of information services and products. In respect of CARDI, the process made me very aware of the type of methods that CARDI could apply in analysing its information services and I have tried to introduce that. As far as I am aware, CTA has not adopted the methodology we developed. I think they should explore this methodology for evaluating training workshops, since this is an important part of their own work. The methodology is ideally suited for the two products for which it was developed. It could be applied to other information products with some adaptation. I would like to see it applied in the Caribbean where there is little proper impact assessment work done.

Impact assessments should be institutionalised, with the institution making them part of routine activity.

KYLE OTIS. Farmer, Sangre Grande, Trinidad and Tobago

Evaluation experience: *A little, during his BSc course in agriculture*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"In the case of the seminar, it was an attempt to assess the impact on the persons who attended, to determine whether the seminar had prompted any reaction."*

Interview: *Telephone interview, conducted by Maritza Hee Huong; March 2004*

I was interviewed, by telephone, for the survey in February 2000, after the seminar. I have a BSc in Agriculture from the University of the West Indies and, at the time of the hot pepper seminar in 1999, I had bought 8 acres on which citrus and plantain were the major crops. I was exploring the option of introducing short-term crops as a means of increasing my cash flow. I did not introduce peppers as planned, because of soil problems. I found the NAMDEVCO seminar very useful, the information provided was very good. My decision not to introduce peppers was as a result of other considerations. And I am no longer in agriculture.

I think the survey was done because NAMDEVCO was trying to determine what impact the seminar had on the persons who attended. Perhaps they were tracking the development in pepper

I don't think that when they phoned me I was fully aware that an impact assessment was being done. I responded to the questions. I was unaware of a lot of the background.

production generated by the participants. Evaluations are a part of any discipline and certainly a requirement in agriculture, where you can quantify things. My training in evaluation during the BSc has been useful in my current work for an insurance company. I have been involved in evaluating the impact of the mealy bug and have done an evaluation of the dairy industry.

To go back to the survey, in all honesty I don't think that when they phoned me I was fully aware that an impact assessment was being done. I responded to the questions. I was unaware of a lot of the background, but I could still respond to some of the questions. I can't recall much about it. My impression was that NAMDEVCO was looking at whether the people who had attended the seminar had gone into pepper production. And I hadn't.

RANJIT H. SINGH. Head, Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension, University of the West Indies (UWI), Trinidad and Tobago

Evaluation experience: *Considerable field experience in cost-benefit analysis and socio-economic impact studies*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"How one intervention with a particular aim produces a particular result, desired or undesired, on intended beneficiaries and others. I see the measurement of the impact of information dissemination along a continuum, starting with whether information is interesting, whether it is accepted, and does it stimulate a response."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at UWI, conducted by Maritza Hee Huoung; January 2004*

The project, as we understood it, was to examine different channels of information dissemination and evaluate their impact, as well as to compare the effectiveness of the alternative methods. It also sought to review, in particular, NAMDEVCO's role as a provider of technical information in an effort to strengthen that role. The stakeholders went beyond the direct recipients, to include all institutions involved in communicating and sharing information with farmers. CTA was the originator of the study and the major actor. I think it was CTA's intention to obtain lessons on the effectiveness of methods of communication.

Impact can occur in different ways. The failure of a training workshop, for instance, to result in increased production rests not only on the acceptance of the information but on other factors. Non-use of the information does not mean the information was not valuable. The study's methodology pinpoints the different levels and different types of impact that can be identified. Knowledge gained is an impact, an investment decision is another impact; both are valid.

Neither the time frame nor the budget allocated for our study was adequate. The project was definitely under-funded. It was helpful that NAMDEVCO contributed the fieldwork, but even so we, the consultants, worked way beyond the budget. But we did feel that our work was a contribution and we accepted it in that light. We feel that the methodology we developed is good; our commitment was to develop something useful for decision-making at the levels of policy or institutional management. It was not exclusively for the fee. We did point out the limitations of the findings of the study, which were primarily related to the fact that the available time to observe impact was limited. This was because we felt that there may be significant gestation time in the internalisation of technological/managerial information and the subsequent use of such information for investment and/or managerial purposes. However, we were also mindful of the fact that from a practical point of view the study could not be longer. This we accepted and agreed to do the project.

We — that is, the Consultants and NAMDEVCO's personnel — collaborated on every aspect of the project, since the transfer of the methodology to NAMDEVCO was an important objective. The scope of the work entailed: conceptualisation of the problems and issues to be addressed; development of the methodology; design and pre-testing of the survey instruments; refinement of the instruments based on feedback; analysis and interpretation of the results; and, finally, the preparation of the project report. It was an intensive process. We worked closely as a team. The team effort was excellent. The methodology was informed by the conceptual model that we developed and, in this regard, we consider the analytical model to be preliminary with some scope for refinement. We are of the view, however, that the methodology could be considered generic in a sense, since it could be used to assess other types of interventions or development initiatives.

Developing the methodology was a challenge, but my experience on other impact assessment work certainly helped. The team spent a lot of time on the methodology, tried several runs and made refinements along the way. We were pleased with the end product. There were the more practical challenges, such as getting the field work done. NAMDEVCO was a true collaborator here, and provided the support for the surveys. Ganesh Gangapersad from NAMDEVCO was very involved at all stages; the partnership was very effective.

For myself, the most significant part of the study was developing and testing the methodology, and of course I found the results of the pilot to be most interesting, particularly the positive impact of the training. The results showed that knowledge was gained, and that was a positive impact. There were no results which indicated increased production. However, this was to be expected since the time lag between knowledge and skills gained from interventions and actual production decisions does tend to be long — certainly more than a year or two.

If there was an opportunity to do the study again, I would wish to use the methodology in an ideal study, where the impact assessment of a seminar, for example, would be applied from the start of the seminar and would continue after the seminar for an extended period of time to

*Neither the time frame
nor the budget
allocated for our impact
study was adequate.
The project was definitely
under-funded.*

adequately observe delayed impacts, including the impact on production. Done like this, the assessment would be more revealing. A one-off study like the one we did has limited usefulness, of course. With the newsletter, I think everyone was aware that evaluating the impact of a single issue was not an ideal case, but an important aspect of the exercise was the development of a methodology that would have general application to other types of training and information interventions. We have not seen anything in the literature that is as detailed as our work — there is a lot of discussion on impact assessment, but very little about a precise methodology and/or analytical models.

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and/or analytical models.*

The methodology and the results of the study were shared with NAMDEVCO. I believe they have informed decisions at the institution. I'm not aware that they have been shared with other institutions in the sector locally, but there certainly is potential for that. At the international level, Bruce Lauckner attended meetings organised by CTA in which a number of countries participated. Through these forums, the findings of our work on impact assessment were shared with other countries. I am presently considering the application of our methodology in another area of study that I am interested in — trade and the environment.

STUDY 4

FOOTSTEPS MAGAZINE, KENYA AND RWANDA

The study

Footsteps is a quarterly magazine that has been produced by Tearfund since 1986. It aims to provide encouragement and practical ideas for Christians working in development, particularly those who are in remote areas with little training or resources. It is published in six languages (Bengali, English, French, Hindi, Portuguese and Spanish) and covers a broad spectrum of subjects, including HIV/AIDS, water, community development, health care, disability, agriculture, technology and literacy. By late 2001, it was being distributed to 164 countries and had a circulation of about 43,000 copies.

Between December 2001 and March 2002, The Evaluation Partnership, a London-based group headed by John Watson and **Graham White**, was asked to conduct an impact assessment of *Footsteps*. In addition, they were to carry out a product review (e.g., magazine content, language and identity), a review of the marketing and distribution of the magazine (e.g., subscriptions and delivery) and an overall strategic review.

The evaluators noted that “information impact can be differentiated in a progressive way: relaying information, raising awareness, imparting new skills, stimulating new projects, energising new initiatives in the wider community... The sustainability of *Footsteps*’ impact on poor communities can be seen as the spin-off from this progressive build up.” The question underlying the activities that they undertook to assess the impact of the magazine was: What is the impact of *Footsteps* on its readership and on poor communities in changing attitudes, influencing actions, enhancing knowledge and introducing new methods?

Their activities consisted of:

- analyses of the *Footsteps* readership survey, conducted in 2001, and of readers’ correspondence;
- interviews with Tearfund staff in London, including the magazine editor **Isabel Carter**, translators and some members of the editorial committee;
- interviews with ‘informed independents’, such as staff in World Vision;
- field visits to Kenya, Rwanda, India and Brazil (1 week in each country; in this book we focus on the first two), where they sought feedback from intermediaries and end-users through interviews and focus groups;

The names in bold in this summary of the impact study are the names of the people whose stories follow the summary.

- preparing the impact assessment, product, distribution and strategy reports, and presenting the findings to Tearfund and the *Footsteps* editorial committee.

Tearfund organised the field visits, most of this work being done by **Rachel Blackman** from the London office, working through field staff. The questions asked of *Footsteps* readers during these visits included: What activities have you implemented as a result of *Footsteps*? How has *Footsteps* changed your life or the life of your community? Do you use *Footsteps* in a training context?

In Kenya, 56 people took part in the evaluation, most of them end-users; **Rosalia Oyweka**, from Rural Extension with Africa's Poor (REAP), which distributes *Footsteps* in Kenya, helped identify the interviewees. They provided many examples of activities that had stemmed from what they had read in the magazine and ways in which the magazine had improved their lives. In Rwanda, of the 35 people who took part, most were intermediaries and multipliers, such as church and non-governmental organisation (NGO) staff responsible for getting the magazine to end-users and people who used *Footsteps* in a training context. Far fewer activities arising from *Footsteps* articles were reported, and impact appeared to be limited; the evaluators suggested this might be partly because people at village level do not understand French, and so rely on intermediaries to translate the magazine.

The evaluators spent some time, as part of the distribution and marketing review, analysing the mailing list; it had grown significantly and they felt that there had been an assumption that “a growing mailing list implies growing impact”. They found that not only was the list seriously out of date and in need of considerable pruning, but also that distribution often stopped with the multiplier.

The evaluation report recommended five actions to increase impact: adopting a more pro-active approach, providing training on the use of the magazine, decentralising magazine production, marketing and distribution, and developing a set of impact assessment indicators. These indicators should focus on the range of uses of *Footsteps*, the quality and mix of readership feedback, and growth in the number of local champions of the magazine.

On receipt of the report, Tearfund drew up a ‘post-study Action Plan’, a detailed reaction to the report. This is standard practice at Tearfund. Each recommendation was listed, ranked according to priority and assigned a code (i.e., R = reject, M = accept with modification, D = more discussion required). Alongside the code were comments on the recommendation, a description of action to be taken and by whom, and the deadline for that action to be completed. By December 2002, most of the actions that Tearfund had set for itself had been completed.

The stories

RACHEL BLACKMAN. Creative Sub-Editor, Tearfund, UK

Evaluation experience: Some experience in the field, but not in impact assessment

Definition of 'impact assessment': "A way of finding out about the effects of our work; people are never going to tell you everything, but it gives pointers."

Interview: Face-to-face interview, at Tearfund, conducted by Kay Sayce and Pat Norrish; October 2003

This interview was prefaced by a short meeting with the Footsteps team leader, Simon Larkin, and the two 'storytellers', Rachel Blackman and Isabel Carter.

In answer to the question, "Whose decision was it to do the impact assessment?" Simon Larkin said it was the Tearfund advisory board. As to why Tearfund had called for it, Isabel Carter suggested it may have been to look at cost-effectiveness, perhaps triggered by something in the 2001 readership survey. They all agreed that, whatever the reason, it had been a good idea; they needed to know more about Footsteps readers and about distribution. It was not seen as a threat, as there was considerable anecdotal evidence that Footsteps was very popular. Rachel Blackman added that, with the low response to the readership survey, it was good to do a thorough evaluation and test some of the anecdotal material. The survey had helped in identifying people to interview and drawing up the consultants' terms of reference. Simon Larkin noted that the budget for the study had increased by about 50%, partly because the visit to Brazil had not been in the original plan. He considered it money well spent, and planned to do an impact assessment of the magazine every 5 years. Isabel Carter noted that, since receipt of the recommendations in March 2002, all of them had been acted upon in one way or another. The team meeting ended and the interviews began.

When I arrived at Tearfund, my first task was to organise this study. I was being thrown in at the deep end. I needed to identify consultants, organise their itinerary, contract local people to do arrangements, and ensure the report came through on time. I wrote the consultants' terms of reference with Simon; some of Isabel's ideas were included.

I didn't think about the methodology too much. My time was taken up with logistics. It was all quite stressful. Organising the study, making sure focus groups were not biased, understanding what was wanted, working with our partner organisations. So much is out of your hands. You have to trust so many people.

The consultants came up with the methodology. They had a good track record; after a discussion on what could and couldn't be done, we left it up to them. We drew up the list of 'impacts' to look for, an idea of questions to ask, what we wanted done, who to see — but not how to do it. Broadly, they kept to all this. They wrote the proposal based on what they thought we wanted. We perhaps put more organising into the process than usual; they said they were pleased with how much we'd organised, they usually had to do more of this. They had the discretion to do things differently if they wanted, talk to different groups, etc. We made sure they had time to follow up on leads, and we set up translating facilities in Rwanda. All they really had to do in preparation was to produce the methodology.

The most difficult thing I found with the study was communication. A major problem. It was often difficult, sometimes a nightmare. E-mails not getting through, the post bad. So many people involved. Waiting anxiously for answers. I had a short time frame not just for arranging things but also keeping all involved up to speed with what was happening.

Organising the study, making sure focus groups were not biased, understanding what was wanted, working with our partner organisations. So much is out of your hands. You have to trust so many people.

I hoped those organising logistics on the ground would make proper arrangements for the focus groups, and see to the participants' transport and refreshment needs. And all the time I watched the budget, ensuring they didn't think that holding focus group meetings in five-star hotels was a good idea!

On the whole, I'm happy with how it went, but would have preferred the consultants to have talked to more grassroots people in Rwanda. Looking back, we needed to have more focus groups and longer visits. The visits were only 4 or 5 days, not enough time. But we had to work with the time and money we had.

In the first draft of the report there were rather a lot of sweeping statements. We had to sort those out. For example, the urban issue [too much focus on the rural poor, not enough on the urban poor]. This raised much discussion. There were quite a few things we felt we could challenge. In Brazil, it would have been better if the consultants had gone up north, not stayed in the urban areas. What they saw was a bit one-sided and this contributed to their comment that *Footsteps* didn't focus enough on urban poor.

The best thing about the study was that we now have a methodology for next time. Something to use as a basis, though we will probably do two countries next time, not four. It was also good to have all the statistics analysed and to have independent people look at *Footsteps* so that we can get a true perspective on it.

We shared the findings on the website and gave presentations on them to staff. At our quarterly editorial meeting, members were invited to comment on the report and the consultants were included in our discussions on the Action Plan. And now we are working on the recommendations.

ISABEL CARTER. Editor of *Footsteps*, Tearfund, UK

Evaluation experience: PhD, in part, looked at the impact of information; considerable experience in readership and baseline surveys

Definition of 'impact assessment': "An opportunity to go beyond the obvious, to get a more in-depth view of impact, especially long-term impact."

Interview: Face-to-face interview, at Tearfund, conducted by Kay Sayce and Pat Norrish; October 2003

I had to be fairly detached from the impact assessment exercise because I was being evaluated. I helped with the ToRs but, generally, I tried to stay back. I was not an evaluator. I didn't take part in choosing the evaluators. But I know I probably influenced things a little, gave them the benefit of my PhD knowledge, such as ensuring the spread of people interviewed was good.

I wasn't impressed with some things the evaluators did. In the field visits, for example, they seemed to get stuck with one group of people who weren't providing the necessary information and they didn't change tactics and find other sources of information. They should have broadened the groups. With my background, though, I am bound to be a bit critical of their methods.

I didn't find being evaluated a challenge. It was good to talk. I was curious about what the report would say, but not apprehensive or excited. I suppose this was because during my PhD research I had had the opportunity to meet directly so many readers in Uganda and Ghana — often unplanned — and had really benefited from their comments on *Footsteps*. When the report came through, it had quite a few inaccuracies that had to be straightened out. But the presentation of the findings was very good, very positive. I wish they'd have put more of what they said in the presentation in the actual report. One problem with the findings, though, was that they came through in several stages, thus lessening the overall impact.

Much of what was in the study was what we expected. But they did find some interesting things, such as the organisational bottlenecks in distribution and the appreciation for *Footsteps* being in so many languages. The feedback from Kenya, on how people were using *Footsteps*, was especially good. I think the report made too much of *Footsteps* focusing on the rural poor and not enough on the urban poor. They did talk about poor distribution in urban areas, though, and that was interesting. And they talked about the need to regionalise more, and gave useful insight on that.

Some of the recommendations are a bit frustrating, as we don't have the staff to do all these things. There have been no staff changes since the study; I would have liked more staff to have been one of the study results. The major thing the report showed up was the poor state of the mailing list. We knew the list was poor, but not the detail. It was nice to have someone go through it in detail. But what I found most useful was not really the impact study but the

I didn't find being evaluated a challenge. It was good to talk.

content-related stuff — how to improve the content, to choose photos which suited different countries, etc. Not a lot about content surprised me, but it did give me a nudge about things to get going on.

Some things could have been done differently, such as focusing on two countries, not four, so that there is more possibility of following the information links and finding the blockages.

The broad approach of the assessment was good, but some things could have been done differently. One, use more local translators. Two, focus on two countries, not four, so that there is more possibility of following the information links and finding the blockages. Also, the assessment was done by two foreign white men with lots of baggage. All consultants have baggage, but local ones might have done things a little differently. I would have chosen a male–female national team backed up by an external person. Another point is that Tearfund set up the field visits. Perhaps it should have got the consultants to do this, so that when things weren't going too well, as in Rwanda, they could have made other arrangements and not worked to the brief so closely.

We do have a register of local people, local consultants. But the choice of the consultants for this study was good in a way because they had assessed the impact of information products before. Information, its impact, is a very hard thing to measure.

And we've learnt for the future. We are taking this issue of external/local evaluator on board for a training programme evaluation we are planning. Gender balance is also important. And we are doing a baseline. The *Footsteps* study is not a baseline; if we are going to assess the magazine's impact again in 5 years time, perhaps we should be doing a baseline study now.

ROSALIA OYWEKA. Coordinator, Rural Extension with Africa's Poor (REAP), Kenya

Evaluation experience: *No formal evaluation background, but some informal experience*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"It is to assess if what is written in the magazine is being utilised and if someone is benefiting. To find out if there are success stories or negative stories."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at REAP, conducted by Hilda Munyua; January 2004*

I operate from Kisumu, but I also have an office in Nairobi. The aim of the *Footsteps* study was to find out about magazine readership and how the content was being repackaged and disseminated in Bondo and Kisumu in Nyanza Province, and in Vihiga in Western Kenya. REAP is a distributor for *Footsteps* and we take some sections from the magazine and package them into practical, simplified materials for teaching, such as materials on 'Building up women of Africa' and practical ideas for church women and fellowships.

Tearfund asked for the study. I think they thought it was important to find out if the frequency, mode of dissemination and access points of the magazine were appropriate. Also, to find out if the language used for the magazine was appropriate, simple and understandable, and if the magazine was available in local languages. They also wanted to find out if *Footsteps* was reaching the grassroots. The study was for distribution agents, too, such as REAP and for the end-users. REAP was interested to see what the multiplier effect was. With REAP, I learn much from end-users who talk to me and give me feedback. For example, one person in Vihiga, Francis, used an article from *Footsteps*, then called women from his area and taught them how to prepare lye (traditional salt).

My role in the study was coordination. I contacted people, arranged venues for meetings, took charge of all the logistics and acted as a translator to Mr White [the evaluator] during the meetings. They speak Luo in Bondo and Luhya in Vihiga, and I speak both these languages well. I didn't participate in designing the methods for the evaluation. The approach for the study was good, but I felt the questionnaires should have been sent to us earlier so that I could prepare people. The questionnaires were mailed to end-users, but most users never received them and most of those who did receive them never responded.

Another problem was to do with the mailing list. We received sections of it and wrote letters to the addressees about meetings. Some addresses were wrong, so some did not receive the letters. I had to physically visit and inform people about the meetings. Collecting people from different areas was also a challenge. People spend time thinking about this and there are transport expenses, so organisers should bear this in mind. People expect an allowance for time they put in.

The most interesting thing about the study, for me, was that it showed that people have a big interest in reading the magazine and are keen to share and apply the information. People ask for additional content and ideas relevant to developing countries that they can read, share and apply. The content in *Footsteps* has taught people to preach and prepare messages to share.

The study increased my knowledge and information on practical issues. I created new friendships and relationships with other people and got ideas from different people in rural areas. It gave me insight into the impact of *Footsteps*. It was good to meet people sharing a common goal, to share experiences and to see the gender balance of readers.

I think the time for the study was too short, though. People needed more time to talk about their experiences. We had only 3 days for the whole of Western Province. The study needed more time. I would also have had meetings for women and encouraged smaller groups to discuss the magazine among themselves. Some men have worked with big NGOs and they intimidate the others. Rural women do not speak openly when mixed with men or the pastor. And there are health-related issues such as menopause and HIV/AIDS that women will not discuss in the presence of men. These are better discussed with fellow women. I think it would have been good for me to have been involved in the design of the methods, as I understand the people better.

The questionnaires should have been sent to us earlier so that I could prepare people. The questionnaires were mailed to end-users, but most users never received them and most of those who did receive them never responded.

I haven't seen the results of the evaluation. I don't know what happened to them or how they were used. I never received them, but I would love to receive them. Impact assessments should be done because they impart knowledge to us, even for REAP work. This study helped us to focus our work better and learn more. It should be done regularly.

GRAHAM WHITE. Senior Consultant, The Evaluation Partnership, UK

Evaluation experience: *Extensive, mainly for European institutions, as well as some work on questionnaire design and analysis in African development work*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"It's the effects of a project on society, how a project changes society. It must include the positive and the negative, the foreseen and the unexpected. If it's short-term impact, we are talking about 'results'. If it's long-term impact, we talk of 'outcomes'."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at consultant's home, conducted by Kay Sayce and Pat Norrish; November 2003*

The magazine *Footsteps* had been going for a long time. There was a lot of anecdotal stuff saying it was much appreciated, but they needed an independent look at it. It's a free magazine, and it's very difficult to measure the success of something that's given out free. I think they had a genuine desire to see where *Footsteps* should go. This was not just an exercise.

After a meeting with Rachel and Simon, we came up with the methodology; we had a free hand there. We have a broad methodology, but this changes as we go along, we adapt it, we learn and we make changes. They made the decisions about the countries to visit. They sent me to places where they thought I'd find out most about the magazine. The time and money were realistic. And I think they got their money's worth. It was an evaluation I particularly enjoyed. Some of them you don't, but this one was very enjoyable.

There were no problems on the contractual side. We agreed to all their terms of reference. When later they wanted to add another country — Brazil — they asked if we'd do it, if they added more days. That was fine. Sometimes I did detect a slight defensiveness on Isabel's part, that we were seen as 'inspectors', but that's understandable, it's her magazine. I tried to get over that we were working together to make *Footsteps* better.

We used indicators. They should be seen only as attempts at measuring. Personally, I like them. It's my background. My training is in economics and statistics; my business partner, John Watson, is strong on the business side. One issue that came out of the *Footsteps* work was the mailing list.

My background came in very useful for that. On the basis of a very rough sample, we estimated that around 25% of the people on the list were not at the given address any more.

On the ground, Tearfund or the local partners helped with everything. They sorted out the focus groups. They set up interviews with *Footsteps* readers in Nairobi. Then we went to Kisumu to do rural group interviews; these were groups who got together from time to time, voluntarily, to read the magazine together and discuss it. A huge difference from Rwanda. In Rwanda, copies tended to land on the desks of the elite; they are in French and most of the rural people don't read French, so the magazine never really gets to the grassroots, whereas in Kenya it really did. Kenya oozed impact, Rwanda didn't. It all comes back to distribution. An excellent product, poorly distributed, is a waste of money. In Kenya, they truly used the magazine to make changes. India's different again. There they print the magazine themselves.

There's nothing about the study that I would have done differently. Except perhaps for one problem, which was that too many of the people we saw were multipliers, intermediaries — not the end-users. We saw very few actual end-users. More in Kenya than Rwanda. I didn't look for more end-users, because the programme had been set up. So I talked to whomever they wanted me to talk to.

We came up with important findings that would be useful to Tearfund. The main ones were: (1) don't just look at the publication, always look at the mailing list, that will tell you a lot; (2) the images in the magazine, many needed to be more relevant to the readers (Indian readers, for example, complained that too often *Footsteps* had African images); (3) *Footsteps* addresses rural poverty mostly, but we found some of the biggest problems were to do with urban poverty, and we felt it should be addressing urban poverty more.

I don't know how the study findings were used, but it would be of interest. I know they've had meetings about the study, but I don't know what they've done. Many people have such a negative idea about evaluators, but I say we are not here to fight you but to work with you, to help you make your product better. So I'd like to know if we've helped. With some studies, it's *ex post*, so you know nothing will be done and you don't hear anything. Generally, in our work in Europe, the bigger the budget the more likely they are to want answers. The smaller budget ones are the routine ones that just get folded away. And there's always a bit of accountability involved. Even with the *Footsteps* study, if we'd have found no impact they'd have thought about closing it down, I'm sure.

Attributing changes to the magazine is very difficult because there are so many factors to take into account. For short-term impact, it's easier to attribute change. For example, we could see the direct impact of a *Footsteps* article about a stove — people talked about using the magazine information to make these stoves. But further down the line? Attributing improved health, improved lives, to the magazine? You can't really do that.

Many people have such a negative idea about evaluators, but I say we are not here to fight you but to work with you, to help you make your product better.

STUDY 5

ELECTRONIC DELIVERY OF AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION (EDAI) TELECENTRES PROJECT, UGANDA

The study

From August 2000, with funding from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) through its Acacia programme and in collaboration with CAB International (CABI), Uganda's National Agricultural Research Organisation (NARO) implemented a project entitled 'Electronic Delivery of Agricultural Information to Rural Communities in Uganda (EDAI)'. Its main objective was to improve access to agricultural information through existing Multipurpose Community Telecentres (MCTs) at Nabweru, Buwama and Nakaseke; these telecentres were being run by the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology (UNCST), with funding from IDRC for Nabweru and Buwama and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) for Nakaseke.

The main target groups of the EDAI project were farmers, community organisations and extension services. A baseline study was conducted in February 2001, which included an assessment of the information and communication needs, preferences and resources in these communities and covered more than 1,000 people in the three districts.

Among the project activities were identifying and repackaging information for dissemination through the MCTs (including translating electronic, print, video and CD materials into the local language, Luganda); strengthening the resources at the MCTs and at NARO's Agricultural Research Information Service (ARIS); and organising training workshops on database management, information retrieval, content development and the use and management of information and communication technologies (ICTs). The participants in the training workshops included ARIS and telecentre staff, extension agents, researchers, farmers and members of the telecentre management committee and local councils.

The project was scheduled to end in December 2002. As it drew to a close, preparations were made to hand over the management of the telecentres to local bodies — the local councils for the Nabweru and Buwama telecentres, and the District Administration for the Nakaseke telecentre.

The names in bold in this summary of the impact study are the names of the people whose stories follow the summary.

The study to assess the impact of the EDAI project ran from November 2002 to January 2003. The project leader, **Joyce Adupa** from ARIS, and the project advisor, Jane Asaba from CABI, worked with **Edith Adera**, the IDRC representative, to define the objectives of the evaluation and the terms of reference for the consultant who would carry out the evaluation. They brought in a local consultant, **Narathius Asingwire**, a lecturer and researcher in the Social Sciences Department at the University of Makerere in Kampala, to conduct the study, assisted by a team of two field supervisors and seven research assistants who received training in the use of the study instruments.

The study sought to assess project impact in terms of:

- accessibility to ICTs;
- skills in managing and disseminating agricultural information to rural communities;
- resources at ARIS and the three MCTs;
- information dissemination to the rural communities using conventional and electronic channels;
- sustainability of the telecentres' information services.

The study methodology was based on both quantitative and qualitative techniques. A pre-tested structured questionnaire was used to collect the quantitative data through face-to-face interviews. The instruments used to collect the qualitative information were in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, and the findings were used to corroborate the quantitative data. Additional data were collected from documents at the telecentres and from ARIS. The impact study was carried out in 36 villages and involved 978 farm households (the basic sampling unit, one member of each household being interviewed); a Nabweru farmer, **Daniel Serubie**, was among those interviewed. A number of key informants were also interviewed, such as local officials, representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs), and telecentre staff, including **Edward Juuku**, the manager of the Nabweru telecentre.

The findings were presented in a report that described the project activities, the study methodology, the extent to which the project was believed to have had an impact on accessibility, skills, resources, information dissemination and sustainability, the conclusions and the lessons learnt. This report was reviewed by the key players in the impact study, and a Final Technical Report was produced in February 2003.

In April 2003, NARO and CABI organised a workshop in Kampala to share the study findings with a broad range of stakeholders. Among them were telecentre managers and some of the farmers who had participated in the study. Other workshop participants included representatives from IDRC, UNCST, the Ministry of Agriculture, extension agencies, NGOs and CBOs.

The stories

EDITH ADERA. Senior Program Specialist for Acacia and Connectivity Africa (ICT4D programmes), IDRC Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa, Kenya

Evaluation experience: *Extensive*

Definition of ‘impact assessment’: *“Impact assessment is an estimation of the consequences of a current or proposed action.”*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, during a visit to IICD in The Netherlands, conducted by Gesa Wesseler; December 2003*

Evaluating projects is a general principle for IDRC. Evaluation is always incorporated into the project plan. The main purpose is to see whether the project had any impact, to learn lessons for future projects, and to share these lessons with the project stakeholders. IDRC encourages its recipients to undertake project evaluations for learning purposes as opposed to as a policing function. IDRC is at hand to lend evaluation support to recipients; it views itself as an ‘accompanying agency’. The evaluation should be valuable to the project partners. The partners in this project were NARO and CABI. The goals were to provide agricultural information to rural communities and farmers using a variety of ICT channels, to test the best means of providing this information and to find the best format in which this information could be provided. The project made use of a whole range of dissemination modes — video, CD-ROMs, print materials, TV, radio, question-and-answer service through e-mail, internet (web portal).

With the impact assessment, we wanted to establish to what extent the information provided was useful. We also wanted to assess to what extent this information and the corresponding knowledge acquired resulted in improved agricultural productivity. And whether the project resulted in enhanced capacities of the various stakeholders — the scientists, the extension agents, the telecentre managers and the farmers — to access, package/re-package and disseminate targeted agricultural information through ICTs.

An independent consultant was engaged to undertake the study. I was involved in helping to define the study objectives and the evaluator’s terms of reference. I was later interviewed by the evaluation team. I represented IDRC as the funding agency; the project was fully funded by IDRC, with CABI providing some services but no financial commitment. As a general principle, IDRC staff stay at arms’ length during an external evaluation process. We review the draft reports and comment on them.

There was no pressure on the consultant to show impact. A good thing about the way the study was implemented was that it was very participatory. It was not seen as a ‘policing’ or

The study was guided by the principle of learning rather than accountability.

‘accountability’ exercise. The emphasis was on learning and on sharing the results of the project with like-minded agencies and stakeholders. We really wanted to assess the project’s results and examine what effects it had on the beneficiaries. The study was guided by the principle of learning rather than accountability.

The respondents in the study all came from the project area. Most probably they were randomly, but purposively, sampled. In each sub-county — the third of five administrative levels in Uganda — three parishes were selected, then villages sampled and the respondents selected from within the sampled villages. The evaluator conducted the sampling exercise.

The study showed that the project actually had some positive impact on agricultural productivity. The report was very well written, it reported on all the steps of the project, and it was able to provide facts and figures. One other striking thing was that about 80% of the respondents were the same persons interviewed during the baseline study, which provides a good basis for impact assessment and comparison of before and after the project.

The study identified a missing link in the quest for ICTs to impact on agricultural productivity within this project’s context. That is the fact that information and knowledge are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for bringing about community development; beneficiaries also need the means/resources to transform the information and knowledge acquired into practice for developmental outcomes to be observed. Information alone is not enough. In planning the second phase of this project, we will take this lesson into account. The study was also able to provide evidence of the efficacy of ICTs in increasing agricultural productivity through information service provision — it is possible to re-package information to meet the expressed needs of the beneficiaries. It is practicable, it is doable, and it has made positive changes in the farmers’ lives. The evaluation provided this evidence.

If we had the chance to do the study again, though, I would enhance the time spent with the stakeholders to discuss the recommendations coming out of the evaluation and see how things could be done better. Also, I think it was difficult to measure impact after a project lasting only 2 years. That was definitely a very short period of time to achieve all of its objectives. There wasn’t enough time to create all the right linkages with other organisations to help the beneficiaries to transform their knowledge into practice for tangible outcomes. Also, undertaking the study immediately after the project ended meant that it couldn’t show any long-term effects.

The study findings were presented at a workshop. I had the idea of publishing a synthesised version of the report for wider circulation, but after discussions with colleagues within the Acacia Program, we decided to take a different approach. We will now pool all our ICT4D experiences in Uganda since 1997 in one document, and produce a country briefing paper, which would combine all of this, including an overview of the ICT environment and other projects that Acacia has funded to date.

It was difficult to measure impact after a project lasting only 2 years. Also, undertaking the impact study immediately after the project ended meant that it couldn’t show any long-term effects.

I'm not aware of any specific follow-up to the impact study. The telecentres are still seeking agricultural information to complement their information resources. In this way, the project has contributed to raising their awareness of agricultural issues and the role that can be played by ICTs. Community information needs are very dynamic, necessitating information providers to constantly assess clientele needs and update information on a regular basis — this is a big challenge, considering that the overwhelming majority of people in both urban and rural Africa are largely tradition-bound, African-language-speaking communities with varying levels of illiteracy.

JOYCE ADUPA. Project Leader, Agricultural Research Information Service (ARIS), Uganda

Evaluation experience: *Some experience, but not in impact assessment*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *None given*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at ARIS, conducted by Geoffrey Ebong; January 2004*

The EDAl project arose out of the recognition that there was an agricultural information gap which needed to be filled. Analysis showed that the physical infrastructure, such as computers and telephones, was there but not enough agricultural information was being disseminated. And NARO, being the main generator of such information, was the natural host for such a project. The project was for 2 years, but was extended for 6 months to December 2002. Some activities continued into 2003, like the end-of-project evaluation and the stakeholders' workshop to discuss the evaluation.

A needs assessment was done to identify the specific constraints, what kind of information was needed and what kind of channels to use to disseminate it. Eventually, the whole project was planned with the stakeholders. I had a few problems, but on the whole it was a very good project. Sometimes we were able to do more than was required by the project. For example, we were supposed to produce three videos but we ended up producing eight!

Towards the end of the project, NARO commissioned a study to gauge the 'impact' of the project. I put 'impact' in quotation marks because I think that what we looked at was not impact, but outputs and outcomes. Impact means looking for the changes in people's lives brought about by the project. But it was too early to say how the project changed people's lives, in this case, at the time of the evaluation study. We just evaluated what the project delivered, what people

They commissioned a study to gauge the 'impact' of the project. I put 'impact' in quotation marks because I think that what we looked at was not impact, but outputs and outcomes.

learnt and what they could have gained from that knowledge. Basically, how they were using the outputs. And there is another point here: when you talk of impact are you looking only at good stories?

Anyway, NARO commissioned the evaluation and IDRC funded it. I was in charge of the exercise, apart from doing the actual study itself. When I wrote to IDRC asking them to select the evaluation consultants, they instead asked me to organise it. They let us do the exercise without any interference, apart from providing guidelines for writing the final report. So, I drafted the terms of reference for the evaluation and shared them with IDRC and with colleagues in NARO and CABI. We then looked for a local consultant, and chose the person who had done the needs assessment. Could this lead to bias? I don't know, the experts need to tell us. But Asingwire knew the telecentres very well. We developed the questionnaires together and went into the field to pre-test them. The good aspect about the IDRC approach during the entire project was letting us implement the project without undue hindrances. This enabled us to build the capacity of the project implementation team. It was a huge, challenging project, but with close collaboration from CABI, and the support and keenness of the beneficiaries and the telecentre staff we managed the project very well. I would say I am a much stronger manager and leader than before the project.

IDRC had a very comprehensive internal monitoring system in place during the project implementation, which I think contributed very much to the systematic and smooth implementation process. They closely monitored the project through a 6-monthly reporting system. The project had very clear milestones to achieve. They paid regular visits to the project, usually unannounced. So, I think we built up confidence and this is important for smooth project implementation.

For the study, we went to the same people and areas that had been involved in the needs assessment, but fewer of them. We wanted to find out: Did they use the information? Did they find it useful? Was there any change in the way they do things now? How accessible was the information? But we were not really looking for changes in behaviour. We also evaluated the telecentre staff. What had they done with the information available, with the training they had been given? I think it's better to look at things at the lower level. Looking for changes in behaviour — this is too big, too difficult, especially if you are evaluating a project on information. How do I know that the change in somebody's behaviour is because of my brochure? To me, in the case of information, output is just as important.

I'm not sure about the timing of the study. An end-of-term evaluation had been incorporated into the project design and had to be done at the end of the project. So we were under pressure to have this analysis ready soon after December 2002. But, on the other hand, if you do a study too long after a project, people — the beneficiaries and the project staff — might have forgotten things. And might have moved on. So, I believe it is good to do an evaluation immediately. This is also necessary for accountability.

Looking for changes in behaviour — this is too big, too difficult, especially if you are evaluating a project on information. How do I know that the change in somebody's behaviour is because of my brochure?

I think the biggest problem doing this study was not knowing exactly what to look for or how to measure it. You want things in quantitative terms, but how do you get there? As for the question of attribution, we did not dare tread there in this study. If you look at the report, nowhere is anything related to attribution mentioned. Another challenge was how to capture some of the dynamics which had an effect on the project. For example, politics. This is crucial. How do you capture this in your evaluation? And a final question: Who is best placed to do an evaluation? Is it somebody who knows the project well? Or do you get somebody who is a stranger to the project?

NARATHIUS ASINGWIRE. Researcher/Lecturer, Social Sciences Department, University of Makerere, Uganda

Evaluation experience: *More than 15 years' experience in conducting evaluations*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"A scientific evaluation of the effects or consequences of a designed intervention on the intended beneficiaries."*

Interview: *Questionnaire, compiled by Geoffrey Ebong and based on the guidelines sent to all interviewers (the respondent's workload at the time prevented him from being able to participate in a face-to-face interview); January 2004*

The project was on the electronic delivery of agricultural information to rural farmers in the Luwero, Mpigi and Wakiso districts. Its goal was to enhance agricultural production through information delivery to the farmers, thereby improving their living conditions. The IDRC of Canada funded it. The stakeholders were rural farmers, the Ministry of Agriculture, NARO and local government.

I don't know whether there has been any follow-up. My work stopped with the presentation of the impact study report to the dissemination workshop.

The purpose of the impact study was to analyse the extent to which the intended goal and objectives had been achieved, and to document lessons learnt for replicability purposes. The study was commissioned by NARO, and it was done for NARO and partners. I was the Principal Investigator/Consultant. I was involved in the design and implementation of the study: I had submitted a plan on how to go about it before I was contracted. The study was done at the end of the lifespan of the project so as to objectively assess the impact. But there was no pressure to show impact.

I cannot remember the details about the time and money allocated to study. All I know is that the budget was a bit small for such a big study. Maybe more resources — time and money — were

needed. I feel the rest of the study was perfectly OK. A good thing about it was the participation of all the stakeholders.

Measuring impact after 2 years of an agricultural project is a daunting challenge. One has to be careful to analyse whether the said impact is as a result of the project being assessed or some other interventions.

The findings were disseminated in a workshop in which I participated. I cannot remember all the other participants, but there were members from various organisations — NARO, FAO, etc. I don't know whether there has been any follow-up. My work stopped with the presentation to the dissemination workshop.

EDWARD JUUKU. Telecentre Manager, Nabweru, Uganda

Evaluation experience: None

Definition of 'impact assessment': None given

Interview: Face-to-face interview, in Nabweru, conducted by Geoffrey Ebong; December 2004

There are many challenges as the telecentre manager here. Too much politics since it was placed under the local government governance when the IDRC project ended. And, like other telecentres, it is in sub-county headquarters because there is office space here, but we are in the same compound as a police station and a local magistrate's court. This is putting people off. They feel intimidated in such a location, especially if they are having problems with paying graduated tax.

I have been the manager of this place for over 2 years now. The IDRC project ended in November 2002, but many activities went over into 2003. The evaluation was from November 2002 to February 2003. I knew the evaluator quite well; he is the one who also did the baseline survey. In the evaluation, he was looking for impact on the ground.

The evaluator's interest was to find out whether the project had been successful in providing the required agricultural information and whether it had succeeded in providing skills to telecentre and extension staff, as well as to farmers. He used a questionnaire, which was administered at random. He also conducted interviews with key informants and held focus group discussions.

Unfortunately, my role in the study was very limited. We just helped them locate interviewees. We were not involved in the design and testing of the questionnaire. I saw it only when they came with it. The questions were really not the critical questions I would like to know the answers to. I would have asked very different questions. And the questionnaires were too long for the farmers. To me, it looks like the questionnaire was designed to deliver certain pre-conceived results.

I also had a problem with the way they selected the people to be interviewed. They really landed on anybody. They left out many people who are knowledgeable about the project. Some people they picked had never even heard of the telecentre. They should have selected the people who participated in the project and benefited from it, not just a random selection. The local management team they interviewed had been in office for just 2 months, so they could not provide all the information needed. These problems could have been avoided if they had involved us in the process.

We were not involved in the design and testing of the questionnaire. I saw it only when they came with it. I would have asked very different questions. And the questionnaires were too long for the farmers.

Another problem was the enumerators. The evaluator came with his own enumerators who were not people from the area. They did not speak the local language fluently. They were not very familiar with the local customs. I really wonder whether they were able to get the information they wanted.

It is unfortunate that telecentre management input was not sought. Because of this, the impact of the project was perceived as very minimal. To me, the project was very successful in what it was supposed to do. The evaluation should have been designed for what the project was actually supposed to do. But some of the things evaluated were not what we were supposed to do. Like impact on the people on the ground.

Also, it should have been done at a later date. Some of the project activities were still ongoing when the evaluation was being done. Training the extension agents, training the farmers to use the internet, etc. You cannot see the impact of these things within a short period of time. Even the project itself was too short. At the time when people were beginning to appreciate it, it was coming to an end.

After the evaluation, we were invited to a workshop to discuss the evaluation report. It was quite intensive. We were split into working groups to discuss the results. Apart from that, I have not yet received any official report. I was given a summary report, which is not very useful. Anyway, since the evaluation was for the donors, not us, it is OK.

In future, I think they should involve telecentre staff in evaluations. Not just ask us to give the names of parishes where they can do the survey. And they should involve the people around here as enumerators. People would rather give information to people they know than to strangers. I hope your book will help in this.

DANIEL SERUBIE. Farmer, Nabweru, Uganda**Evaluation experience:** None**Definition of 'impact assessment':** None given**Interview:** Face-to-face interview, in Nabweru, conducted by Geoffrey Ebong; December 2004

I was one of the first users of the telecentre, and have attended many seminars and workshops there. One of them was a training workshop on how to use the internet. This was part of the EDAI project. The EDAI project was supposed to train us, farmers, on how to get information from researchers and extension agents.

When they did the evaluation of the project, they asked us about the activities in which we were involved at the telecentre. They also wanted to know what sort of information I received from the telecentre and what I used it for. And what sort of information I would like to receive from the telecentre in future. I told them that when I started getting involved in the telecentre I knew what I wanted. I wanted to get information to help me start a banana plantation in my home area. My main interest was in banana management and pest control. So, I was always looking for specific information. This information was available at the telecentre in tapes and handouts. I have now established my plantation in Luwero by applying the skills I acquired from the telecentre.

I was selected to participate in the evaluation, as a key informant, because they were looking for those engaged in groups and the group leaders who were active in agriculture. But, like me, they were all people involved in the project. I had a problem with that. I wish they had also sampled those who did not participate in the project. To find out why did they not participate.

The evaluators used questionnaires. They were too long. And some of the questions were too direct. In fact, sometimes even insulting. For example, the question on changes in personal income. It was too direct. It should have been better formulated. People were not willing to give their personal income status to the research assistants. And these research assistants, they need to be sensitive. You should not just pick anybody to collect information.

There was another problem. The questions asked were in relation to both the telecentre and the EDAI project. But the telecentre was there before EDAI. It was as if EDAI was being evaluated based on the telecentre. The telecentre itself had its own operational problems, but EDAI had no operational problem. To me, this was a mix-up of issues. It appeared as if the problems of the telecentre were also the problems of EDAI. But EDAI was a very good project.

The evaluators used questionnaires. Some of the questions were too direct. In fact, sometimes even insulting. For example, the question on changes in personal income. It was too direct.

By the time of the evaluation, I had already implemented all I wanted. So whether they had come 1 year or 2 years later wouldn't have made any difference to what I had to tell them. But I think for the other people, the time of the evaluation was too early.

I did have feedback from the evaluation because they invited me to participate in the workshop on disseminating the results. You know, the problem in evaluation starts with the project design. People always bring their ideas without researching on the ground. A lot of assumptions were in the project design. Some of these assumptions were wrong. They should start by evaluating the project design. Assess the objectives of the project. How feasible were they?

STUDY 6

WAN SMOLBAG THEATRE (WSB) RADIO PROJECT, VANUATU

The study

In 2000–01, four South Asian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and their New Zealand NGO partner agencies took part in the first phase of a participatory impact assessment (PIA) pilot programme. This was followed, in 2001–02, by the second phase in the Pacific, involving four Pacific NGOs and their New Zealand partners. The Voluntary Agencies Support Scheme (VASS) of NZAID, led by evaluation specialists **Marion Quinn** and **Kevin Clark**, had initiated the pilot programme in order to increase awareness of PIA among New Zealand NGOs and their Asian and Pacific partners. VASS sees PIA as:

- a qualitative approach to analysing and understanding change in a particular context;
- a means of improving development practice and the sustainability of benefits for intended beneficiaries, building monitoring and evaluation capacity, and strengthening partnerships;
- a participatory and gender-sensitive process based on clear objectives, good baseline data and viable indicators, integrated into all stages of a development project and involving all stakeholders (particularly the intended project beneficiaries) in each stage of the process.

The South Asia phase started with a training/planning workshop for the four teams, each team consisting of an Asian NGO, its New Zealand partner and a facilitator. The teams then went back to the projects to share knowledge with agency staff and stakeholders. Over a period of several months they conducted a PIA, held an analysis workshop locally, and wrote a report. They were brought together again at a final workshop in New Zealand to review the exercise.

For the Pacific, the same procedure was followed, with each of the four teams assisted by a local facilitator. The Pacific projects were in Bougainville, Fiji and Vanuatu. The initial 2-day workshop was held in New Zealand in August 2001. It sought to develop a common understanding of PIA (rationale, concepts, principles, methodologies, indicators), formulate a framework for the PIA study (objectives, scope, data to be collected, data collection methods) and arrange New Zealand NGO visits to the Pacific to work with their partners on planning the study. The PIA was implemented over 5–6 months. The final workshop took place in Fiji. The Vanuatu study, one of eight undertaken in the PIA pilot programme, reflects some of the constraints and benefits for the NGOs involved.

The names in bold in this summary of the impact study are the names of the people whose stories follow the summary.

The Vanuatu project that was being assessed was a radio soap opera produced by Wan Smolbag Theatre (WSB), with Oxfam NZ funding. Launched in October 2000, *Famili Blong Sarah* dealt with reproductive health issues (including HIV/AIDS) and was broadcast several times a week to both urban and rural listeners. A Listener Survey conducted by WSB in 2001 suggested that the radio programme was proving to be an effective medium for reproductive health education. WSB wanted to measure this effectiveness. It expressed interest in participating in the pilot Pacific PIA, and the team was formed — with WSB as the local NGO (represented by two WSB researchers, **Siula Bula** and **George Petro**), Oxfam NZ as the New Zealand partner (represented by **Nicki Wrighton** and Harriet Sewell), and **Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop**, a development consultant based in Samoa, as the facilitator.

The PIA process involved:

- Attending the initial workshop. Here, the team set the goal (“to use the PIA strategy to measure the effectiveness of the *Famili Blong Sarah* radio soap to raise youth awareness and education in reproductive health issues”, with behaviour change the key indicator of effectiveness) and selected the communities (two rural, two urban). It also decided to involve two young people (one male, one female) from each community (Community Representatives, CRs) in the data collection. Among the CRs were **Ulas Titus** from Santos island, and **Kaltau Sepa** from Emau island.
- Arranging community meetings to discuss the PIA study. All four communities expressed interest in it and helped select the CRs; at these meetings, the indicators were chosen (increased awareness of family planning issues and use of family planning methods; decrease in the number of sexual partners; decrease in exchange of sex for *kava*, etc.; increase in the uptake of condoms from clinics and increase in usage by young men and women; decrease in the number of unwanted and teenage pregnancies; increased awareness of reproductive health issues; increased communication between partners/friends; and decrease in the number of sexually transmitted infections, STIs).
- Arranging a planning workshop for the team to decide what data were needed and how to collect them, and to train the CRs in the participatory data collection tools. It emerged at this workshop that few families in the two rural communities had radios. Two radios were provided for each community, to be looked after by the CRs and made available for young people to listen to *Famili Blong Sarah*.
- Implementing the first data collection, using social mapping, location mapping, social trends, focus group interviews and individual questionnaire-based interviews (the questions were the same for male and female respondents). One of the rural communities dropped out at this point because of logistical and personnel problems.

- Encouraging the young people to listen to the radio soap over a 4–5 month period.
- Implementing the second data collection. This was preceded by a workshop to review the work to date and prepare the data collection tools (only questionnaires this time, used in one-to-one interviews aimed at gathering more in-depth information); the facilitator was present during the data collection in the first community; an Oxfam NZ representative participated in the data collection in another community.
- Analysing the results of both data collection exercises. This was done by the WSB and Oxfam NZ members of the team.
- Attending the final workshop in Fiji, with the three other Pacific teams. This was organised by VASS and the four facilitators to share the lessons, the findings and what emerged in the way of the process and tools.

In its final report, WSB said that the PIA study “had opened an avenue for a more participatory approach [that would be] of great benefit to the organisation as a whole... [but] the time consuming and highly labour-intensive nature of this participatory method of data collection may mean that WSB cannot use it as often as it might like to.”

In the VASS final report, the authors wrote that “the scope of the exercise was too broad and the eight indicators identified made it difficult to focus on the impact of *Famili Blong Sarah*... In some cases the data collection tools were selected (adapted) according to what the data collectors could use rather than the tools’ usefulness for the task... The relationship between the research question, the indicators identified and the data collection methods needed to be more fully considered at the planning stage.” They concluded that “this pilot showed that PIA is a valuable learning tool for communities to participate in setting their learning goals, identifying the processes to achieve these and then evaluating outcomes.”

The stories

SIULA BULA and GEORGE PETRO. Project Research Officers, Wan Smolbag Theatre (WSB), Vanuatu

Evaluation experience: *Siula: none. George: involved in some M&E for WSB*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"How some physical thing, or ideas and information, impact on a person's life. For anything that you do there are always impacts, good and sometimes bad, on the people's lives."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, conducted by Shirley Randall; December 2003*

Oxfam inserted this PIA into the M&E of the *Famili Blong Sarah* radio programme, which aims to raise awareness among young people about reproductive health issues, especially HIV/AIDS. This PIA is a new thing and Oxfam liked the idea of including it in the project. So it was done for Oxfam and VASS. From the WSB point of view, we thought it would be good for the organisation if we knew more about PIA if that's the way things are going in M&E.

The pilot PIA was for 6 months. The amount of money was fine. As a pilot, 6 months was a bit of a squeeze, especially with the transport problems. Everything had to be done in a hurry. But working with communities, things didn't work as fast as we wanted them to. There were procedures to be followed to make sure everyone was happy and we needed more time. Also, the issue itself that we were dealing with — it's one that needs time.

The whole thing started with a workshop in Auckland where PIA was discussed. We looked at it and then we formed a team — us, Oxfam people, a VASS representative and an external facilitator. We both did all the groundwork setting up the work in the communities. We were involved in the design and throughout the process. We were involved from the start.

And we started in the dark! We were not very clear about what we had to do. We were stumbling around. We just did what we thought was right. The facilitator was not in the country. It would have helped if we had someone here to bounce ideas off. We were connected by the internet, but that was slow. A lot of the work was left for us to do. Although our study was linked to those other PIA studies, we saw it as a local study, not multi-country. From the VASS point of view it was multi-country, but we did not worry about what the others were doing.

The overall purpose of the study was shared by all the agencies involved because we discussed it. The lines of communication were clear, but at times they were difficult. Everyone was very

We started the study in the dark! We were not very clear about what we had to do. We were stumbling around. We just did what we thought was right.

enthusiastic but, because there were three countries involved, we should have set up much better lines of communication. It was only at the end that we decided to do the communication phone link-up; we could have done that much earlier.

A significant thing was working closely with communities on issues that are not easy to talk about — getting to know the people who we were working with. We were impressed with some of the older women who were very supportive of their children getting information about STIs, HIV/AIDS, etc. We chose two young people from each of the communities [Community Representatives, CRs] and worked closely with them, to increase their capacity. And all this strengthened our relationships with the communities, so that we could work with them in some other projects if the need arises. Also significant is the way you can see how the youth knowledge of reproductive health issues has developed since the beginning of the study. Now, when we go back to the communities and study the issues we see the changes.

When you are talking about behaviour change, no one thing or one person can change the behaviour of another person completely. What we were trying to do with the radio programme was to get people thinking and talking about reproductive health. If that was happening, we were happy. If *Famili Blong Sarah* was the cause for the change, that would make the donors happy. But just getting people to talk about reproductive health is enough, whether because of the radio programme or something else, it doesn't matter.

Now that the study is finished, we are a bit clearer about what we were supposed to do. If we went back to the start, we would probably want more and clearer instructions on how to go about the whole thing. We did not have any PIA experience and we did not know that it was going to be a bit difficult. We would have handled the indicators differently, for example. In the Auckland workshop, we came up with a list of indicators and when we came back we set up a meeting with our secondary stakeholders and we talked with them about what they would like to know, and then we went to each of the communities involved and asked the same things. We ended up with a different group of indicators and there were too many of them. We would choose fewer indicators, now, and also not choose too many communities. Because we weren't clear about what had to be done, we aimed too high.

PIA is a very interesting method of analysing and you are working with the community all the time, but things need to be very clear at the start. The whole planning process has to be done well. You need to make sure you know exactly what you are doing and that you don't do too much, or try things that are too difficult.

We don't know how the study's findings were used. They were given to VASS. We still work with the CRs — we refer to them as 'data collectors' because we are working with them for the rest of the *Famili Blong Sarah* project on collecting PIA data. This is an ongoing thing with WSB.

We came up with a list of indicators initially but we ended up with a different group of indicators and there were too many of them. We would choose fewer indicators, now, and also not choose too many communities. We aimed too high.

PEGGY FAIRBAIRN-DUNLOP. Development Consultant, Samoa

Evaluation experience: *Extensive experience, mainly in community-based participatory research and practical training, drafting research evaluation, monitoring evaluation models, and teaching formative and summative evaluation at university level*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"To see what the impact of any intervention that you have put in place is: social, economic attitudes, what you think, what people tell you is the result of the intervention — positive, negative, or unexpected."*

Interview: *Telephone interview, conducted by Shirley Randall; December 2003*

The project was a pilot to look at PIA, to see what resources were required — PIA is very resource intensive. The key purpose of PIA is that people should not only determine their needs and the strategies they should use to address those needs, but they should also learn and be able to evaluate the impact of their actions. People do this naturally anyway, but in a project framework, people determine the goals, evaluate what happens and ask, "Where do we go from here?"

The project was to replicate an Asian experience of PIA that had worked — to see how it went in the Pacific. This Vanuatu PIA was very different because we were trying to evaluate a communication strategy: the effect of radio messages. It was tricky because we did not know who would be listening to the messages. The stakeholders were the two NZ agencies and the reproductive health component of Wan Smolbag's (WSB) *Famili Blong Sarah* radio programme. At the community level, we developed another layer of stakeholders — the women who ran the small health clinics. Primary stakeholders had been identified by WSB in the communities where it had been working. The relationships existed and we capitalised on them.

The project time was very short: a year. Within that year we had to have baseline data, and then go back and measure what had changed. Not much time when you think about how difficult it is to get attitude change. Information coming in and out is a long-term process. We went straight into the project from a 1-week workshop in Auckland for the community workers, facilitators, donors, where we learnt about PIA from a PIA expert and from people from the Asia projects. Later, there was a mid-term workshop and then a final workshop in Fiji.

At the first workshop, we had to design the study; it was a bit rushed. We were at different levels of understanding and not too sure of processes. We went through participatory strategies; most of us knew of them, but weren't sure how to use them. We developed our understanding over time, but we should have had more time at the beginning. The whole process of dialogue between learners and the community and the change agents which is central to PIA required

The key purpose of PIA is that people should not only determine their needs and the strategies to address those needs, but they should also learn and be able to evaluate the impact of their actions.

more time to work through, to understand how to talk to people, how to listen to people. It was not a solid enough approach to project planning. We learnt in the field when we got out.

Our job as facilitators was to be a support system to the study on the ground and to the donors. A training and clarification role, not a director role. WSB decided to do four widely spread communities (because they wanted both urban and rural), so we brought in two resource people from each community and ran workshops with them. We tried to do too much, working in four communities. For a pilot project, one or maybe two communities would have been enough.

We needed time to ensure that we were talking about the same thing when we talked about PIA. Trying to instil the attitude that you can gauge impact by other than words, by participatory games, not just questions, and working out the impact strategy you can use to assess a change in behaviour — this is tricky for anybody, even the most experienced people. We were evaluating a media message and trying to make sure people had listened to it. We ended up giving out radios (we discovered, after the CRs had been trained in data collection, that one of the target communities had almost no radios!). We had to document who listened, when they listened and how they listened. If we were going to monitor reproductive health messages, what were the messages in the programme? Reproductive health is not only about where to buy condoms, but issues of power and relationships in families. This is hard, trying to measure impacts of change of attitudes, values, skills, knowledge. By the time we got it down to what was doable in 1 year, we had learned a lot.

A significant aspect of the study was the changing nature of the participatory communities, their migratory nature, between rural and urban areas; it is pretty well impossible to do PIA with communities that are changing. You need the same people to be there at the end. You have to take account of a changing population.

The key good thing about the study was that it forced all of us, including the community, to look at impact, and the community saw that they should have a say in what goes on in a project. In any development exercise, we must learn new ways and strategies of doing things. WSB should be carrying out more evaluation, so should Oxfam, but it is very resource intensive, and you have to balance that against the returns. Most of us came to the conclusion that any one agency could not do a PIA on every project, but you should be aware of it and do fuller assessments on one or two of them.

If there was something I could change, it would be to do with that first workshop. It is to introduce an idea; you don't expect in the same workshop to develop the whole plan. With strategy, more discussion and training of NGOs is needed to build up the skills base. There are many PIA tools and you have to select the appropriate one to give you a valuable result. Too many people grab the tool bag and think they can do the lot without being sure of what they are doing. The evaluation of this project was done at a workshop in Fiji. It was quite powerful for those of us who had been through the wringer. As I looked around the room, I didn't think there was a good understanding of the implications of a PIA. There were 40 people saying different things.

It is pretty well impossible to do PIA with communities that are changing. You need the same people to be there at the end. You have to take account of a changing population.

There are many tools of PIA and you have to select the appropriate tool to give you a valuable result. Too many people grab the tool bag and think they can do the lot without being sure of what they are doing.

A few other points to make... There was not a model of media from Asia, so it took us a while to adapt what we did. And there was very little interaction with other Pacific countries. Perhaps there should have been more. We operated almost in isolation once we had learned the basic kit. And the multi-agency aspect was an issue. When discussing the PIA's purpose in Auckland, donors had their purpose. I was looking at PIA as a strategy for better implementation. Oxfam saw it as a way of working better with their local groups. For WSB there was yet another viewpoint.

Overall, I think we should have had a longer time frame at the beginning to see more clearly what we had to achieve and then more time for evaluation at the end. The radio programme over time had built up a following of people who identified with the people in the show. If the PIA had been a longer-term exercise we would have been able to relate it better. At the end, I was not sure that we could ever say there were changes in attitudes due to the programme, but I believe there were changes due to our PIA intervention.

MARION QUINN and KEVIN CLARK. Evaluation Consultants, Voluntary Agencies Support Scheme (VASS), NZAID, New Zealand

Evaluation experience: *Extensive experience (including impact assessment) working with government agencies and NGOs in New Zealand, India, UK, Canada, etc.*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"Looking at the longer-term impact of the development project or programme that has been undertaken."*

Interview: *Telephone interview, conducted by Shirley Randall; December 2003*

The Vanuatu case study was part of a pilot programme on PIA funded by NZAID. We were contracted by VASS to find a process that would help measure project impacts while promoting a key VASS principle — participation. We developed a concept of process involving New Zealand NGOs and their partners in South Asia (first stage of pilot) and the Pacific (second stage) in a learning process. From designing the programme to writing the final report took 4 years, the field work taking 2 years. We designed the pilot and then managed the overall process. We presented the final report to NZAID in 2003.

One of the lessons that came out of it was that impact assessment should be an integral part of how organisations think and work. It needs to be incorporated into organisational policies, training, planning, monitoring and evaluation. It should happen throughout the project cycle, not just after the project has finished. If it is part of the normal process, integrated into it, then it does not become a burden, an extra thing to be done.

A major challenge was training. The context was new to everybody; people came with different ideas and experience, and the training workshops sought to achieve an agreed level of understanding on both framework and language. Some people found their involvement harder than others. To some extent this depended on their level of knowledge and understanding about participatory processes and the resources they had. And the timing wasn't always brilliant. It didn't always fit naturally with what was happening in the communities or with NGO workloads.

The initial planning workshop in Auckland wasn't long enough; it didn't take into account that the Pacific countries had less experience than those in Asia. In the Pacific, the field planning with the local NGOs and communities didn't happen in some cases for 3 or 4 months after the initial workshop. In Asia it occurred straight afterwards; this was much more effective, not least because it helped to build strong teamwork. Also, a longer workshop would have made clearer the roles and responsibilities between Oxfam, WSB and the facilitator. With many people involved you need to be clear about who is taking the initiative and who is being involved, when and where.

In the Auckland workshop, the partner agencies worked together to think about indicators to measure impact. They needed to take that back to their agencies, to staff, volunteers and beneficiaries, for specific input on the indicators. It didn't happen too well in some of the Pacific case studies. Some agencies, including WSB, chose too many indicators. In some cases the agency determined them and the community endorsed them, rather than drawing out from the community how they would measure impact; part of the idea of PIA is that the agencies together with primary stakeholders should come up with a few key indicators to measure impact. By doing that, the community becomes part of the process of monitoring and evaluation and has some say in what is being measured and how. Impact assessment doesn't have to be done by outsiders to be valid and effective.

Mentoring and facilitating throughout the process where there is limited experience is very important. The process needs facilitators like Peggy who helped WSB work alongside — and link — people and agencies. There was a lot of focus on analysing what came out of the case studies, working with the community to draw out issues. Sometimes this was done by the local NGO rather than with the community, but the findings were shared with communities.

Timing was a critical feature. PIA is based on the belief that impact occurs from the beginning and has to be thought about from the beginning. Potential impact has to be considered in planning, selecting indicators and monitoring them throughout the process from the very beginning to the very end. And identifying primary and secondary stakeholders was also important. How the NGOs engaged different stakeholders was an important part of the PIA process.

The money was reasonable. It allowed the NGOs to hold workshops with their partners, to investigate how PIA might work in practice together and come together afterwards to reflect on lessons learned. But it did not allow the New Zealand NGO representative to go back to work

Impact occurs from the beginning and has to be thought about from the beginning. Potential impact has to be considered in planning, selecting indicators and monitoring them throughout the process from the very beginning to the very end.

with those in the field during the analysis stage. If we were doing it again we would fund them to go back at the end. Also, we would emphasise the importance of the community being involved in those final stages.

There were lots of good things about the study. It broadened perspectives. It built partnerships. It broke down the donor–recipient mentality. There was a greater focus on learning tools that involve people, a greater awareness of the importance of the full involvement of women in all stages of the process. Coming together as partners at a workshop, planning an activity, going out to do it with a skilled facilitator, and coming back to report on it was a significant learning process. A lot of issues were faced and learned from, and NGOs could see what they would do differently next time. It is more effective to go through the process than just talk about it.

The participation of primary stakeholders in planning and implementing the study — this is obviously a primary focus of PIA. Some achieved engagement to a greater degree than others. With WSB they initially talked to community leaders, then got representatives selected from the communities, young women and men who would be better able to engage with the target group, and gave them some initial training — and they were key to making sure the target groups in the community were actively involved in the process.

They realised that extremely poor and often illiterate people were able to use the process and tools and be actively involved in project planning and evaluation.

In the feedback from the NGOs, among the many positive comments, one that stood out was that many of them had been able to incorporate PIA into their project management systems and processes. Another was that most of them could see ways in which they could build on the work they had done in the pilot. WSB in Vanuatu said, “We now have a new baseline of information that we can use.” In future studies they realised that it would be better to have fewer indicators. This shows that PIA is an ongoing learning process. When Siula Bula (from WSB) came to the first workshop, she said she was more confused than excited, but at the final Fiji workshop she said she was more excited than confused! A lot of people found that the PIA process changed what they thought about their development work. They realised that extremely poor and often illiterate people were able to use the process and tools and be actively involved in project planning and evaluation.

Being a multi-country study, the programme presented some challenges. The idea was that at the initial workshop it was up to each team to look at the specific context and develop a plan for the PIA which was appropriate. The projects were all very different. All tools had to be adapted. So the workshop talked about tools that might be used, but it was up to each of the NGOs with the communities to decide which would be useful.

The concept of credit, attribution, didn’t come into this project. The focus was on learning. Agencies received funding through VASS, but there was no implication that if negative aspects were found it would affect funding. The focus on PIA and good monitoring and evaluation systems provides accountability to everyone who needs it. The process is aimed at better accountability to the intended beneficiaries — the primary stakeholders — and to NZAID and to the New Zealand tax payer.

KALTAU SEPA. Chief's Spokesperson, Emau island, Vanuatu**Evaluation experience:** None**Definition of 'impact assessment':** *"I am not clear about what it exactly means. They have asked me to work here but they haven't explained everything. Next year I think I will understand everything about it."***Interview:** *Face-to-face interview, conducted by Shirley Randall (in the local language, Bislama); December 2003*

The project is on reproductive health and we deal mainly with young boys and girls. Oxfam NZ funds the project. All the women and men in the village are interested in making sure the project continues. The Chiefs are also interested. I am working with three villages on the island. There are six villages altogether. I want to work with the three villages on the other side of the island, but when I went to one of them the Chief and the pastors were against the radio programme so I did not talk again with that community. The other two communities are waiting for me, but I have to go through the first community to get to them and that is hard for me. This is a Presbyterian Church island. The Moderator of the Session knows about this work and the Session is interested in the project. The Chief of this village was the very first to support me and then everyone supports me. The Headmaster of the school also comes to the meetings with the Chief.

When I went to the first workshop [for the PIA study] I understood that this is a good study to assist the community. It was being done for Oxfam NZ and WSB. I understand that there will be a lot of benefits to them because they will work out a lot of things through the study. There are a lot of things coming into the study as it progresses. The money from NZ went to WSB and they make the radio programme with that money. We [the six CRs] have taken part in the cassettes that they have used to make the programme.

I don't know why they chose me to join the study, but one person from this island, George, works with WSB and he chose me. I am an Elder and the spokesperson for the Chief here. The money that comes to me, at the time I started, is still the same. If it was raised a bit it would be good, because when I go to talk to the people I have to face some arguments so it should be increased. And I gather all the young people together and have to make some small food so they can eat a little after the radio programme.

Before this, I had no experience of this kind of work. But now I have to tell people what I have learned at the workshops. Last year, I went twice to the workshops and once this year. The six of us, WSB staff, Siula and George, Peggy, Marion and one Australian who talked about AIDS, we all went, and the nurse at WSB. There was a 1-week workshop at the beginning, then a 2-day workshop, then a 1-day workshop. I don't think the time was enough. If we had more time it would help me more to talk more effectively with the people. They gave me a radio. I have to stay with the people and ask them questions. When I talk in the village all the children come.

At the workshop one speaker came to speak for 5 minutes, then another one for 5 minutes and they finished. They should have a day each to talk to us. I tried to understand the teachers and I told them the time was not enough.

My role in the study is to collect information to send to WSB. They have given me a pen and an exercise book and I have to write down what is said. I have some forms in my exercise book. First, I have to ask the father about what he thinks, then the mother and then the boys and girls. When I was there at the workshop for a week, they taught me how to work with the radio. Then how to talk to people. I needed to understand more about the issues of the study, to tell the people here, but I didn't have the opportunity. At the workshop one speaker came to speak for 5 minutes, then another one for 5 minutes and they finished. They should have a day each to talk to us. I tried to understand the teachers and I told them the time was not enough. I needed to be taught more.

I don't know what they do with the papers that I send to them. When I went to the workshop, I asked them about this and they said they put them into a book and sent them down to Fiji or somewhere to put them in another big book and then sent them out. Then to another big book but I haven't seen this yet. I am still working on this study with George.

ULAS TITUS. Data Collector, Pepsi Village, Santo island, Vanuatu

Evaluation experience: *None, but had learnt about data collection on a Life Skills course*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"They talk about these words a lot but I am not sure of their meaning."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, conducted by Shirley Randall (in the local language, Bislama); December 2003*

I began to work on this project in 2000. I think it is very good because it helps young people to understand what is good behaviour and what is not. Its goal is to show the right way to keep Vanuatu a safe country. The project teaches about reproductive health, HIV/AIDS and the issues faced by young people in the town. It is funded by Oxfam NZ. The key stakeholders are Wan Smolbag Theatre, the two data collectors in each place (Pepsi, Emau and Seaside), the parents, the community, the Chiefs who are supportive, all young people, the Church leaders and the Youth Drop-in Centre. I am not sure who called for the study, but all the young people needed it.

In 2000, I went for a workshop for 4 days in Vila. I contributed when they showed us the questionnaires and asked our advice and took notice of what we said. Then there was another 1-week workshop in 2002, then another one in July 2003 for 1 week. The money is enough because it looks after accommodation and travel and what we need in the project.

I am a data collector. I have a radio and get all the young people in the village together when the *Famili Blong Sarah* programme comes out. I collect all their thinking and ideas on a form and send that back to WSB. There are three forms. The first asks what people think about the project.

The next one asks how many people are listening and the third is a composite of the two forms. Sometimes there is a problem with the quality of the reception. If my radio is not working I use someone else's radio. All the young people come together to listen to the radio programme. If the parents want to come they do too. There is a big improvement now in what the young people are doing. I just work with the boys and Rosie works with the girls.

There are no real challenges with the work. When I ask young people to come to listen to the radio they do, and when I record the information that is fine. It is just when the radio does not work that there is a problem. I have seven boys who come every time to listen to the radio, sometimes more. I am pleased to see the change in behaviour of the young people. Where boys are with girls, now they use condoms where in the past they didn't. Teenage pregnancy is going down in the community. Before, boys would never talk about these things but now they do. Now fathers are also talking about these issues with their sons.

If they did the study again, there is nothing that should be done differently. I think it has been good the way we have done it. Siula and George look at the forms we hand in and the next time they see us they have it recorded and if necessary they change the way we have been collecting the information. Four came the first time — Siula and George and two others — then twice more we have had visits. They have run a course for us. I learned a lot from this course. I want to encourage you that the project keeps going — it is very important in helping us and our parents, we need to do more in the area of reproductive health.

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NICKI WRIGHTON. Project Officer, Oxfam NZ, New Zealand

Evaluation experience: *Extensive M&E experience; no specific experience in impact assessment*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"It includes identifying what your intended impacts are at the beginning, monitoring as you go and looking back at what you have achieved — looking at the overall results of the project, what actually happened."*

Interview: *Telephone interview, conducted by Shirley Randall; December 2003*

Oxfam funds go towards WSB's *Famili Blong Sarah* programme, which focuses on health promotion. Other donors also fund the programme. Our component is on STIs and HIV/AIDS and health promotion. The stakeholders in the PIA study were the donors, the Vanuatu communities who listen to the programme, the Ministry of Health, WSB and its Family Health Clinic, which receives visits from those who hear the programme. Oxfam got involved in the study because there were issues around the bigger things, a wider level of asking why we were in the business we were in. We needed a more credible system for knowing the impact of what we were doing that we could give back to those who support Oxfam.

The time allocated to the study was not enough. From the beginning we did not sit down and think about the time we needed, because we were unclear about the process when we came out of the first workshop. I know that there was quite a lot of money available. But it was unsustainable money in that NGOs themselves could not sustain that level of funding. There were problems with the study scope. We did what the Asia study had done. We did not limit the scope sufficiently until it was too late. We all felt frustrated about this. We should have been able to learn from the Asian pilot a little more. If someone had said to us, "It is going to be far too complicated", "two areas would be enough, do it well," it would have made a difference.

Before this study, I had been involved in a lot of project M&E. I had not done impact assessment, but my understanding now is that I have actually been doing it for a long time. You just extend M&E into impact assessment looking at causal activities, etc. Impact assessment is not rocket science and we were so blinded by that. We thought it was another process we had to do on top of M&E.

There were problems with the study scope. We did what the Asia study had done. We did not limit the scope sufficiently until it was too late.

I was involved in the study design and the implementation at that first meeting, with our partner WSB. There were two of us from Oxfam, me and Harriet. My role was not with a day-to-day focus, but to be an extra questioner, to use my assessment and other skills and to link this with the programme committee as well as a staff member so there was a linkage within our organisation. The major challenge was that we didn't know what PIA was. We all had a lot of chats about this. It had been described to us as an item, something you should learn, but it wasn't. I felt I had a vision of what PIA was, Harriet had a vision, George and Siula had a vision, Peggy had a vision, and they were all different and we could not thrash that out until we were together. In retrospect, we should not have felt challenged really. We thought we had to redesign everything and do something new. Some people from WSB, NGOs, Oxfam thought that what we had been doing in the past was not good and we had to throw that away and start with a new study, and run that on top of everything else.

My understanding about indicators was that they were fundamental and we should get together and decide on them. But I arrived in Vanuatu late due to plane failures, so just WSB and the facilitator determined these. We found at the second meeting that we were not able to measure what we wanted to do. We tidied that up. We had a totally different set of views about establishing indicators — e.g., the quality of indicators rather than who establishes them.

A good thing about the study was that Oxfam and WSB cemented a good relationship. It gave us the chance to focus on M&E — to chew the fat because usually you are too busy for that — the chance to work with a partner in a developmental way. If we had the chance to do the study again, we would not have come out of the first workshop blind. I would spend more time trying to figure out more at the beginning, rather than muddling through to get clarity three-quarters of the way through. Even then, your clarity is different from someone else's clarity.

It didn't seem that the Vanuatu study was tied to the other PIA studies. For us, the connection to the other studies came through the facilitators, who were in touch with the study managers and every now and again had to move us along. I thought there was a reasonable amount of flexibility. But there is a problem with timing in a multi-study pilot. We were not able to get together as a team until the first visit, which for us was quite late in the year. We had to do the second phase when we weren't ready to do it.

The participation of primary stakeholders did pose some difficulties. We ended up not involving a large number of them in the study. The reasons? — time-wise it turned to jelly. Our colleagues in Vanuatu found they could not describe the study well enough to encourage the involvement of others. The young people and community? — yes. But the Ministry and other agencies? — we did not engage with them much at all.

I don't know what happened to the study findings. WSB should take credit for the observed changes that happened. I have seen the summary documents, but I have no idea about how they were used. I don't know if there has been any follow-up with the CRs, because after that I moved to Suva.

We had a totally different set of views about establishing indicators — e.g., the quality of indicators rather than who establishes them.

STUDY 7

AQUA OUTREACH PROGRAMME (AOP) EXTENSION MATERIALS PROJECT, THAILAND

The study

The Asian Institute of Technology's (AIT) Aqua Outreach Programme (AOP) in north-east Thailand began in 1988 as an adaptive research project aimed at developing appropriate technical recommendations for aquaculture for small-scale farmers, using a farming systems research approach. The project was funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) (then known as the Overseas Development Administration, ODA). By the early 1990s, the project felt that it had identified a suitable package of recommendations (on nursing fingerlings and on pond fertilisation) and began to examine ways of disseminating this information, taking into account the resource limitations of its main partner, the Thailand Department of Fisheries (DoF). It decided to produce extension materials (printed and audio-visual), using a carefully designed participatory approach to develop them with the farmers so as to ensure that they suited the farmers' lifestyle, culture, language and learning experience.

An assessment of the impact of the project was conducted in 1996 in Udorn Thani province. It focused mainly on the process of adoption of the recommendations; it did not collect data on the views, attitudes or socio-economic status of the adopters or on the changes in their farming systems. It was conducted among three groups of farmers:

- those who heard about the extension materials and came to the project office to get them (49 farmers);
- those who received training and were given the materials during training (107);
- those who received training but were not given the materials (26).

Of these farmers, 164 had fishponds and so could put the information to use. Through questionnaires, they were asked if they had understood the extension materials, if they had followed the recommendations, if they had told other farmers about them, and what changes there had been in levels of production. More than 70% had followed recommendations to some degree, with higher levels among those receiving the extension materials. On the basis that more than 6,000 sets of the materials had been distributed in the region, it was estimated that the recommendations had led to an increase in production of 480 tonnes annually, valued at US \$500,000.

The names in bold in this summary of the impact study are the names of the people whose stories follow the summary.

Meanwhile, the focus of DFID's aid programmes had moved towards poverty alleviation and it was calling for projects to be assessed in terms of their impact on reducing poverty. An advisor in the DFID team for north-east Thailand, **Peter Owen**, felt that the AOP project was not generating enough poverty reduction data. The project had, until then, been managing and reporting on project activities within the context of the DFID logical framework, but DFID now wanted harder data — “piles of fish” data, as **Harvey Demaine**, the AOP project coordinator from 1993 to 2003, said later.

Harvey Demaine disagreed with the DFID approach; he saw the project as a capacity-building venture and considered the evaluation approach they were already using to be better suited to the skills and resources of their partners, including the DoF, who would take over the work once the project ended. Among the staff at the DoF during this period were **Wilai Kothisan** and **Paiboon Wangchaiya**, both District Fisheries Officers at the time.

Despite his misgivings, Harvey Demaine and his team, which included the AOP Country Programme Director **Danai Turongruang**, designed and implemented a second impact study for DFID. It began in 1999 and sought to assess project impact during the 1995–97 period in Udorn Thani, Sakol Nakorn and Nakorn Phanom provinces. By this time, more than 30,000 sets of the extension materials had been distributed in the region. The survey sample group included 65 farmers who had received extension materials only, 564 who had received training and the materials, and 309 who had received training but no materials. Among the farmers surveyed in Udorn Thani were **Mongkol Wongchompoo**, **Klong Gaewgoon** and **Sawat Sigongporn**.

The survey questionnaire was divided into three sections: socio-economic status (e.g., land holding, livestock ownership, on- and off-farm income sources); details of the farmers' adoption of project recommendations and the benefits from them (e.g., reasons for adopting/not adopting the recommendations, satisfaction/dissatisfaction with benefits of recommendations) and details of the farmers' sources of information and their views on the training or the extension materials (e.g., how they obtained the materials, their understanding of the materials, whether they had kept the materials).

The aim of this study was to assess, more effectively than the first one, how far the project had reached down to relatively poorer sections of the farming communities, and thus reflect a poverty focus as specified in the new logical framework provided by DFID. The survey indicated that a significant proportion of farmers had adopted the recommendations and that these farmers were broadly representative of the socio-economic spectrum of farmers in the region, although not necessarily drawn from the absolute poor.

The stories

HARVEY DEMAINE. Coordinator, Aqua Outreach Programme (AOP), Asian Institute of Technology (AIT), Thailand

Evaluation experience: *Considerable M&E experience; some impact assessment experience*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *None given*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at his home in Bangkok, conducted by Don Griffiths; December 2003*

It's important to put the two impact assessments in context because they were part of the process rather than one-off events.

The first phase of the programme, from 1988 to 1993, was an adaptive research project to help AIT and the DoF develop technologies suited to the farmers. It focused initially on that only — testing technology for small-scale farmers. The process was participatory, with staff and farmers learning together to develop appropriate technologies. We carried out studies after the first 3 years on adoption of the technologies. A SWOT analysis of the extension services revealed weaknesses in the way the DoF was reaching poor farmers. So, in 1991, we started experimentation with extension approaches as well. We produced a great deal of awareness-raising information about aquaculture — posters, leaflets, TV and radio broadcasts — to distribute through schools, health centres, the community agricultural extension workers and the agricultural bank.

By 1993, our approach had switched more towards building the capacity of the DoF, as it became clear that we had to transfer our successful approach to the DoF to make it sustainable. In this second phase it was now difficult to make progress as we depended on our partners. We had to wait for their capacity to improve in certain areas.

The main donor at that time was DFID. They called for a major review of the project. We had been focusing on adaptive research and capacity building; the development of the extension approaches was part of our capacity-building work. We were not an extension project. But the donor wanted to evaluate us as an extension project and asked to see impact on farmers, especially the poor. We were asked to provide data on farmer impact which we did not have. In preparation for Phase III of the project, they developed a new logframe; in my view it was badly designed, since at the field level it focused on issues of impact on farmers, rather than capacity building. They were not interested in evaluating the 'institutional' aspects of what we had been doing. The logframe shifted the indicators towards the extension side of what we had been doing and recommended input-output economic indicators.

In preparation for the next phase of the project, the donor developed a new logframe. It shifted the indicators towards the extension side of what we had been doing and recommended input-output economic indicators.

The changes in donor approach were brought about mainly by a change in policy. The UK Government had brought out a White Paper on international aid that changed its focus to poverty. DFID started to question the way projects were working with the poor in a way they had not done before.

So the indicators became 'poverty focused'. This was OK, as we had always worked with poor farmers, but in terms of the way the project had been working it was difficult to ensure that the poorest were benefiting. We were being evaluated according to extension-related indicators beyond our control. For example, we had to rely on the DoF staff to train farmers, but we couldn't tell them which target group of farmers to train, or how. And we had to go at the DoF's pace, we couldn't go faster — you can't force partners to change like that. The DoF really didn't understand the issues involved. We tried to identify some basic indicators with them, but they had a limited ability to collect and evaluate quality data. It's not that they didn't understand the M&E issues, but we had to find a realistic level at which local staff could collect and analyse data.

DFID criticised this approach. They didn't think the assessment had to be consistent with local capacity. They suggested some input-output economic data we could have collected, but what would it have meant? Farmers can't answer questions like that accurately, especially in small-scale aquaculture when ponds are not drained annually. It is so difficult to get good hard data from farmers, much better to ask them about the wider range of activities. We suggested it would be better to design indicators from the point of view of the farmer, focusing on adoption as the key indicator.

We never really resolved this conflict over indicator selection. We felt that the indicators should be based on what the farmers understood and what the partners could reasonably collect, analyse and understand; this would be more sustainable. In the end, we had to agree to the donor's request, but it meant we had indicators which were too quantitative/numeric.

The first survey — the Knowledge, Attitudes, Practices (KAP) one — had been done before the donor's switch in policy. The second survey was done after the switch. So, in addition to KAP, we also looked at socio-economics and poverty. We designed the assessment, having discussed the details with the donors and our partners. I have a lot of experience with this type of work, so I was quite comfortable with supervising it. We didn't bother with a control group as we had sufficient data from secondary sources. We tried to find data from groups of villagers with similar socio-economic profiles. The results of the surveys are all with AIT and AOP.

The biggest problem with the second survey was that because we had not considered this type of assessment at the start of the project it was difficult to design it at a later stage. There were so many groups of users within the sampling frame. We had to simply ignore some as it would not have been practical to cover all of them.

We never really resolved the conflict over indicator selection. In the end, we had to agree to the donor's request, but it meant we had indicators which were too quantitative/numeric.

So many data were collected in the second survey that the analysis hadn't been completed by the time the donor pulled out. We simply couldn't do what was asked of us with the limited time and resources we had. If we had had an extra budget it would have been different, but there was no budget increase to deal with the changes. It was a great pity because we had DoF 'on the hook' in terms of their interest in developing a wider strategy. Switching the focus to extension monitoring meant we took our eye off the ball. We never were able to analyse the third year of on-farm trials conducted with the DoF.

Both assessments showed a high degree of attribution. The situation without the project was zero. There was no DoF system in place to provide information/extension like this. We increased farm production; there was no other group responsible for this. We used the assessments to decide on the robustness of our approach and they helped us immensely in our negotiations with the subsequent donor (SIDA). It was a useful exercise and should have been repeated every couple of years.

KLONG GAEWGOON. Farmer, Baan Up Moong, Udorn Thani, Thailand

Evaluation experience: None

Definition of 'impact assessment': None given

Interview: Face-to-face interview, at his farm, conducted by Don Griffiths; December 2003

I produce fish, pepper, betel leaves and fruit. The betel leaves are my most important source of income. I produce around 10,000 a month and this gives me a good income. Fish are probably number 2 for me in terms of my income.

I was trained by the project about 11 years ago, at the Amphur office. I also got some materials like posters and leaflets from the project. The topics covered were breeding and culture of fish (catfish and tilapia) and making green water. The training was carried out by a foreigner and a government officer.

The training really changed my attitude and the way I farmed fish. I realise that I didn't have any good idea how to culture fish before the project. I used to think that clear water was good for fish. I now know this is completely wrong and I have now been using green water culture and the results have been amazing. Green water is made of plankton which is food for the fish; it is natural food and means I don't have to provide pelleted food.

I had a lot of contact with the project initially and after the training. Some of them asked about what I had understood from the training and how it had changed my culture methods. It was mainly about the fish production. They seemed very happy with my answers. I have had good results, so I explained this to them. I was happy with the way they collected the information. It was good to talk to them. They really only asked about my fish production though, so they wouldn't be able to say anything about the rest of my farm or my life.

No one came back to tell me anything from these assessments, how my results compared to other districts. They just came and asked me about what I did. They always did that, came and asked questions and then disappeared.

It would be very interesting to know what they did with my information, especially if this work was carried out in other countries as well. It would be interesting to see what those farmers did; maybe we could even learn from exchanging information with them. I wonder if they have found better ways to do this. But we didn't get feedback and it is not polite to ask the visitors who spoke to me for this type of information. Our way is not to ask. I would have liked to know from the project itself, how my work compared with others. Although I have learned a lot, feedback like this is very important. It could be given to us in any way that is convenient to the project, even by TV. There is not really any way to get information out of the Department of Fisheries, and I can't really contact them. They have an office in the Amphur, I could go there if I wanted, but I don't — it's too far away.

No one came back to tell me anything from these assessments. They just came and asked me about what I did. They always did that, came and asked questions and then disappeared.

WILAI KOTHISAN. District Fisheries Officer, Department of Fisheries, Thailand

Evaluation experience: *Good theoretical background in impact assessment, and much experience in designing and implementing assessments*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *None given*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at the AIT office, conducted by Don Griffiths; December 2003*

I have worked with AIT, in Udorn Thani, for 9 years. At the DoF, we didn't carry out assessments of the project for AIT, though. We did our own surveys, collecting information from the farmers directly. In the DoF, if we have a large project, the impact assessment is organised centrally; with smaller projects we can do all the work locally, such as sending out and analysing forms. But this is new. At the time of the fisheries project, a lot was done centrally and we didn't have much say in how the indicators were decided. They focused on production and numbers of farmers.

But production indicators are not sufficient. Many other indicators could have been used to look at changes in the livelihoods of the farmers, whether their quality of life had improved. You could also look at their changes in thinking or their approach to farming. Production can be misleading. For example, if lots of farmers start to grow fish you will get an increase in production. But you have to think about whether they can sell them or not and their input costs. Are they making a profit? You might be in a situation where their production increases but their profit falls because they cannot sell.

The most difficult thing with assessments is trying to get time from the villagers. They are very busy. If you need 40 minutes with them, it takes time from their day. Then, if you find problems in the survey, you have to invest additional time to get to the roots of them. For example, poor people are seldom at home when you go to survey them, they will be working. So you may only end up with the wealthier section of the community who are free during the day. There are a lot of issues related to poverty that are difficult to measure. People will not respond truthfully as they are embarrassed.

We live in the real world and the principal reason impact assessment is done is for the project staff and the government and donors.

We used participatory approaches in the past but were not happy with the results. There are problems with involving the poor and the different sections of the community. Time is the biggest constraint for us and for the people involved. Sometimes villagers would send different family members on different days, instead of the nominated person, as they had other work to do. This makes it difficult to get good information. The AIT project had the staff and resources to be more participatory and work with villagers. The DoF didn't have the resources for that sort of work. I know that the project fully involved villagers in designing materials and developing the technologies and that was good. But the project decided on the indicators.

We didn't really get any feedback on whether the improvements were due to the project and not other factors. My own observations and experience tells me that the participating farmers greatly increased production over those who were not participating. But it's difficult to know what the farmers did with their production, how did they use it, did they make a profit? The supply-demand chain was not looked at so the real impact is unclear.

I am not sure what happened to the results of the various reviews. I assume they were kept within the commissioning organisations, AIT, DoF planning cell, etc. I don't think the policy-level recommendations were acted on at all. The DoF is a large top-down bureaucratic organisation and is slow to change. Senior staff change frequently, so impetus for change can easily be lost. But the DoF itself has changed in the way it does extension, thanks to the project. Staff, even some senior staff, have seen better ways of doing things and better extension materials.

I think impact assessment is important. How would we know whether we are making progress without evidence of impact? As to who we do it for, we should say "for the farmers". But we live in the real world and the principal reason it is done is for the project staff and the government and donors. Farmer-to-farmer learning is very important; we should try to measure that as well.

PETER OWEN. Senior Governance Adviser, Department for International Development (DFID) office, Thailand

Evaluation experience: *Considerable experience, including being an adviser on DFID evaluations*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *None given*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at the DFID office in Bangkok, conducted by Don Griffiths; December 2003*

We supported the AIT project from 1987. At that time we simply funded posts. Over the years it evolved into something more 'projectised' and we supported it more formally; logframes were designed. We used DFID's 'project cycle' approach for the design, implementation and monitoring of projects, so reviews were part of a clearly defined process which involved yearly 'output-to-purpose' reviews, a 'mid-term' review and a final 'project completion' review. Indicators were developed and agreed with partners. The reviews were all carried out for this project and I think the project scored well.

In about 1995, DFID was changed by the publication of the aid White Paper and the focus of our aid changed to poverty alleviation and the Millennium Development Goals. We had to look at our existing projects in that light and asked them to provide more details on their impact on poverty reduction. I recall we were not satisfied with the information provided in the AIT surveys. While they were useful in describing the impact of technical activities (training and extension), they did not help us in gauging the project's impact on the poor, or where we should be going with the project. We were not happy with the information generated from the project as a whole, but in particular in terms of our poverty reduction agenda. The information from the project was simply not enough to decide on the degree of attribution. However, it is certainly plausible that the results claimed were due to the activity of the project.

So, in agreement with AIT, we commissioned a series of 'thematic' reviews of the project to look more specifically at the social, livelihoods and poverty issues. Part of the reason for this was to help them become less dependent on us. We were also not sure where this type of programme fitted in within our regional perspective and at that time our office was very stretched. I would add that the impetus for this also came from AIT and other work with FAO. We were really looking at ways of doing things differently, while still adding value. We needed to see the 'bigger picture' of the project.

The reviews suggested that there was a communication issue and that, although the work was technically good, the messages generated by the project were not being networked regionally. So, we set up a regional networking unit to help disseminate information. We also realised that this was not the type of work that we should be involved in directly as an organisation. The reviews helped us — and AIT — to change direction in terms of poverty alleviation work in the region.

We were not happy with the information generated from the project, particularly in terms of our poverty reduction agenda. The information was simply not enough to decide on the degree of attribution.

I was working with the natural resources and fisheries advisers at the time. They wanted to get behind the technical aspects of the reviews and ask some difficult questions about impact and the poor. We saw the results generated by the project as too academic and with little poverty focus and lacking depth. We just didn't seem to be on the same wavelength as the project in terms of where we were going. We brought in a wide range of people on the reviews to get to the facts and they made a number of useful and specific recommendations (described in the reports at AIT).

The thematic reviews occurred at various times throughout the project. The final review was carried out towards the end of our support and took around 1 to 2 months. I was not directly involved, we employed two consultants. Our partners were AIT and the project. They knew of the review arrangements. We had regular meetings and agreed terms of reference and objectives for the reviews. They, of course, had their own priorities and we understood that DFID was not the major player in this project. We also worked closely with FAO on this. We saw the reviews as essential for the project to look forward. The information provided by the AIT surveys was too narrow and backward looking, it did not give us the 'bigger picture' in terms of extension service provision.

I think there was support within the project/AIT for this agenda. We were not dictating what was done. This was done in full discussion with the project and AIT. In particular, the AIT president was very supportive and saw the work of the project as pioneering.

We just didn't seem to be on the same wavelength as the project in terms of where we were going.

SAWAT SIGONGPORN. Farmer, Bann Kong Pon, Udorn Thani, Thailand

Evaluation experience: *None*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *None given*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at his farm, conducted by Don Griffiths; December 2003*

I have a small farm with rice, fish and buffalo production. It is mainly rice; I get one crop a year. Before I was involved with the project, my fish production was really poor. I didn't use the sex-reversed fish and the rice-seed quality was no good either. The fish would be in the pond for 6 months without growing. Now they grow really well. I grow tilapia and silver barb. I have now done very well out of selling the fish.

When the project came to use my farm as a demonstration farm, they bought all the fish from my ponds, drained them and started again. Initially, they came to the village to ask who would be interested in the project. I didn't get any formal training from the project. They asked for lots of information about me.

The project staff would come often and discuss and advise me and show me what to do. They explained a lot about what they were finding and listened to my ideas. When they came, they would measure and weigh fish to look at their growth and production. Sometimes other people came, foreigners and consultants.

Some of my neighbours were interested in the project and I gave them information, but they have flooding problems and there is also a problem with marketing. Nowadays, the best way to raise tilapia is to use cage culture in the river or reservoir. If you do that, the company will provide you all the feed and buy the fish from you and give credit. We can't compete with that kind of production. We just sell fish for the local area from our car; we get less profit that way, but we can't compete at the district level. The project never told us about marketing problems. It really is the biggest issue for me. What is the point of producing lots of fish if you can't sell them at a profit? I would have liked more information on that.

We never got any feedback from the visits. They would just ask questions and then leave. I have no idea what it was for. I would have liked to know, but I couldn't ask, it is not the Thai way to ask visitors to your farm things like that. They are guests. Their visits were not a problem, though, not at all. I was always very happy to help with anything. But the questions they asked were not enough to understand our situation. They asked only about fish production.

The coordination from the project was good, but we didn't get any feedback from the reviews. I would have been interested, even if it was just a bit on TV or radio. The project cost a lot of money, it could have given more feedback to us. I'm not sure how DoF should be involved; their work with fish stocking, etc., is more about politics than farmers.

We didn't get any feedback from the reviews. I would have been interested, even if it was just a bit on TV or radio. The project cost a lot of money, it could have given more feedback to us.

DANAI TURONGRUANG. Country Programme Director, Aqua Outreach Programme (AOP), Thailand

Evaluation experience: *Some M&E and impact assessment experience*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *None given*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at Udon Thani Fisheries Development Centre, conducted by Don Griffiths; December 2003*

The project started around 1987–88. We realised that although there was a lot of good technical advice in academic circles this was not in a format that farmers (in particular poor/low-input operators) could use. We designed a project that would first look at adaptive research for the existing technologies, making them accessible to poor farmers. The second phase was to develop

and evaluate extension systems, suited to the capacity of the DoF. The last stage was a large-scale delivery of the technologies. DFID supported us in the first two stages and SIDA/DANIDA helped with the last stage.

We started with a basic logframe. DFID gave us training on logframe preparation. We used the logframe as a management/implementation tool rather than a monitoring tool. We followed the DFID project cycle approach with output-to-purpose reviews, mid-term reviews and project-completion reviews. We were particularly interested in measuring the impact of our approach (extension, training and technology) on the beneficiaries. We had carried out a baseline survey on three types of farmers involved in the project: (1) trained; (2) trained with materials; and (3) trained but no materials. We started with a 'farmer first' approach (based on Robert Chambers' work) aimed at reducing poverty. We chose indicators we thought would reflect that, though they were based on production; an increase in production would reduce poverty. This was part of our internal monitoring and reporting procedure in order to improve the work we were doing.

The second phase of the work focused on capacity building of extension agents, so we had less need to review impact at the grassroots level. At the end of the second phase, DFID asked for a large review and they changed the emphasis of the work from the technology to improving the quality of extension services. They organised a 'retreat' for project staff when we were 'revisioning' the logframe for that review.

We were able to cope with this change of focus, although we were limited by the amount of money we could use to carry this work out and it would have been good to have had more time to respond to the donor. It is important to remember that we were working with partners — DoF and the DOVE — and we had to rely on them for collecting information, at least initially. Their capacity to do this was limited. We found that DOVE was more open to accepting the new approaches than DoF.

When we did our internal reviews, the donor was not involved; it was our work, our indicators. We focused on 'adoption, satisfaction and retention' (of knowledge). This was enough for us to understand how the project had changed the lives of these people. We were able to measure impact on the poor; you could see people were not so poor after we had worked with them. I was happy with the work, but it was difficult to find staff with the ability to do good household interviews. We used a 'bottom-up' approach to the assessment. We set the teams clear objectives and allowed them to feed back and change things as necessary. I think the whole assessment process took 3–4 years. I would not do it this way again, though. I would prefer a more systematic approach and a more experimental design. If we had limited it to three provinces out of five, it would have allowed us to focus our efforts more. It is also important to develop a better network at village level so we can get good feedback easily.

The donor also did its own impact reviews. This was their work, their indicators; they didn't discuss their reviews with us and we didn't discuss ours with them. I don't think they covered enough ground. The teams only had 3 days or so in the field, not enough time to see the detailed

When we did our internal reviews, the donor was not involved; it was our work, our indicators. We focused on 'adoption, satisfaction and retention' of knowledge. This was enough for us to understand how the project had changed the lives of the people.

and broader impact of our programme. When they do this work, they should use flexible planning so they can spend time on interesting things that they find. It must be farmer driven as well. Simply evaluating against the logframe was not good enough. We had a much broader impact and the logframe was too narrow to identify these effects.

The teams really didn't understand the context of the work they were looking at and so didn't ask the correct questions. For example, they would ask farmers about how much time they spent a day on a task (say, tending fish culture ponds). If they said they spent a day on it then they would calculate that the farmer had spent 8 hours a day on the task and multiply by the number of days in a year to get a yearly total. This is wrong. If a farmer said he spent a day on a task, this might mean that he spent a couple of hours in the morning, then a couple of hours in the afternoon. Farmers also work on tasks in a seasonal way. You had to consider this as well. I think looking at farmers' livelihoods as a whole is more important.

The most interesting thing about the reviews we did was that the materials turned out to be much more useful to the farmers and the DoF than we had suspected. The addition of good-quality training really improved the impact. Even with poor-quality training, the impact was the same as just handing out extension materials.

We published a lot of our findings in books and academic journals. The work of each country office was circulated to all the other offices so there was international dissemination.

One of the most important lessons I learned is that working with partners like the DoF you have to go at their pace. Institutional change is slow and difficult (also difficult to monitor). If we simply sent our findings to them there would be no impact. It has to be followed up and over a long time. You have to manage the information flow carefully and influence officials at the top.

We used their logframe as a management/implementation tool rather than a monitoring tool. Simply evaluating against the logframe was not good enough. We had a much broader impact and the logframe was too narrow to identify these effects.

PAIBOON WANGCHAIYA. District Fisheries Officer, Department of Fisheries, Thailand

Evaluation experience: Limited

Definition of 'impact assessment': None given

Interview: Face-to-face interview, at the Amphur office, conducted by Don Griffiths; December 2003

I have been working with the project for about 9 years. Extension is carried out by the mobile unit. The idea is that the local village-level agriculture officers can put farmers in touch with us and we can respond quickly. The biggest problems in this area are with pond water quality and fish disease. Poor fry supply is another problem. But I suppose the lack of investment and credit

can also be considered an issue for some small farmers, though I can't help them with that. I visit farmers almost every day and respond to their problems. There are around 3,000 ponds in my remit. Before this work, I had done some theoretical extension at university, but never practical extension work. When the project came, I was able to learn through the materials they gave me and through practical experience.

When the project was being assessed, people would come and talk to farmers. My role was to organise the field visits so they could see the results of the project work. I think they may have been from the DoF or perhaps the project, but I'm not sure because they didn't always say. I am only a junior officer so they never tell me anything; it is not my place to ask them questions about what they are doing. I do remember that the DoF organised a surprise inspection once, but I was quite happy with that, I have nothing to hide and am proud of the work we have done. I also remember some 'project' foreigners (westerners), but they never told me what they were doing or why. They just wanted to talk to farmers.

There was no consultation about indicators. It all came from senior staff in the project and the DoF. The indicators were simply production based. We are not required to ask for more than the fish-production based indicators, nor do we have the staff or resources to do so. We know that production alone is insufficient to measure broader changes, say, in livelihoods. You should understand we don't have the time or resources to go into such detail.

The farmers learned and shared with each other through participation in the project (demonstration and meetings, etc.). But the project didn't really involve the farmers in setting indicators or designing the review, so at that level there was not much participation in that way.

I understand the basics of impact assessment, but don't really have a lot of practical experience. Most of my experience was theoretical during study, with some practical later as an assignment (designs, collection and observation of approaches). We had some feedback verbally on the results of the assessments from local (senior) staff at meetings and I have seen some of the reports that the project produced.

The results showed that the approach used by the project was good. This was important as it was a different way of working with and advising farmers. I also think the reviews showed that the advice on green water management was good and really helped production. Although it was true that production from the farmers involved in the project increased (100%), there wasn't really enough information collected to say that was all due to the project alone. I know from my own observations that this was the case, but this is not in a review report.

I don't think the recommendations of the reviews were acted on. But they didn't come to me directly. The DoF has a problem, as the regional heads and senior staff at the centre (Bangkok) change positions frequently. This might mean that a person who has agreed to a change will be replaced and his or her successor won't agree or will not implement it. It's not simply a matter of

The project didn't really involve the farmers in setting indicators or designing the review, so at that level there was not much participation in that way.

making recommendations, you need people to implement and sustain the changes. Because the senior staff change so frequently, this can't be done in a sustained way.

If an impact assessment was done again on this project, I would suggest the following. First, look not just at production, but also at adoption and secondary adoption through the demonstrations — I'd like to know the extent to which that works. Second, sustainability — long term — should be looked at in much greater detail. And third, ensure that recommendations from the reviews are acted on and disseminated.

MONGKOL WONGCHOMPOO. Farmer, Baan Nong Saien, Udorn Thani. Thailand

Evaluation experience: None

Definition of 'impact assessment': None given

Interview: Face-to-face interview, at his farm, conducted by Don Griffiths; December 2003

I have two fish ponds, rice fields and dairy cattle. I sell the fish from the pond regularly and also eat them. I have been farming here for around 7 years and I also have a house in the village. My main income comes from cattle. I get around 100 litres of milk per day, from 10 cattle. I have 22 cattle in all. The cooperative collects and markets the milk and I have a lot of help from the livestock department extension services. I make all the food for the cattle myself.

I have been involved with the fisheries project for a long time. Initially, they held a meeting in the village and asked who was interested and able to take part. I was selected and attended training in the provincial building. I tried out some of the technologies with the help of project staff. They also provided me with good leaflets about the technology.

I don't know anything about impact assessment. The project collected lots of information from me at the start and as we worked. As the project progressed, they gave me information and advice about what worked and what to do. They found this out from assessing the work they did. Sometimes foreigners would come and visit, also project staff. Not too often. They would ask lots of questions about my knowledge and how I cultured fish, and what I had learned. The best thing I learned was about managing green water.

Their visits would not last long, a few hours each time. It was never a problem. Nobody ever told me what it was about or what their results were. And I did not ask them. It is not the Thai way. If people come to ask you questions, they are guests in my home. It would be very impolite to ask them why they come or to question what they do.

The project collected lots of information from me. Nobody ever told me what it was about or what their results were. And I did not ask them. It would be very impolite to ask them why they come or to question what they do.

But I would be interested to know what they found. It would be good to find out what happened and how we compare to other countries. Maybe we could share experiences with them. We might learn new things. The technical information from the project was good, but I didn't get enough other information.

Lots of friends came to ask me about the project and I have helped them with their fish culture. I feel confident to do this from my experience and the training and information I received. Before, we had to spend a whole day trying to catch some fish to eat, but now you can see how easy it is to catch a couple of fish for our meal. This is a good impact of the project.

No one has ever come here from the fisheries department. I've never seen them. I know that they stock the community pond and sometimes produce subsidised fingerlings, especially when there is a flood. I remember they asked the village headman for information about who was affected by flooding one year, but I don't know what they did with the information. I know they have a unit at Amphur and there is an agriculture officer who I could contact and he would put the fisheries officer in touch with me. I've never done this though, I've never had the need.

I would like more information about how the project went. It would be good. Any type would be OK. It could be on the TV or meetings or newspapers, whatever is convenient. And I would suggest, too, that you look much more at the marketing of the production. Now, although we can produce more fish, I don't want to intensify any more because I'm not sure how we would sell them. I have an integrated farm and don't want to risk loss by expanding one area at the cost of others.

Before, we had to spend a whole day trying to catch some fish to eat, but now you can see how easy it is to catch a couple of fish for our meal. This is a good impact of the project.

STUDY 8

AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS' CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT, LATIN AMERICA

The study

Between 1992 and 1997, the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR), one of the centres in the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) system, implemented a capacity development project in Latin America and the Caribbean. The project sought to strengthen planning, monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) in nine agricultural research organisations in the region, with the aim of improving the way they produced and disseminated information, provided training and facilitated organisational change.

In 1997, ISNAR launched an in-depth evaluation of the PM&E project, using a conceptual approach developed specifically to gauge the impact of the regional project and to improve understanding of the theories of action that underpin capacity-development programmes. As noted by **Douglas Horton**, the lead author of the evaluation report, "rather than address the entire impact chain, the evaluation focused on the largely unexplored link between capacity development programs and the organisations they work to strengthen. The main purpose was to identify the types of direct impact brought about, how they were brought about, and how such impacts might be enhanced in future capacity development efforts."

A workshop was organised in February 1997 to develop the evaluation plan; this plan was reviewed by the PM&E project team and a four-member external advisory group. The evaluation was based on collecting data from staff (the 'project beneficiaries' in this case) in the nine organisations and triangulating the findings of specific groups (e.g., participants in training courses) with those from other groups and with documentary evidence and direct observations. Five independent and complementary studies were conducted to gather this information, focusing on:

1. the project's design, strategies, activities and outputs;
2. the impact of its publications on individuals and organisations;
3. the impact of the training programmes;
4. the project's contributions to change in three pilot case organisations, and the effect of these changes on organisational performance;
5. its influence on PM&E approaches in the nine organisations in the project.

The names in bold in this summary of the impact study are the names of the people whose stories follow the summary.

Among those who were involved in these studies were **Carmen Siri** (leader of Study 2), **Jairo Borges-Andrade** (leader Study 3) and **Maria Delia Escobar** (a participant in a pilot organisation training programme evaluated in Study 3, and a member of the Study 4 team); both Carmen and Jairo were members of the core evaluation team, alongside Douglas Horton and Ronald Mackay. Study 1 provided a descriptive review of the project. Study 2 involved organising a postal survey to collect information on the use and usefulness of project publications from people known to have received these publications. In Study 3, a questionnaire was sent to all those who had participated in the organisations' training programmes prior to 1997. Both groups of respondents were asked to score the products against a set of indicators and to provide examples of specific impacts; in addition, in Study 3, each trainee's immediate superior and a colleague were asked to comment on the impact of the training on the trainee and on the organisation.

Study 4 involved developing self-assessment procedures with collaborators in the pilot organisations (in Cuba, Panama and Venezuela) and then organising 3-day assessment workshops, during which staff analysed changes that had taken place in their organisations and assessed the extent to which the PM&E project had contributed to the changes. For Study 5, case studies were done in each of the nine organisations on their PM&E approaches, and the findings were compared with those from baseline studies done in 1992; the work included conducting interviews, reviewing documents and observing PM&E practices. In addition to the five studies, questionnaires were sent to research managers, as well as to representatives of other regional organisations thought to be familiar with the ISNAR project, to obtain their views on project impact.

Together, the studies produced a wealth of detailed quantitative and qualitative information, contained in the five evaluation reports, three self-assessment reports, nine case studies and several databases. Various methods were used to synthesise the information for analysis, including conducting statistical analyses of the quantitative information, using NUD.IST software to process responses to open-ended questions, coding and grouping responses to produce graphic and tabular information, and organising workshops.

The draft of the final report was reviewed at a regional workshop in Panama in 1999 attended by the core evaluation team and the external advisory group. The final report, produced as part of ISNAR's Research Report series and made widely available in print and electronic format, is a detailed and comprehensive document that provides important evaluation lessons. Uppermost among these is that "in evaluation, there is a strong tendency to routinely employ traditional frameworks and methods [but] meaningful and useful evaluations require that frameworks and methods be selected for each case, depending on specific needs and opportunities." Evaluation approaches, the report concludes, need to be informed by three types of theory related to the people, programme or organisation being evaluated: a theory of action, a theory of performance and a theory of change.

The stories

JAIRO E. BORGES-ANDRADE. Researcher/Lecturer, University of Brasilia, Brazil

Evaluation experience: *PhD on designing and evaluating instructional systems; considerable experience in training and organisational evaluation, including impact assessment*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"You suppose that by doing a project it will have an impact (or make a difference) on people and/or organisations. With impact assessment, you try to see what's going on and what impact (or difference to people and/or organisations) there has been."*

Interview: *Telephone interview, conducted by Kay Sayce; February 2004*

I participated in the design of the ISNAR project. It aimed, initially, to improve PM&E in Latin America through training. And then it grew into something larger. It became clear during the project that training would not be the only solution to improving PM&E in the region. When the project ended, another project grew out of it, with the headquarters in Costa Rica. ISNAR was involved in that one too. Some of the people involved in the first ISNAR PM&E project are still involved in the second one.

During the evaluation of the project, I had two main roles. One was to help design the study and develop the instruments that would be used, which I did with the others in the core group, and then I participated in the data analysis. The other was to design the particular instrument — a survey — for the study I was heading, the impact of training, Study 3. We based the design of the survey on an evaluation model developed in Canada; we visited Canada to talk to the person who had developed it. Then we — the core group and some of my students at the University of Brasilia — started developing the variables and reaching a sort of consensus on these, and then we wrote the questions. We tested the questions, rewrote some, and then the questionnaire was ready. We also did a psychometric analysis of the questions, after data collection.

The purpose of my study was to identify the effects of the PM&E training modules on the PM&E work people were doing and on the organisations themselves in terms of technologies and processes. We would have liked to look further, at the impact of improved PM&E on agricultural research and perhaps at the farmer level, rather than stopping at organisational changes, but IDB said they only wanted to see impact at the organisational level. The call for the study had come from the donors — IDB, ISNAR, etc. — not from the organisations involved in the project.

The money allocated to my study was realistic, to some extent. I was fortunate in that there were a lot of students very interested in studying the impact of training at the organisational level, so I was able to get their help for data analysis for free because they wanted to learn.

We would have liked to look further at the impact of improved PM&E on agricultural research and perhaps at the farmer level, rather than stopping at organisational changes, but the donor only wanted to see impact at the organisational level.

And I knew I would gain from the learning of being involved in such a study. It wasn't at the level of the impact of training on people that I was keen to learn — I'd done that before — but impact on organisational processes and technologies.

One of the main challenges of the study was to persuade the ex-trainees to return the questionnaires. There were problems with the post. They also said the questionnaire was too long. All this took a lot of time. Another major challenge was doing an impact study at organisational level. Looking at the impact on people is relatively easy; doing it at this second level was a great challenge. It meant, for example, talking not just to ex-trainees, but also to their peers and supervisors.

The study gave me the chance to establish contacts with many people in this field, to learn about evaluation models. Up to then, I hadn't come across an organisational impact methodology. This methodology has been used successfully in many other situations since then. One of my students did a PhD dissertation based on it. I used it, successfully, in an evaluation that the Bank of Brazil — the largest bank in this country, 80,000 employees — wanted done. A student here in Brasilia went back to Bahia and used the methodology in a hospital setting, again successfully. It can be adapted to so many situations. This was perhaps the most significant gain from the study.

If I had the opportunity to change anything, it would be to add, in my study, a questionnaire relating impact to support for the transfer of training. I realised that we needed information on training support in order to really assess impact. How the received training was transferred, what support was there for this?

When it came to the whole impact study, I agreed with Carmen that we should divide the analyses between us; I'd do the quantitative side, she'd do the qualitative side. My background is in quantitative work. We've known each other for a long time, long before the ISNAR study, and we work well together. Both approaches were valid in this study. In a study involving several countries and organisations, many people and conducted over many years, I thought there might be coherence problems, but once the study was under way this was not an issue. The data coming in from a range of people matched up pretty well; they were far more coherent than I'd expected.

My training study accounted for about a third to a half of all the data that came in, I would say. It had started smaller, then got bigger. The information study — Study 2 — had started bigger but got smaller, and gave us far fewer data than expected. A problem here was with librarians not replying to the questionnaire, or not providing much information if they did reply. They seemed to know so little about the ISNAR project.

I don't know how the findings of the overall study were used. That was up to the donors. Another project grew out of the first project, so maybe some of the findings were used there. What happened in the study itself, though, was widely used, like the methodology which has been applied so successfully in many areas, not just agriculture. And all those involved in the study did learn a lot.

I agreed that we should divide the analyses between us; I'd do the quantitative side, she'd do the qualitative side. Both approaches were valid in this study.

MARIA DELIA ESCOBAR. Project Manager, Fond Nacional de Investigaciones Agropecuarias (FONAIAP), Venezuela

Evaluation experience: *Some experience*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"Knowing what contribution we make to society, to people. Impact assessment means thinking about your work, not just having information, and it helps to strengthen the planning process."*

Interview: *Telephone interview, conducted by Pilar Santelices; February 2004*

I became involved in the project after an invitation from ISNAR to participate in a capacity-development training course. I participated with the strategic planning team because that is my area. It was a very good experience. I then became the focal point for the ISNAR project in FONAIAP. And then I worked with the impact assessment team led by Doug Horton. I was with Study 4, which was on the PM&E project's contributions to change in three pilot organisations, one of which was FONAIAP.

The methodology used in Study 4 was very efficient, an effective way to put a value on the people's experiences. Today, I'm still using the techniques I learnt with ISNAR. Doing Study 4 was almost like an inventory. Each country's dynamics — way of working, different issues to be faced — are very specific to that country, but when we undertook Study 4 we didn't work on the basis of what I thought would happen. Rather, after we met up with Doug Horton — he is a special person, a very good leader — we organised events where we asked the people themselves to speak directly about their experience. It was real participation. They talked about what they felt had changed.

There was a lot of teamwork. When it was time to produce the results, we worked as a team, brainstorming, and then we prepared a synthesis of the results. The working dynamic that was generated was such that we worked together well and were all motivated. The resources were so generous that we didn't have any issues with the financing; in fact, it was more than we needed.

We didn't have any problems with the study. But when the report of the whole study came out, the actual findings of our study were a little hidden. There was a lot of effort put into the study and it doesn't really show in the report. The ISNAR Briefing Paper hardly mentions the actual cases and anyone who is interested in the findings would come away disappointed. The results given are of interest for a minority, for specialists with an interest in evaluation. It would be good to see the contribution of each study in the final report. I would like the results of the study to be more accessible. It is important to note that the changes at FONAIAP were greatly facilitated by funding from IDB.

The working dynamic that was generated was such that we worked together well and were all motivated. The resources were so generous that we didn't have any issues with the financing.

In general, the ISNAR evaluation was a wonderful experience for me. It showed that it is possible to measure the impact of information. But you have to be aware that an impact study provides a good picture only for a short space of time and that it can never give you 100% of the picture.

DOUGLAS HORTON. Economist and Evaluation Specialist, Team Leader, ISNAR, The Netherlands

Evaluation experience: *Extensive on both the theoretical and practical sides*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"The assessment of any effects of a project? Hard to say. It's so controversial."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at ISNAR, conducted by Kay Sayce and Pat Norrish; January 2004*

The ISNAR project was an attempt to improve PM&E in agricultural research organisations in Latin America and the Caribbean. It started in 1992 and initially should have been an 18-month project, but it went on to 1998. One of the donors was IDB. We also got money from IDRC to do the diagnosis and add the action-research element. Others came in along the way. The evaluation began in 1997 and sought to (1) develop a method for impact assessment, and (2) assess the impact of the project. It was easier assessing the effect of activities in the early years than those in the later years. And in some areas we are only finding out now, in 2004, what the effects were.

I've found that it's not uncommon for people to prefer analysing quantitative data to qualitative data. For me, in this study the most interesting stuff came from the qualitative work.

We didn't spend too much time on designing the methodology. We — Carmen, Jairo, Ron Mackay and me — had a meeting in Quito. Everyone there knew a lot about evaluation, and we worked out the methodology during a 2-week workshop. Then we had to develop the instruments. In many evaluations you've no idea how they came up with the methodology.

I was very involved in deciding on study design and approach, and in looking at the reports, but not in the analysis. All the questionnaires were sent from ISNAR and the responses went to Jairo. He did all the quantitative analysis — he refused to touch the qualitative stuff. The qualitative material went to Carmen to analyse (she had quite a tough time using rather unfriendly software). I've found that it's not uncommon for people to prefer analysing quantitative data to qualitative data. A big challenge was the returns on the surveys. After several mailings there was only a 30% return (hard science wouldn't accept the findings as valid on this basis) so we tried all sorts of ways to get to those who hadn't replied. In all evaluation work a major challenge is to get enough evidence to back up the conclusions.

We learned a lot about capacity building during this study. But some donors want to know about impact only in terms of value and cost. You can get important spin-offs and unexpected results from this sort of exercise, but the donors weren't interested in that. For example, some people created Masters-level courses based on our study; others used our methods to build capacity. This was impact, unexpected impact. You couldn't have designed questionnaires to capture this sort of thing. For me, the most interesting stuff came from the qualitative work.

We'd done a baseline study in 1992 and we found there'd been great changes over the period studied, but most of it had nothing to do with the project. The world had changed and the agricultural research organisations had changed along with it, with improved PM&E systems, the logframe coming in, etc.

It was good to have a series of studies done by different people. If there'd been only one this would have seriously restricted the outcomes. There were some problems with the nine case studies and with the surveys, the poor feedback. Individually, they were not always rigorous, but when brought together there was rigour. Overall, we got praise for the study. One expert said he'd never seen a more rigorous one anywhere in the world. But he added that he couldn't see it being done anywhere else because it cost thousands of dollars and involved so many people.

When it came to merging all the material and reporting on our findings, presentation became a big issue. We tried to reach people through books and journals. And later we put out a Briefing Paper, short, to the point. This has been very popular. People don't read long reports. But how does one adequately summarise findings, especially those deriving from qualitative data? It's a big challenge. An added challenge was coming up with just 10 conclusions that everyone agreed to, from all the material we had!

I now favour self-assessment exercises for improving capacity development, rather than complex external studies. For the PM&E study, Carmen and I went to Cuba for 2 weeks to develop a workable self-assessment approach with our Cuban colleagues. In our next project, we allowed people to choose their own self-assessment methods and tools. We moved away from questionnaires and towards more qualitative analysis through workshops, using simpler methods, producing briefer reports. We need less fixation on reporting. It's an important issue, but I am now a great believer in Michael Patton's utilisation-focused evaluation approach, his perception that it's the process that matters, every bit as much as, if not more than, the reported findings.

I never really followed up systematically on how the results of our evaluation were used. There might have been some effect on methods used by some donor organisations, such as SDC and IDRC, but not IDB or ACIAR — they were never convinced by our methods. The PM&E project itself has evolved into a network of research managers concerned with institutional change — things that are considered 'esoteric' by many, but which I believe are very important. The PM&E project is much more into self-assessments now at least in part as a result of our study. And many people who were involved in the study have benefited individually from the experience; lots of them use the methodology we developed in their work now.

It's not clear that the more we give donors numbers, the more funding we'll get. So, is bending over backwards to produce quantitative results, alongside the more valuable (to us) qualitative analyses, worth it?

Seldom do you hear of someone getting an evaluation report and then making a decision or changing things as a result of reading the report! We are all faced with the dilemma of what to do with evaluation results. The important thing is to improve the process, but we are faced with donors who just want to know the results and whether we like it or not we have to respond to the accountability questions. There is this idea that there are dwindling funds for development and so we need to show results in order to get more money. But what is actually happening is that, even if you do produce the numbers, the funding is still dwindling; it's not clear that the more we give donors numbers, the more funding we'll get. So, is bending over backwards to produce quantitative results, alongside the more valuable (to us) qualitative analyses, worth it?

CARMEN SIRI. Education and Communication for Development Specialist, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Honduras

Evaluation experience: *Extensive, in the field of education, with specific experience in the use of self-assessment*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"The traditional use of the term sees impact as the effect that a project or programme has had on an organisation or on its performance. But this view of impact is limited, as it portrays impact as a linear process, operating in a vacuum, which clearly is not the case in the real world."*

Interview: *Telephone interview, conducted by Kay Sayce; February 2004*

With Doug, Jairo and Ron, I was part of the core team that planned the impact study. Others came in for specific assignments. Three lines of assessment were defined. One focused on assessing the impact of training, as training had been a major component of the project. The second focused on the impact of the information products produced by the project. And the third area of assessment had as its target the impact of pilot cases in Cuba, Panama and Venezuela. The time and money allocated for the study was appropriate. It was a complex job, but we had the time to do it and the time to experiment with different methodologies.

The study had three purposes — to develop a knowledge base on impact assessment, to show the results of the ISNAR project and to give the stakeholders (the agricultural research managers, specifically, but many others too) information on how their organisations and the region as a whole was doing with regard to PM&E. Thus, there were many audiences, among whom the main ones were the national partners and the evaluation community.

Doug brought a core team together in Quito to define the impact assessment framework and the types of studies and instruments to be used — surveys, self-assessments, case studies. I had experience using the self-assessment approach and felt that it could be used specifically for the impact assessment of the case study countries, where an external evaluation would not be appropriate.

Impact is not a linear process, nor is development. In the case of the ISNAR project, one cannot trace the results in a country back as if the initiative came only from ISNAR. The national partners are part of the impact process. Impact is not something that comes from the outside, but is achieved together with national institutions. It's easier, of course, if you are talking about a new variety, where you could adopt a linear approach to impact assessment. But in the social arena there are different actors in the process and all are, in part, responsible for outcomes and effects.

Why self-assessment? In principle, no one likes to be evaluated. Furthermore, evaluation has political consequences for the programme that is being evaluated. Thus, in the ISNAR study we considered self-assessment when analysing the results of organisational change in countries that had been pilots, as they were active partners in the change process. Impact assessment, and evaluation in general, should be a process to enhance change and it necessarily should be managed with respect and with care.

Doug is a person who is constantly evaluating, looking for feedback, integrating it into the programmes he develops. Not many people work like this, and few do it as systematically as he does. This is what creates a learning environment within a project. Development is not about providing resources — giving money does not produce change. Development requires creating the conditions to produce change, and this perspective must underlie all impact assessment work. Development requires that you work alongside people, listening and learning, if there is going to be real and sustainable development. In the ISNAR PM&E project it was not ISNAR as an organisation that brought about changes alone, but ISNAR working with many other people in the region — as well as other unrelated factors — that brought changes.

Surveys were used for the information and training studies [Studies 2 and 3] because we wanted to reach as many people as possible. The challenge with impact surveys is to get the survey size right and get a good response rate. It worked better with the training study than the publications one. With training, people found it easier to pinpoint ways the training had changed the way they worked, their attitudes, their performance. But with information products you seldom find people who say a book or some other information product changed the way they work. This study probably would have benefited from having other approaches for the analysis, such as case studies and interviews.

The strongest instrument we used was the self-assessment methodology. We were working with countries that felt the project was theirs, not ISNAR's. This really shows the success of a project, when a national programme takes ownership of the process. They really didn't want an external

Impact is not a linear process, nor is development. Impact assessment should be a process to enhance change and it necessarily should be managed with respect and with care.

evaluator coming in and subjecting them to non-constructive criticism. It was only when we told them that they would be doing the assessment themselves that they accepted. And it turned out to be an enriching and constructive experience.

We went to Cuba to develop the self-assessment methodology for Studies 1 and 4, then refined it in Panama and in Venezuela. The approach was fed back to all three countries as part of the validation of the methodology. The self-assessment was done through a series of short workshops which did not take key people away from their jobs for long periods. For the pilot organisations, the challenge was building an assessment process in which they were completely part of the study and saw it as theirs. Of course, ISNAR would also be getting the information it needed. It was a win-win situation. ISNAR obtained the information it needed, and national programmes were strengthened by the process, leveraging additional support.

When it came to the analysis, Jairo did the quantitative analysis and I did the qualitative analysis. I used NUD.IST software, which was not user-friendly. I probably used it in ways they had not intended. I extracted lots of quantitative data out of the qualitative material. The use of qualitative and quantitative data — numbers and stories — complement each other.

The experience of this ISNAR study was a great learning process for me. It showed that impact assessment for capacity development is very different from using it to assess technology transfer. The self-assessment methodology has held up well in other projects where I've used it since then. One was a youth project that involved bringing in different groups — curriculum developers, facilitators, district staff and the teenagers themselves; the methodology worked well and we got very interesting material from the teenagers. I have also used it as a tool to create change in projects that are having difficulties. This involves creating mechanisms to address the priorities, what needs to be done, what changes to make.

The study results were used by the national programmes, particularly by the three pilots. And we held meetings to discuss the approaches we had used in the study with the project partners, as well as with other agencies in the agricultural community and with the World Bank, etc. Doug and his team produced the final summary report, which was excellent. I have used it as a reference and model for other studies since then.

Maintaining coherence in such a complex study depends on the leader. Doug has the right professional background and the right personal skills. He had the competence, the energy, the commitment, the people and management skills. He got on well with everyone. And he has worked extensively in Latin America. He gave cohesiveness to the different studies and held the study together well, enabling him to produce a single impact assessment document. In a study like this, without someone of that calibre, it would have failed.

Maintaining coherence in such a complex study depends on the leader. In a study like this, without someone of the right calibre, it would have failed.

STUDY 9

REGIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS EDUCATION RESOURCE TEAM (RRRT), PACIFIC

The study

An impact assessment study of the Pacific Regional Human Rights Education Resource Team (RRRT), funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), was conducted in late 2000. The RRRT had been set up in 1995 to enhance the legal and human rights status of women and other disadvantaged groups in eight Pacific island countries.

It sought to do this through advocacy work, by providing legal education and literacy training for various groups (including paralegals, police, magistrates, social welfare and community workers, staff from NGOs involved in women's rights, women's groups) and by supporting a Legal Rights Training Officer (LRTO) in a key organisation in each country, such as the Catholic Women's League (CWL) in Tonga and the Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), to provide legal advice and organise training workshops for local communities.

DFID had conducted a mid-term review of the RRRT in 1998. In 1999, it engaged **Stephen Kidd**, a social development consultant, Simon Henderson, an economist and evaluation specialist, both from the UK, and Atu Emberson-Bain, a local consultant and researcher, to conduct the impact assessment. This team was to work with RRRT staff in Fiji and the LRTOs to:

- develop questionnaires for the range of beneficiaries and conduct a survey;
- analyse the extent to which the RRRT contributes to poverty alleviation and the improved welfare of the target groups;
- evaluate the impact of the RRRT's work on national legislative reform, gender and human rights policies, practices and common law and ratification of UN human rights conventions;
- document and assess the willingness of the judiciary and legal profession to apply international human rights law and social justice principles in legal advocacy;
- compare and assess the levels of human rights awareness in the community since the inception of the RRRT project;
- document the extent to which workshop participants retain, disseminate and apply the legal knowledge gained through RRRT training;

The names in bold in this summary of the impact study are the names of the people whose stories follow the summary.

- assess the impact of the RRRT on the capacity of LRTO partners and other civil society organisations (CSOs) to mobilise for change in human rights advocacy, policy intervention and legislation;
- assess the extent of the use and impact of the project's publications and media outputs such as *Law for Pacific Women: A Legal Rights Handbook*, Family Law leaflets, CD-ROMs and websites.

The RRRT staff involved in the impact study included **Leonard Chan**, the RRRT project manager. The LRTOs included **Betty Blake** (in the CWL in Tonga) and **Asenaca Colawai** (in the FWRM in Fiji).

The exercise was carried out over 6 weeks in November–December 2000, starting with study design and indicator selection. The design was seen as a function of the objectives of the impact assessment itself and of the RRRT project being assessed, as well as of the available resources (funds, time, data, skills, etc.). The team's ToRs required them to assess, in addition to impact, the RRRT's achievements in terms of outputs and outcomes, and thus the scope of the exercise was wide-ranging, covering not only impact assessment *per se*, but also elements usually found in conventional project performance evaluation.

With regard to impact, the team members noted that, with previous evaluations of human rights initiatives showing that advances in this area take time, they would be unlikely to find large-scale impact on the welfare of the target groups at this stage. They also decided that, given the limited time, the lack of LRTO preparedness and data-collection skills, the travel and communication difficulties posed by a multi-country study and other resource-related limitations, a large-scale formal questionnaire survey could not be included as a study component.

In the absence of a reliable logframe as a starting point for the impact study (there were three versions of the RRRT logframe, their status unclear and they had different lower-order objectives), the team developed a legal-rights-based framework of analysis to categorise RRRT activities, clarify the relationship between the study objectives and RRRT objectives, and improve the team's understanding of RRRT strategy for achieving its objectives. The framework operated at three levels, the team noting that "a legal rights strategy that aims to impact on the welfare of poor people must assess constraints at all three levels":

- substantive (the legislative context determining people's rights, such as international conventions, national constitutions and common law);
- structural (the 'service delivery' aspect of the legal system, such as courts, the police and social welfare departments);
- socio-cultural (attitudes towards the law determining how people relate to the legal system, including their knowledge of the law and awareness of their rights).

The methodology was based on a two-tiered approach, with four cases studies (in Fiji, Samoa, Tonga and Vanuatu) being selected for detailed assessment by the team, and the LRTOs being asked to collect additional primary and secondary data from all eight countries. The qualitative data collected (via key informants and focus groups) were largely attitudinal and highly context specific. The type of quantitative data collected (via small-scale questionnaire surveys and official records) was guided by the RRRT's logframe and activities, as well as by recommended donor practice.

The report produced by the impact assessment team in March 2001 noted that organisational weaknesses (e.g., limited LRTO capacity in qualitative survey techniques and variable quality of their feedback) affected the qualitative data collection, while the collection of quantitative data was adversely affected by the poor quality of statistical records in the Pacific region. The report also noted that, because there were various movements for progressive change in the region, as well as other agencies doing work complementing RRRT's work, the team had to strike a balance between identifying overall change and trying to discern RRRT's specific contribution, commenting that "attribution in a study such as this is inevitably a subjective exercise, reflecting the judgement of the study team."

The introduction to the report carries this caveat: "Although this report has been commissioned by the UK Government's Department for International Development, it bears no responsibility for, and is not in any way committed to, the views and recommendations expressed herein." Shortly after the report's completion, the RRRT project was taken over by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and DFID subsequently closed its offices in the Pacific region.

The stories

BETTY BLAKE. Legal Rights Training Officer (LRTO), Catholic Women's League (CWL), Tonga

Evaluation experience: *Very little; evaluated the work of teachers in a supervisory role*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"It's about knowing if the project has made any changes to the community... if we have given the right information to them."*

Interview: *Telephone interview, conducted by Cema Bolabola; January 2004*

I have worked in the CWL's Legal Literacy Project since 1992. It was set up in response to recommendations of the national conference of the CWL to establish a programme to address education for women and the increasing family-related problems in Tonga. The RRRT set up a working partnership with the project in 1997.

The first time I came across impact assessment was when I worked with the evaluation team from the RRRT. The impact assessment was about evaluating the objectives of the RRRT, what changes have taken place in the community — e.g., if the women who participated were able to go to the police for help in cases of domestic violence. In Tonga, women were embarrassed to talk about domestic violence. Now they talk about it and are not ashamed anymore.

I think the donor, DFID, decided to have the impact assessment. They gave the money and wanted to find out if the project really helped the people. I had nothing to do with the decision. I was not consulted. I learnt that the team was coming when I was in Fiji. It was short notice, less than a month. The LRTOs and the impact assessment team discussed the study at a 1- to 2-day workshop in Fiji, and I was told to organise eight groups. We agreed that some groups should be from the rural areas, some from the outer islands and some from the main island. The Vanuatu LRTO raised a lot of questions with the team, about the timing of the exercise, the short notice, the need to organise groups and appointments, also about funds for the evaluation activities. There was some discussion about indicators to show if communities used the workshop information, how they used it, and their knowledge of international conventions like CEDAW.

My role was to get information from people, the workshop participants, get their views and feedback on the use of materials and the knowledge given them at the various community workshops. I also had to organise the visit of the team member, Atu, who came to Tonga. The groups were a good representation of communities we worked with; there were about 8 to 20 people per group. Some groups were less than 8 and some groups were just too big. I had a list of questions from the workshop in Fiji, and the assistant went out to the outer islands and used the questions. I did the main island. The guiding questions were good as the communities were

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able to remember how they used the knowledge we taught. From the answers, I wrote a 5- to 6-page anecdotal report, wrote people's views as they said it. I had to translate from Tongan to English and send it off to the team. They said it was interesting.

To be frank, everything was short notice. I organised the groups. I went to the government departments to collect information. I had to talk with others. I gave them a questionnaire to fill in and collected it later. These responses had to be included in the report. Atu and I stayed up very late to put all the information together. When she left for Suva, I was tired. It's easier to get to the community to get information than the departments. I had to host lunches for people in the justice department, to get information. I also had to give token. You know how things are done in the Pacific. You have to give a little to get information, either food or money to give to people in government to thank them for their time. Not for groups but people in government.

The people in government were not open and some did not want to meet the team. That was challenging. The team could not meet the representative from the Ministry. Time was just too short. More time is needed for proper research. But I tried to do everything the team wanted me to do as LRTO. It was something new and I learnt what is required in impact assessment. I learnt what information to look for from various departments, how to go out and talk with people, how to put results together, how to find out how useful the information we gave was and how people are using the same information. Also, how to get views of decision-makers and prominent people, learnt how these people saw our work.

We were all given a copy of the team's report, with highlights of work and impacts in each country. I refer to it every now and then.

LEONARD CHAN. Project Manager, Pacific Regional Human Rights Education Resource Team (RRRT), Fiji

Evaluation experience: *Some experience, including involvement in the mid-term review of the RRRT*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"It is going beyond knowledge acquired where the results are immediate. Impact assessment takes things further along... it's about looking into the application of knowledge acquired."*

Interview: *Telephone interview, conducted by Cema Bolabola; January 2004*

The project was about raising people's awareness about their rights. It had a multi-level approach — the decision-makers and policy-makers at the top, the implementers and service providers in the middle, and the community level as the beneficiaries. Its aim was to improve people's overall

living conditions, to reduce poverty through governance, inclusiveness, participation and engaging them in decision-making. Stakeholders need to empower communities to be involved in decision-making even at policy level. The problem is that the policy-makers, the politicians and the technocrats don't consult people. People's awareness must be raised so they can influence policy.

Measuring the impact of our project involved using qualitative methods. I was not really familiar with impact assessment until the RRRT study. Statistics as numbers of training courses and participants, these are quantitative data. We were more interested in raising awareness, seeing how we had improved people's lives, such as through new legislation to improve people's rights.

The impact assessment study was done for DFID, to justify its continued support to the RRRT and to decide if DFID should remain in the South Pacific. We had expected that there would be an end-of-project review of the RRRT programme, not an impact assessment. DFID's decision to withdraw from the region was made a few months after the assessment.

Statistics as numbers of training courses and participants, these are quantitative data. We were more interested in raising awareness and seeing how we had improved people's lives.

The role I played was mainly to do with logistics, planning and organising LRTOs, briefing the impact assessment team, opening doors for them and facilitating their work. We could have done better if we'd been given more time to plan. There was just a short lead-time. This was because of the availability of the DFID staff. The study was originally scheduled in July–August 2000, but actually took place in November–December. At this end, DFID didn't really provide funds for the study. The project had underspent that year, so funds came out of the project budget.

The exercise took about 2 weeks in the field and 1 week for report writing. And 1 week initially when the team worked with the RRRT to set up the programme and the LRTOs collected data. I wasn't involved in the design of the impact assessment. The indicators were from the project logframe. I don't remember them discussing the indicators with me. But we talked about what would work and what wouldn't. It was new to us. We relied on Steve Kidd for advice. The main thing we learned was the methodology for collecting data for an impact assessment — how to record it, what resources are required, the need to ask the right questions, seeing monitoring as an ongoing rather than a one-off activity, and so on.

There were many challenges. One was logistics. We had to find the people who participated in the project. We didn't keep a database on all those who participated in RRRT activities and workshops. Second, the timing was just too short. Also, I knew very little about impact assessment then. Now, because of the study, I'm aware of what needs to be done to improve our training programmes. The study was able to produce results — it's about tracking — we can give the donor to show what changes really happened. There were also intangible results, like people getting new ideas and applying them.

But we can't attribute the changes to the work of RRRT alone. Other groups are doing similar work. Only anecdotal evidence indicates that we have caused change. For example, the Fiji Family Law Bill can be attributed to the RRRT, but social change is difficult to attribute to our work, that's why tracking is important.

More donors are looking for qualitative data now. The study report became the key document in designing the current phase of our programme, especially on M&E — certain elements were specifically put in after the impact assessment, and we recruited a social development adviser for the programme.

The statement in the report about DFID having no responsibility for what is said in the report and not being committed to it, I see as standard. It allows DFID the option to support or decline recommendations, as it sees fit. Support may be resource related.

With hindsight, I think the impact assessment was an ambitious exercise. We wanted to get much out of it — people were assigned to different countries to give maximum regional coverage. We couldn't cover the DFID priority countries, like Kiribati. There was just no time to go to all the project countries, though we would have preferred that. In the end, we got a cross-section of the actors involved in the programme. The team preferred that to trying to cover all the countries. At community level, we depended on LRTOs, and the depth of information wasn't perhaps so good. But we were satisfied with the depth of information collected at institutional level and from government departments

The exercise gave the RRRT a good kick-start into impact assessment and qualitative study. The whole idea of impact assessment is fluid — as ideas are being debated. We would like to learn the process.

The study was able to produce results — it's about tracking — we can give the donor to show what changes really happened.

ASENACA COLAWAI. Legal Rights Training Officer (LRTO), Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), Fiji

Evaluation experience: None

Definition of 'impact assessment': None given

Interview: Telephone interview, conducted by Cema Bolabola; February 2004

I joined FWRM in 1990 as the LRTO and was in charge of its Legal Literacy Project, funded by DFID through the RRRT. The project involved developing and implementing the community programmes, mostly through workshops. We — the LRTOs — visited the communities to assess their need for human rights education. If they wished to participate, then we carried out a 5-day workshop in the community. The idea was to help them to be more aware of their rights under the laws of Fiji (e.g., the Family Law Bill and the Employment Act of 1990) and also link to international obligations that the Fiji Government has signed up to, such as CEDAW and the ILO Convention.

I had no experience of evaluation before the impact assessment team came. I wasn't involved in the design of the impact assessment. FWRM had no say in it. Whatever RRRT says, we follow. They funded us — whether we like it or not, we just do what we are told. I can't remember the team discussing indicators with us. They only briefed us on how to ask the questions to find out if knowledge the people acquired from our workshops helped them in any way, for example, if it empowered them to report violence in their homes. We discussed the questions with the team at a meeting of all the LRTOs in Suva. The team asked us what type of questions we would ask the community. We provided some questions; they probed us, then compiled the questions and showed them to us. We gave our opinion on the way the questions were phrased or if they were not suitable to ask the community.

We organised focus groups in the communities where we had had workshops, gave them the questions and waited for their answers. I organised six focal groups, all from around Vitilevu, with about 10 people in a group; the team had recommended 7 to no more than 12. We recorded the answers on a tape-recorder, which we later transcribed. We gave the team the tapes and the transcribed form, which was mostly translated because some people used vernacular.

The focus groups were ideal, as there was a mixture of people in terms of their educational background, age, gender and language. One thing they all said was that the workshops were useful and they appreciated us coming to their level to talk about basic issues. One change that struck me was on maintenance claims: after our workshop the women themselves made applications for maintenance. Before that they didn't know how to go about it.

But you can't attribute the changes exclusively to our work, because there were multiple players. For example, the RRRT work done at regional level was also being done by FWRM and FWCC at national and local levels. At the end of the day, you want to raise the consciousness level of one person — who is listening to all the groups that are carrying out similar work. But FWRM and the RRRT did contribute to the changes.

One problem was that the team was here for a limited time. I think they were in Fiji for 3 weeks. We had to have discussions with them, organise the groups, write up the transcription and hand it back to them to process before they left for the UK. The time was just inadequate. We were rushing our constituents. We work with rural households living far and scattered. It took time for them to travel to towns for the focal groups. And we had to drop our work to do the impact assessment work. Because the RRRT and DFID funded us, we felt obliged to help them.

It was also an enormous task for the team: the different groups they had to talk with to get the full picture of RRRT work — it was too big a task for a 3-member team. The time was too short for them to go into the communities with us. It was better for the LRTOs to ask the questions, as the communities know us and were relaxed in answering the questions. *As palagis* ('foreigners') the community would not have taken the team in easily, but they should have accompanied us.

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I didn't learn anything at all from the impact assessment exercise. All the team did was explain to us why they needed answers from the community. They didn't teach how to do the impact assessment, how to frame the questions, how to get answers from the community. I expected to be trained, but we seemed to be just a means to an end.

After the impact assessment I heard that the RRRT hired additional staff with social analysis skills and a community development specialist. I understand that the report went to DFID, to assess if it's worthwhile pumping more funds into the RRRT.

STEPHEN KIDD. Social Development Consultant, UK

Evaluation experience: *Considerable experience in evaluation in the human rights field, but little experience in impact assessment*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"The difference that a project has made in the context of the project objectives... in this case, the difference in the lives of ordinary people, in the legal system and in the legal services."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, conducted by Kay Sayce; February 2004*

The RRRT programme sought to address women's and children's rights at various levels — legislative, service, awareness raising. It was based in Fiji and covered eight Pacific countries, training LRTOs in each island, and providing training for women's groups, paralegals, magistrates, judges, police, etc. Overseeing the training was a group of four or five trainers, most with a legal background, some with a background in human rights for women.

In impact assessment, it's the changes in the lives of the people on the ground that matter. We knew this, but it was difficult to do this adequately in the study; we, therefore, also focused on the more intermediate impact levels — changes in legislation that should affect the lives of women, for example. A big part of our impact assessment was to look at how much the RRRT had raised awareness of rights even if this had not necessarily led to changes in people's well-being. We did look at statistics to see if they could tell us anything about changes in people's lives, such as figures for violent attacks on women, but generally these did not show much change. Attributing observed differences to the RRRT was easier to do at the community level, through the focus groups.

The purpose of the impact assessment was very confused! The DFID ToRs indicated that they wanted to look at impact at the legislative and structural levels, but we soon realised what they

In impact assessment, it's the changes in the lives of the people on the ground that matter. It was difficult to do this adequately in the study, so we also focused on the more intermediate impact levels.

really wanted was a review of the RRRT, how it had performed, recommendations for improvement, etc. Doing a review is very different from doing an impact assessment, and now we were being expected to do both at once. DFID wanted to show that a good job was being done; this is not impact assessment. It would have been much easier just to do the review. To do both meant we had to work round the clock and there were times when we felt we were just making up the methodology as we went along.

The time allocated was very short. There had been no prior planning. The first time I met Simon was on the plane. Fortunately, the journey to Fiji is a long one, so we had time to sort out quite a lot. We were a good combination, both being comfortable with a joint qualitative and quantitative approach. Simon was an economist, with a strong background in evaluation. Atu was strong on local context skills. We had to bond quickly, the three of us, and then we had to bond quickly with our team of LRTOs! DFID hadn't explained to the LRTOs what we were going to be doing there. They had no idea why we'd come; we didn't realise this till after our first meeting with them. So we had to tell them about the proposed impact assessment, how much of it would be them assessing themselves. Initially, they were uncomfortable with 'being judged'. We had to stress we were not there to judge, but to help them see the changes as a result of their work. This was the biggest challenge — getting everyone on board, and then getting them to be self-critical — all in a matter of days.

*For impact assessment
you need a specific
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There can be
no blueprint.*

We stayed initially in the Pacific for 1 week, then went back to London for 2 weeks while the LRTOs did the work on the ground and Atu visited Tonga. We then returned to the Pacific for 2 further weeks to conclude the study. During this time, Atu went to Samoa, me to Vanuatu and Simon stayed in Fiji. We designed the theoretical framework during the first week (adapted from various frameworks); then we designed the impact assessment methodology around three levels of human rights realisation — substantive (i.e., laws), structural (i.e., changes in state practice such as in the police and judiciary) and socio-cultural (i.e., changes in people's lives and awareness) — and explained to the LRTOs why we were looking at several 'layers' of impact. For impact assessment you need a specific methodology, depending on the context, etc. There can be no blueprint. The methodology should be decided early in a programme's implementation along with clear outcome indicators, rather than at the end, as we were having to do it.

The RRRT hadn't expected us to do much quantitative work; they had no statistics available, so we had to collect them ourselves. We had to have these data for another reason — there was no baseline! DFID should have done one at the outset, but they didn't, so we had to create our own baseline by getting data from the time of the start of the programme and then current data, and comparing the two to measure change. This meant, for example, asking people what they had known 4 years previously, when the programme started, and what they knew now. Not a satisfactory way of doing things. But if you don't have a baseline how can you seriously do impact assessment? What are you measuring against?

Our overall finding was that while what the RRRT was doing was fairly high-quality stuff — the training was very good — there was actually little impact that we could see. One team member was concerned about this finding and wanted to say something more positive about the impact as the report could be construed as overly critical of the RRRT. But, objectively, we were unable to prove attribution, to show change linked to the RRRT. If we hadn't taken a critical, objective approach, the findings would not be useful.

Looking back, I know the work deepened my understanding of impact assessment and just how critical it is to be independent. More and more, because of the RRRT study, I see the importance of impact assessment. In any project I'm involved in now, the impact assessment plan must be there at the beginning, with the baseline. What would I do differently if I could do the study again? What we were expected to do was far too ambitious. Impact assessment is a difficult area. A lot of organisations are very fuzzy about it. We should have at least asked for more time and resources, done more preparation with DFID before we went to Fiji, and have had more independent people doing the work, instead of the LRTOs, who were part of the RRRT programme, and so had vested interests.

Not long after the study, DFID closed its Pacific programme. The UK Government decided to no longer have a bilateral programme in the region and decided to transfer the RRRT to UNDP. DFID took the review part of our study, and started acting on the recommendations in the design of the next stage of the programme. I was involved in drawing up a new project proposal to hand over the programme to UNDP. But on the impact assessment side, and the fact that we found minimal impact, I don't know.

This is not to say there was no impact. There was, but was it sustainable? I'd have preferred to go back, say, 2 years later to look at how sustainable the changes were. While a project runs, sustaining impact (if there is impact) isn't so difficult — the test is to see, a few years after it has ended, what of that impact remains. That's the real point about impact: its sustainability.

There was no baseline. The donor should have done one at the outset, but they didn't, so we had to create our own baseline. If you don't have a baseline how can you seriously do impact assessment? What are you measuring against?

STUDY 10

SELECTIVE DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION (SDI) SERVICE, AFRICA

The study

The Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) service was established at CTA in 1988 to keep agricultural researchers in ACP countries abreast of scientific and technical information (STI) in their field. CTA commissioned two agencies, one in the UK and the other in France, to run the service — CAB International (CABI) and the Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement (CIRAD) — for English and French speakers, respectively. Since 1996, the two agencies have worked closely together to deliver the service.

In 1999, a study to assess the level of satisfaction with the SDI service and its impact on agricultural research and development was carried out. The study was also intended to provide guidelines for CTA in developing an impact assessment methodology. Although there was much debate in development circles at the time about whether project impact studies should be carried out by the agency implementing the project, CTA felt it appropriate that this impact study should be conducted by CABI and CIRAD. An evaluation conducted earlier, in 1995, had been done by an external consultant.

At the time of the impact study, the materials sent to SDI users (by post, disc, fax or, after 1997, e-mail) were divided into 'standard profiles' and 'personal profiles'. Most titles (e.g., research management, plant breeding, dairy farming, environmental management, technology transfer, marketing and soil fertility) fell into the standard profile group. The personal profiles were tailored to the particular research needs of the SDI user. By 1998, there were about 150 personal profile titles and 161 standard profiles, and the number of users had reached about 1,150.

The CABI team for the impact study included **Margot Bellamy**, **Sue Smith** and **Jane Frances Asaba**. In the CIRAD team were **Alain Glarmet** and **Françoise Reolon**. They considered that, as there were few precedents from which to draw an appropriate methodology and no consensus among experts on appropriate indicators, they would build on methodologies with which they were already familiar and which they felt would generate the appropriate data. CTA agreed with this approach.

The names in bold in this summary of the impact study are the names of the people whose stories follow the summary.

The methodology chosen for the study comprised a literature review (to be carried out by CABI), a desk study (CIRAD) and a data collection exercise (CABI). Initially, a sample group of 132 SDI beneficiaries in several countries was selected; this was later reduced to 107. It was assumed that the selected beneficiaries had all been using the service for at least 3 years. For the desk study and data collection, three profiles were selected for analysis; two were standard profiles, on soil fertility and integrated pest management (IPM), and one was a personal profile, on water hyacinth. After discussions with CTA, these three profiles were considered to be representative enough of the SDI profiles in general and to have a large enough number of recipients to provide a sound basis for analysis.

The literature review sought to highlight impact assessment methodology issues which could inform both this impact study and future CTA work in this area. It examined the literature in development economics, information science, environmental impact assessment (EIA) and social impact assessment (SIA), and the work of development agencies and practitioners covering the impact of information-related projects.

The desk study involved searching the major agricultural databases to retrieve references to any work by the selected beneficiaries, so as to establish their publishing output, and conducting a bibliometric analysis of the records sent to SDI users in relation to the three profiles. The data collection involved designing and mailing a questionnaire to all the selected beneficiaries and using this questionnaire as a basis for face-to-face interviews in two countries, Kenya and Zambia; among the interviewees in Zambia was **Moses Mwale**, a research officer at Mt Makulu Research Station. The desk study and data collection approaches were seen as complementary, the first applying an objective set of measurements and the second based on a more subjective approach.

The study report submitted to CTA by CABI on behalf of the two agencies contained a substantial section on past and current work and trends in the impact assessment field, specifically in relation to information products and services. The report noted that, while CABI and CIRAD considered the conclusions drawn from the desk study and the survey to be valid, it would have been better if the study had selected researchers who had been using the SDI service for a longer time, had covered more SDI users, had had a wider geographical spread (especially for the interviews) and had included more personal profiles. The study conclusions were divided into use of the service and benefits of the service, reflecting the nature of the indicators used in the survey and desk study. The report was discussed at a meeting arranged between the CTA department responsible for the SDI and evaluations, including **Ibrahim Khadar**, and the CABI and CIRAD teams.

The stories

JANE FRANCES ASABA. Information Scientist, CAB International–Africa, Kenya

Evaluation experience: *Some experience, but not in impact assessment*

Definition of ‘impact assessment’: *“The change resulting from an intervention such as, in this case, the SDI service.”*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at CABI–Africa, conducted by Hilda Munyua; January 2004*

From my understanding, it was CTA who called for the impact study of the SDI service. They wanted to find out how the programme was doing. They wanted to see if the resources used were justifiable, and to assess the benefits for beneficiaries, the quality and usefulness of the service, the level of satisfaction and the impact of the service on research and development.

The study started in about 1999. It had three main components — data collection, which was carried out by CABI and took about a month, and then a desk study undertaken by CIRAD and a literature review by CABI, which both took much longer.

I carried out the interviews, mailed out questionnaires, analysed the data and wrote the report. There were 14 interviews in Kenya and Zambia and we mailed 93 questionnaires to SDI recipients in ACP countries. The study focused on three profiles only — soil fertility, integrated pest management and water hyacinth. I did not participate in the choice of profiles, but CTA thought those three were representative of the recipients.

I didn’t participate in developing the methodology as this had already been decided by CTA, but I did help develop the data collection tools. The purpose of the interviews was to probe for answers that would supplement the questionnaire survey. They also helped us to look for unexpected impact. For example, the service was to provide information to scientists, but it also helped scientists to network and write papers together. The literature review and bibliometric studies complemented the questionnaires and interviews.

The study brought out important areas to follow up, such as the need for scientists in developing countries to publish, and it contributed to the body of knowledge that future studies can draw upon. It was important to CTA because it identified gaps that CTA should address, such as updating profiles, shortfalls of vouchers, delivery formats and timeliness. Overall, it helped CTA to know the impact of the service on the scientists, especially African scientists. These scientists were able to air their views and to express appreciation for the big void the service had filled.

The purpose of the interviews was to probe for answers that would supplement the questionnaire survey. They also helped us to look for unexpected impact.

The main challenge for me in this study was the low response rate to the questionnaire. The questionnaires continued to trickle in 3 months after the closing date for return. This posed a problem in the analysis of the data.

There were other challenges. It was difficult to decide what had led to the change in proposal writing, higher quality papers, shorter time in searching, reduced duplication of research, disseminating research changes — were these changes caused by SDI only? Can we really attribute all the changes to SDI without baseline data? To see the impact, we should have parameters that show baseline information as well as provide information after the intervention.

There are few methodologies for impact assessment in information; this is still a new area. It is difficult to measure impact in terms of non-tangible benefits like learning, knowledge gained, and improved quality of research and research papers — no indicators for this have been developed. Assessing the impact of a service is more difficult than measuring the impact of, say, products.

What I liked about the study was seeing the contribution of the SDI service to research and development and being able to justify its existence. Any service that costs money has an obligation to find out about its usefulness and benefits. The findings of the study could also be used to improve information services in ACP countries and to improve impact assessment methodologies.

If I were to repeat the study, I would have more interviews and would identify a sample and a sample size that was more representative of the beneficiaries. The indicators should be in place long before the study, at the beginning of the project, and used to collect data at specific intervals. I would involve all stakeholders — scientists, CTA, CABI, CIRAD, policy-makers, national research institutions and farmers. I would not use the implementers of the service, CABI and CIRAD, to conduct the impact assessment, but would get outsiders, for objectivity. And I would cover a wider geographical area.

The results were fair. They pinpointed the need to strengthen the service and highlighted its benefits and impact. I cannot say for sure how widely the report was circulated to stakeholders to create awareness or if the service was expanded in scope and number of scientists, but CTA implemented some of the recommendations — revision of the profiles and improvement of the voucher system and delivery mechanisms.

Impact assessment is very challenging, but we should pursue it if we want to show the use and benefits of information and knowledge in development. Impact studies should be part and parcel of all information projects and initiatives to justify expenditure and to give those of us in information a better understanding of these initiatives.

It is difficult to measure impact in terms of non-tangible benefits like learning, knowledge gained, and improved quality of research and research papers — no indicators for this have been developed.

ALAIN GLARMET and FRANÇOISE REOLON. Managers of the SDI Service, CIRAD, France

Evaluation experience: *Alain: considerable experience in ongoing evaluation. Françoise: considerable experience in project evaluation and bibliometric analyses*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"To see if what is being provided is useful or not."*

Interview: *Telephone interview, conducted by Kay Sayce; February 2004*

CIRAD has been running the SDI for CTA since 1988. And we have been working with CABI on it since 1996. Its aim is to provide scientific information and literature sources to researchers in ACP countries. The overall purpose of the impact study was to give CTA information about how the SDI was being used by the beneficiaries and how it could be improved. We had to think about how to measure their use of the information, and we weren't quite sure how we would do this. We decided that the best way would be to see what they had published in journals. This is difficult because if their publication in journals increased after they had started getting material from the SDI service, we couldn't say for sure if it was linked to the SDI service. There would be many other influences on them, other sources of information which would have contributed towards them having papers accepted for publication.

There was also a second purpose, to help CTA come up with a methodology for assessing the impact of information projects. This side was important, of course, but we were more interested in the use of the SDI and how to improve it. So we didn't spend much time thinking about methodologies. But part of the reason for doing the bibliometric study was to see if it was a useful tool for this sort of impact assessment.

Carrying out the impact study jointly with CABI posed no difficulties at all. We work well with CABI. We did the bibliometric work because our experience in that areas was greater, and CABI did the field work because they had a base in East Africa and could do it from there. And they did the literature review. We worked together on the study design, and jointly produced the questionnaire.

We worked with CTA on coming up with the three subjects to use for the study — IPM, soil fertility and water hyacinth. We looked at the files for these subjects over 5 years and prepared them for the bibliometric study. For the bibliometric study, we used various tools to try to show the relationship between the subjects, the researchers and the publications.

A major challenge had been to see if the bibliometric tools were appropriate for this type of study. The answer was no. A bibliometric study alone is not enough to do an impact assessment, you need other studies to be done as well. It was also a challenge see the big picture, see what 5 years of work had achieved, if we were doing the right things and sending out the right sort of material.

We didn't spend much time thinking about methodologies. But part of the reason for doing the bibliometric study was to see if it was a useful tool for this sort of impact assessment.

We don't know what happened to the findings of the study. We didn't get any feedback on that. But the study had shown us that many of the SDI users were not referenced by the international agricultural databases. The study was to be based on the records in the databases, but very few of the SDI researchers were there — they were not in the 'scientific community'. We were not surprised at this finding, but it was very significant. The 'scientific community' is quite dominated by the North.

There are new tools for bibliometric analysis now, so if we had the chance to do the study again we would try those out, of course. And perhaps we would also use a different approach. Our study looked at the publication record of the researchers, but although this would be an appropriate way of measuring impact in the North, where journal publication is very important, it is not necessarily the priority in the developing world. The priorities for information use in developing countries are more wide ranging. They use the information for sharing, for training, for technology development. And so we would need to look more at the use of SDI service in those areas and not focus everything on journal publication. Also, we could have got more feedback from the researchers, especially about any work they'd had published that was not in the database. We didn't perhaps get all the information from them that we should have.

For us, what was good about the study was the experience of doing it. It was a good experience. It improved our knowledge about evaluation, especially about bibliometric analyses. It was good, also, working with CABI — they with their English point of view on things, us with our French point of view! We learnt a lot from CABI, and in particular from Margot, during the study.

Our study looked at the publication record of the researchers, but although this would be an appropriate way of measuring impact in the North, where journal publication is very important, it is not necessarily the priority in the developing world.

**IBRAHIM KHADAR. Deputy Head, Information Policies and Partnerships
Department, CTA, The Netherlands**

Evaluation experience: *Considerable experience, including research experience in cost-benefit analysis*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"Looking at the changes a project might have made — fundamental socio-economic changes with long-term implications."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at CTA, conducted by Kay Sayce and Pat Norrish; January 2004*

I was brought into this study to look at the first draft of the study report. SDI is a CTA service. CTA wanted to see what impact it was having and what changes needed to be made. And we were also looking for a methodology for impact assessment. This is why our department had

encouraged the consultants to include a literature review in the study. The department responsible for the SDI just wanted the evaluation to see how the SDI was doing.

Built into the terms of reference of the SDI contractors — CABI for the English service, CIRAD for the French service — was an evaluation that would not involve more money being spent by CTA.

The report was submitted to the department responsible, and I was involved in the meeting with the consultants. It was clear that the head of the other department had wanted to hear about how SDI was changing people's lives, but the report focused on the extent to which SDI scientists had been published in journals. His expectations had been much higher than that. This taught me valuable lessons about how you put the message across about what impact assessment is and how you measure it and what you can expect from it.

The head of the other department had wanted to hear about how the service was changing people's lives, but the report focused on the extent to which the scientists had been published in journals. His expectations had been much higher than that.

Our department had to explain that his expectations had been too high, a classic case of donor over-expectation. Perhaps the indicators were too soft: none of them said, 'Did the SDI change your life in any way?' The questionnaires asked instead about publication as a result of the SDI service; this was something one could prove. This is a challenge in impact assessment, to have very clear indicators that do show how lives have changed.

The head of the department gave the consultants quite a hard time because he had wanted a more in-depth study on impact. Some of the problem here had to do with what we mean by the word 'impact'. People think of it in different ways... changing lives is just one of them.

What I saw in the report confirmed for me that assessing the impact of information-related projects is a very difficult thing and full of controversy. It is more political than scientific or methodological. In other types of impact assessment the political factor is not so pronounced. One of the problems is that people don't talk enough about the difficulties, the expectations, what impact assessment means — they need to talk about it more.

The study results were used in the SDI service. They gave an idea of the type of information that SDI users in ACP countries wanted. The situation is not the same as in the West, where researchers want information to help them publish. In Africa, scientists want information on others things too, like information about meetings, grants and bursaries. So if the report showed that not many of users were getting published as a result of the service, this did not necessarily mean there was anything wrong with the service. Perhaps the concept underlying the choice of indicators — the focus on extent of publication — was not quite right. But overall the results of the study were used, they were not wasted.

If I found myself in a similar situation, I would have spent more time on looking for a more appropriate methodology for the evaluation. When you do a study like this and you see that maybe it's not getting anywhere, then don't push it. Change the approach. I think the consultants tried hard to push the chosen approach, to get results. They didn't follow the clues that began to appear during the study that a focus on journal publication was perhaps not appropriate. They got too fixed on this; it was the key indicator. There should have been more discussion at the outset about the indicators. To call something an indicator, you need to really break it down to see exactly what it is you want it to tell you.

And when you've set indicators, don't regard them as fixed. No project will produce the changes you thought it might at the outset. So, be flexible about how the indicators are applied, be aware of the need to adapt them if necessary. Some work in some contexts, some in other contexts. Context will affect the suitability of the indicators. People who conduct evaluations carry a lot of baggage, and they must be prepared to acknowledge that some of the contents of that baggage could be wrong and need to be replaced. Project stakeholders should be involved in setting indicators. A more participatory approach to designing the SDI study could have led to a different set of indicators being used.

As to the blueprint, at the time of this study Michel Menou in his IDRC work was coming up with a framework for assessing the impact of information. The idea of having a framework is still valid but now I'm less convinced of the need for a specific methodology. What's needed more is to be clear about what impact assessment is and how it differs from performance evaluation. It is much rarer than other types of evaluation.

I'm less convinced of the need for a specific methodology. What's needed more is to be clear about what impact assessment is and how it differs from performance evaluation. It is much rarer than other types of evaluation.

MOSES MWALE. Agricultural Research Officer, Mt Makulu Research Station, Zambia

Evaluation experience: *Experience in evaluating agricultural technologies*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"To assess how end-users perceived a technology (or service, in the SDI case) and used it."*

Interview: *Telephone interview, conducted by Kay Sayce; February 2004*

I'm an Agricultural Research Officer, with responsibility here at Mt Makulu for soil and water management, especially soil fertility research. Mt Makulu is Zambia's main agricultural research station and I have been here since 1989. I have been using the SDI service for about 6 or 7 years. The material all comes through very regularly, by mail. I like the service, it's well run by CABI.

It keeps me abreast of what's going on in the scientific world. I hope to continue to benefit from it.

I think the purpose of the study they conducted was to see if the SDI was useful and if it should continue, if the abstracts being mailed to us were being put to good use. By 'good use' I mean getting published in journals. They used this as an indicator. This is a valid indicator. But it is also important to see if we are sharing the information we get from SDI. Not many of my colleagues have this service, so I make sure I share the information, the abstracts, with them. I think we were asked about sharing, but there was more on journal publication.

There was no questionnaire, just an interview. A group interview with four or five people here at Mt Makulu who were getting the SDI service. It was conducted by Jane Asaba, who had a lot of questions but the discussion was quite free flowing. It lasted about an hour. It was not too much time to give up. It was good doing it in a group because lots of things came up that might not have come up in an individual interview. My colleagues said things that triggered thoughts in my mind that I might not have thought of and spoken about otherwise.

At the time the study was done, all of us in the interview had been using the SDI service for a year or two. Except for one colleague, in farming systems research — he'd been using it for 4 or 5 years. He had more to say about it.

After the interview there wasn't any feedback. But I think something must have been fed back into the SDI itself, because up to then, if I remember rightly, we got personal profiles, information aimed specifically at the individual researcher, but after that it seemed to become more general. Presumably, they found that the personal information side was not very cost-effective. I don't know. But apart from that, we heard nothing about the results of the study.

It would have been good if we had had some feedback, something saying these are the results and this is what we are going to do. But this not getting any feedback, it happens in other situations too. I myself am guilty of it, though it is something I have been trying to improve lately. I go out and talk to farmers and get opinions that help me in my research, but I seldom go back and share with them how their information is being used at Mt Makulu. I am trying to do better in this area.

Also, I've been involved in providing information in other evaluations, like the SDI one, but we never hear anything back. I think it would be good to get some feedback because then the next time you are asked to give data for these studies you are going to be more interested in the study and you are going to be more frank and truthful in what you say because you will feel more part of it.

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SUE SMITH. Manager of the SDI Service, CAB International, UK***Evaluation experience:** Limited, but long acquaintance with evaluations of information projects****Definition of 'impact assessment':** "There was a workshop I went to in the summer, where someone came up with what I thought was a rather neat definition — 'changing behaviour'."****Interview:** Face-to-face interview, in London, conducted by Kay Sayce and Pat Norrish; January 2004. The notes from the interview were sent to Margot Bellamy for any additional comments she wanted to make; her written comments appear in square brackets at the appropriate points in Sue Smith's story. Margot Bellamy worked with CIRAD on the impact study and has since retired from CABI.*

The SDI service is funded by CTA and they asked for the study to be done and were involved in the design. The objective was to ensure that the SDI service was cost-effective. The goals of the study were to assess the impact of the service, how the intended beneficiaries had benefited and what needed changing. In addition, CTA hoped that it would contribute to providing a blueprint for future CTA impact assessment work. One measure of impact was the extent to which our users were being published in scientific journals.

My main lead for CABI on this impact assessment study was Margot Bellamy. As the SDI project manager at CABI, I attended several meetings about the study, and was interested in the process and the outcomes, and in particular what impact the study would have on the SDI service. The time allowed for the study — 11 months — seemed OK.

CABI and CIRAD are dedicated to the SDI service and have a very good relationship going back many years. Our various skills complement each other. CIRAD were keen to do the bibliometric study, whilst we were happy to do the literature review.

On the issue of whether 'insiders' such as CABI and CIRAD should have conducted the study, I believe you have to strike a balance between bringing in someone from the outside who knows nothing about the project and using someone from the inside who knows far too much. The best approach is obviously is to get a mixture of both. [It would have been more impartial to get someone other than CABI and CIRAD to evaluate the SDI service, and this would have been essential if we had been trying to evaluate our own effectiveness in delivering the service. But this was not the objective of the impact assessment. It sought to measure results, not delivery, and we were the only people who knew how the service actually worked.]

Regarding the results of the study, it turned out that a number of the SDI users involved in the impact study had been beneficiaries for only a short time, so you couldn't really measure the impact. The three topics — water hyacinth, IPM and soil fertility — just happened to have quite a lot of relatively new beneficiaries. If CTA had involved more people who were longer-term

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beneficiaries, the results would have been more useful. [The topics were chosen because they had large numbers of beneficiaries, and there was cost-effectiveness within the budgetary constraints of the study in selecting countries where a large number of beneficiaries could be visited. However, because of the rationalisations in lists of beneficiaries which immediately preceded the study, they were not necessarily the longest-term recipients, which also affected their perceptions.]

The extent to which SDI users were published in international journals was a legitimate indicator. But it presupposes that African scientists *can* get their articles published in international journals. It might have been better to measure what they had achieved in local journals. [CIRAD were unable to collect data directly from the scientists. So we agreed on a bibliometric analysis to see if any of the beneficiaries had published anything at all — we could only use our respective databases to do that. It soon became clear that the analysis was not going to be useful, partly because the time was too short between receipt of profiles and anticipated published output, and partly because developing country scientists rarely got published in the journals being examined.]

So far as I know, CTA did not use the study to create a blueprint. And no changes were made to the SDI service as a result of the study. CTA retains the role of deciding who the users are, who to include or exclude, which profiles to use, how broad or narrow they are in terms of subject matter covered. This is all outside our control. For example, users have to write to CTA directly with comments, and they generally find — and this came out in the questionnaires — that CTA doesn't respond very quickly. Many comments in the completed questionnaires also suggested the subject areas were too broad, but CTA did not respond to this by changing anything in the service.

If we had the chance to do the study again, we would seek information from longer-term beneficiaries. Some of the information supplied through the SDI service may not be immediately relevant, so an impact assessment dealing with an information service needs to take on board this long-term impact aspect. [No mechanisms had been built into the SDI service for the beneficiaries to assess impact — for example, what had they learned that they could use in their research or pass on to farmers. In doing the impact assessment we had to do a less than adequate *ex post* job.]

Margot and Françoise presented the study results at CTA. [CTA thought there would be evidence of some change in agricultural practices, or some outstanding research results to prove that the service had been beneficial, and there was no way we could do this. I was very happy with the final version of the report. I think we made it clear, certainly when we presented it, what the real issue for CTA was — they must build in impact assessment and evaluation for all SDI users, as they join the service.]

I'm not aware that any of the scientists who had been involved in the study got feedback about the results. The study is a benchmark and a number of lessons were learned about the process of impact assessment.

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STUDY 11

EFFECTIVENESS INITIATIVE (EI) PROJECT, ISRAEL, KENYA, PERU AND THE PHILIPPINES

The study

The motivation for the Effectiveness Initiative (EI) came from the increasing number of donors asking The Netherlands-based Bernard van Leer Foundation, which had been running early childhood development (ECD) projects for 25 years, for advice on effective projects in which to invest. But when these donors asked, “What makes a programme effective?” the Foundation had no ready answer. The EI was launched in January 1999 to find one.

The EI was a 3-year investigation involving 10 programmes representing a diversity of locations, contexts and approaches to ECD, each programme more than 10 years old and all of them perceived to be effective (by the Foundation or by other bodies, such as governments and NGOs). The EI process sought not only to test this perception — was the programme effective? — but also to explore how the effectiveness (the ‘impact’, although this is not a word the Foundation feels comfortable using) had been achieved.

In addition to being an in-depth study of the 10 programmes, the EI was designed to be a cross-site, cross-agency collaboration that stimulated dialogue among the programmes, created room for reflection and research within the programmes, and explored indicators of programme effectiveness and the use and application of qualitative research methods. It was intended as an open exploration with no clear end point. It was seen, above all, as a learning process that would contribute to developing methods and tools for assessing effectiveness, and the reasons for it, in future programmes.

At the hub was the EI Coordination Team at the Foundation; heading this team during the latter half of the EI was **Arellys Moreno de Yanez**. The programmes chosen were in Colombia, Honduras, India, Israel, Kenya, Mozambique, The Netherlands, Peru, The Philippines and Portugal; six of these programmes were receiving funding from the Foundation. Each programme had a history of successes and failures, opportunities and difficulties.

The EI teams were created to be attached to each programme, meeting at the programme site two or three times a year over the 3-year period. In each team there were four people, two

The names in bold in this summary of the impact study are the names of the people whose stories follow the summary.

'insiders' (people connected with the programme) and two 'outsiders' (people from international NGOs). Training was provided in participatory approaches for those members who lacked experience in this field. Depending on programme context and in collaboration with programme staff and beneficiaries, each team developed its own analytical framework, the participatory methods and tools it would use to gather qualitative information from stakeholders, and the way it would communicate findings within and outside the programme throughout the process. Built into the process were 1-week workshops, organised by the EI Coordination Team, which brought together all the teams at one of the programme sites, to share their findings, methods, tools, experiences and concerns, and to contribute to work on the cross-site thematic analyses.

The insider–outsider teams began their work from April 1999 onwards (some quite a lot later), and the cross-site analysis began in 2001. The final reports from the programmes were submitted to the Foundation during 2003.

The interviews for this book focused on four of the projects:

- Israel: the Association for the Advancement of the Ethiopian Family and Child (ALMAYA) project had been set up in 1985 to assist the Falashas (Jewish Ethiopians) who had migrated to Israel, teaching children about their Ethiopian heritage and preparing them for primary school in their new country. The EI team included **Liesbeth Zwitser** (an outsider).
- Kenya: the Madrasa Resource Centre (MRC) is part of the Madrasa Regional Research Programme (MRRP) set up to prepare young children for school and provide basic Koranic teaching. The lead researcher in the MRRP is **Peter Mucheru Mwaura**.
- Peru: the Programas no Escolarizados de Educación Inicial (PRONOEI) had started as a nutrition programme in the 1970s and evolved into a community-based pre-school programme, which became a model adopted by the government and used widely elsewhere in Latin America. A member of the EI team was **Fiorella Lanata** (considered by the EI as an insider, although not directly related to PRONOEI).
- The Philippines: after the eruption of Mt Pinatubo in 1991, the long-established Community of Learners Foundation (COLF) launched a project based on home-based playgroups to help the Aeta people who had lived and farmed at the base of the mountain to rebuild their lives in new settlements. Leading the EI team attached to this programme was **Feny de los Angeles-Bautista** (an insider).

The stories

IORELLA LANATA. Research Anthropologist, EI team, Peru

Evaluation experience: *Limited experience*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"It should be about seeing what the beneficiaries feel they have got out of a project, what impact they see."*

Interview: *Telephone interview, conducted by Kay Sayce; January 2004*

The Peru project began in the 1970s when there was a drought, with many rural children going hungry, some dying. A priest started helping communities to organise themselves, and the idea emerged to place the children in some sort of communal situation, all together under the charge of one of the mothers, and give them nutritional and educational support. Later, the project linked up with the Ministry of Education. Peru has long placed emphasis on education as the route out of poverty, so the project was seen as a bridge between the two worlds. Although it was conceived as a programme concerned with the integral development of children, and through them also of the community, it is now concerned mainly with education. The nutritional aspect is inconsistent and not always present, and the flexible nature of the programme has, to a large extent, given way to a formal education approach.

I began working with this project when I was still studying anthropology. Anthropology is all about finding out what has happened. I have always liked to break things down and look at them in detail to try to understand what happened. So the aim of the EI work — to see the effects of a project from the beneficiaries' point of view, and the reasons for those effects — I found very interesting. The EI team was a sort of mirror for the project and the people in it, reflecting back at them the things they were feeling and thinking about the project, and also acting as a link between the coordinators and the teachers and the parents.

I wasn't involved in the design of the EI study. The first thing I did was to look at the research to be done with the parents and then the teachers. My main job was to work with the parents in the project, to explore with them what they thought of the PRONOEI programme. There were two of us doing this aspect, both women. We had the assistance of a local anthropologist to help where the community felt more comfortable using the local language. This person was always there to translate when we were working with the parents, for example. But it was not necessary with the teachers. I analysed the qualitative data using NUD.IST software, with help from other members of the project's team.

Most EI teams had 3 years to do their work — action-research, feedback and closure — but we had only 2 years. The 10 projects used to get together for workshops to share experiences. I went

We realised the study was stopping and there was a lot we wouldn't have time to do. It was a pity to feel rushed. Working with human groups is a process and you should not rush a process.

to the last one, and it was there that I realised we had only 3 months before the end. Closure had never really been clearly defined; we thought we had more time. Anyway, now we realised it was stopping and there was a lot we wouldn't have time to do. It was a pity to feel rushed. Working with human groups is a process and you should not rush a process.

I am using some of the information in the cross-site thematic studies that are still going on. I am involved in two of the themes, one on encountering new cultures (the Israel, Philippines and Peru EI studies) and the other on human development (India, Colombia and Peru).

There were many challenges. This was my first practical experience in almost everything that we were to do. The most important thing was to let go of preconceived ideas, listen to what the parents were saying, and look for the threads that linked actions and opinions and effects. For example, a big issue was children's play and how it is perceived in the home and outside the home. The parents tended to see play in the home, just for pleasure, as being of little value, whereas play in the educational setting had a high value for them. As the EI went on, they saw play for pleasure as valuable. That was a big step. And it made them see their children in a different way, and this in turn led to improved parenting skills and greater confidence in themselves as educators of their children. It was wonderful to watch this shift.

The challenges of the EI were on two levels — the challenge for the researcher and the challenge for the teachers. Many teachers took up the challenge of the EI very well, were receptive to what it was trying to do, understood its purpose. The hierarchical system began to break down a bit, titles became less important. But some of the teachers remained stubborn to the end; there was a paranoia about the EI and a defensiveness about their work which we could not overcome. In general, though, the EI did change the way the teachers saw their role in the project.

I liked this way of working and looking at how things happened. I would have liked more time. I see everything from a very qualitative point of view, but it would have been good to have other points of view there (perhaps combining qualitative input with quantitative). Also, it would have been good to have had a baseline survey done. There wasn't one. Baseline data would have been useful. But this was an action-research project, so it's not usual to have a baseline here.

In the last year, we did some workshops in the community to present the findings of the EI to the parents and the families and the community as a way of closing the project. We also wanted to find out what the project beneficiaries had thought about it, to evaluate the process for themselves. We used several techniques. One, for example, was done with balloon-shaped cards on which we asked community members to write their impressions of the EI. The idea was to explore the community's perceptions about the EI process and findings, to generate responses to what had happened. There were workshops, too, to explore what the project staff felt about the project and findings. The whole community enjoyed the exercise of working with us to look at the EI results. They were not used to people coming to work with them in this way.

The most important thing was to let go of preconceived ideas, listen to what the parents were saying, and look for the threads that linked actions and opinions and effects.

FENY DE LOS ANGELES-BAUTISTA. Executive Director, Community of Leaders Foundation (COLF) and EI team leader, The Philippines

Evaluation experience: *Considerable experience in the education sector*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"It's about outcomes — changed attitudes and improved skills."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at the Bernard van Leer Foundation, conducted by Kay Sayce; December 2003*

One of COLF's programmes is a community-based family education programme in The Philippines, with the emphasis on early childhood development. In Pinatubo, it was set up following the eruption of Mt Pinatubo volcano which caused the displacement of many people, including the Aetas, one of the tribal communities living in Central Luzon. They had lived near the volcano, it had a spiritual meaning for them. They were very traumatised after the eruption. COLF's main donor is Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (DWHH), a German NGO. We also have some local and corporate funding. COLF uses various assessment tools, such as ongoing monitoring and evaluation.

When the EI came into the project it was such a gift! I became part of the EI team, one of the insiders. The Pinatubo project had been through three DWHH-commissioned evaluations. They were helpful, they kept us alert, but DWHH chose the evaluators and came in for accountability purposes mainly. These evaluations were built into the programme, but they never gave enough time for real engagement with the people in the project.

At that time, COLF was close to the stage of handing over programme management to the Aetas, who had already organised themselves formally as community organisations. At the outset, the project was designed so that the Aeta parents would run things themselves, so we really needed to know how ready they were for this, what changes there had been. The EI gave us this opportunity. We designed the EI process to address two issues — health and the capacity of the families to take responsibility for their lives. What we did in the EI was not a latch on; it was integral to what was going on already. It is vital to have an integrated approach. Now and then we introduced something new, but only when we were sure that the families would be comfortable with it. To them, the EI activities were really just more of the same. They were aware of the EI process. We didn't want it to change what was already happening in the communities. And we were careful about working within the culture, not trying to change power relations but being aware of where they could hinder development.

DWHH is always helpful and encouraging. When they have a criticism of COLF, it's constructive. But they have a pro forma approach to evaluation, set by their Evaluation Department. The Department chooses the evaluators and decides their terms of reference. Much depends, we find, on the evaluators, on their credibility. Some are very attuned to the

The donor has a pro forma approach to evaluation. It chooses the evaluators and decides their terms of reference. The evaluators spend about 3 weeks with the project. Sometimes there are surprises in their findings. But not often.

project, others less so. They spend about 3 weeks with the project, observing and consulting with COLF staff. Sometimes there are surprises in their findings. But not often.

Doing an impact assessment over a long period makes more sense than a 3-week exercise. The EI approach is good if you really want to see what's happened, and learn from it, and feed it back into the programme seamlessly. It allows good engagement, and engagement is crucial in this work. Evaluation is learning. DWHH have accountability in their evaluations, with only some learning. We have accountability too, but it is accountability to our families, our target community.

In the EI work we applied our PLA knowledge. It was appropriate, and the EI was very flexible about how we applied participatory methods. We fashioned the EI tools around this. We had a workshop in Portugal with all the other teams and they expressed more need for the EI tools than we did, so we told them about ours. What we learnt from the others was how to improve the way we framed questions. Another project showed us how to improve our way of prioritising issues. All of us were looking for aspects in each other's work that we could apply to our own work.

One of the tools we developed was the creation of family books. Families had already been involved in writing projects because literacy was an integral part of the family education programme, so the idea of making books wasn't seen as something new. The family book became a special way of documenting family stories as well as a data source, and we triangulated them with other sources — staff reports, anecdotal records, observations. And there was a great spin off — all the family books now form part of the new community library! The notion of a library is not part of Aeta culture. But now they have one, with their own books in it.

The whole EI exercise has been a once-in-a-lifetime experience! For me, the most significant aspect is the interactive process. This made it very stimulating and provided space for the practitioners to reflect. Reflection is something of a luxury. Usually, you don't have the time to stand back and look at the project, at what you are doing. The EI gives you the chance to do this.

The timing of the EI project worked very well. We used the get-togethers with the other EI teams as markers, set ourselves certain goals to achieve by the time of these get-togethers. But we didn't push things, we let them happen as naturally as possible. There was no artificial imposition of time constraints — so common in traditional evaluation approaches. I think working with the other teams could have been a bit more structured. And there has not really been any closure.

Our findings were being used all the time and will continue to be used, fed back into our projects. The EI principles relate to participatory evaluation and participatory research. Often in evaluations you get trapped in the inappropriate but well-meaning frame of reference you acquired from the traditional schools of thought. For example, the stress on the replicability of an evaluation approach. But with the EI, it's not about replicability. Every situation is unique. It's better to take from what's available only the aspects that suit a particular project. With the EI work, we wanted to apply PLA and did this in such a way that folded neatly into what was already being done.

Limiting the assessment process to the indicators identified at the outset and then measuring everything against them — this is not a natural way to proceed. Other factors emerge and the learners themselves might introduce new indicators. The process must also be allowed to evolve in its own way.

Some approaches to impact assessment see attribution as important, but I don't. The process we are evaluating is affected by many other factors. If we started trying to trace everything, to make connections, we would negate the role of the learner — we would be making the learner the passive actor. This is why I don't really like the idea of limiting the assessment process to the indicators identified at the outset and then measuring everything against them; it's not a natural way to proceed. Other factors emerge and the learners themselves might introduce new indicators. The process must also be allowed to evolve in its own way; through real engagement, and by observing and looking at the available data we will get an idea of what changes are happening and where we could do better.

ARELYS MORENO DE YANEZ. EI Project Coordinator, Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Netherlands

Evaluation experience: *Extensive, particularly in the education sector*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"An exploratory exercise to find out how people see their projects and what they think makes these projects effective. I prefer 'effect' to 'impact'."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at the Bernard van Leer Foundation, conducted by Kay Sayce and Pat Norrish; January 2004*

I came into the EI from the Colombia and Peru projects, where I had been an outsider in the EI teams. In 2003, I was asked to take over the coordination of the whole project. From the beginning, there was a lack of internal agreement within the Foundation as to how to run this project. Many objections and questions arose at the time. There did not seem to be the right system through which people could channel their learning from the EI. Our analyses now show that indeed more structure was needed. It had not set out clear steps at the beginning about how to proceed with the evaluation or which people should be incorporated. A systematic exploration on what was meant by 'effectiveness' should have taken place at the beginning of the project.

The lack of structure and guidelines has made the coordination of the EI quite complicated. The idea of 'being open and of letting each team follow its own path' is interesting, but a methodological approach should not then be forced into the teams, imposing such things as: "Don't use a quantitative approach" or "You must adopt a participatory approach." So guidelines began to appear. But they should have been there at the beginning. Some projects accepted the guidelines as they appeared, others said, "No, we'll do this the way we want — you said it was open." And now, when we ask for final reports, some say that a final report was never requested and that the EI was an open-ended process.

The initiator of the EI was an anthropologist working from the perspective proposed by Robert Chambers in his book *Whose Reality Counts?* He discussed it with the director and with other agencies and they all liked it. The donor agencies saw it as something that they could use in deciding which programmes they could support. He went into the field and came up with an analytical framework which was used more as a tool for the data collection process.

When it came to selecting the projects, there were no real criteria for measuring effectiveness so as to determine which projects to choose, and this has come in for criticism. There should have been criteria. In selecting the teams, some people had lots of experience in analytical work and PLA and so on, but others not so much. The main thing was to have skills to do the analysis. Anyone can collect data, but you have to know how to avoid drowning in qualitative data, and not let the tools guide the process but use the tools as needed. Some teams thought that the EI should have provided tools, but this was not the idea. Nonetheless, one of the cross-site workshops was on the tools. We found that the teams were borrowing tools from each other. The river analogy, the tree analogy, everyone using visual tools in various ways. This is what we wanted, to add to the richness. So, to have people with good analytical experience is good but more important, in a way, is willingness to learn.

Many Foundation staff thought too much money was being spent on the EI. It is true that it cost a lot of money. We had meetings involving lots of people coming from all over the world two or three times a year — that's expensive. At these gatherings there was much learning, but if we'd had more purpose to these meetings, more structure, we would have gained much more to feed into the EI experience. The time frame for the project kept changing due to the lack of a clear plan.

Overall, the EI has proved very interesting, and the projects have really benefited from it. They felt that they were involved in a process that gave them the luxury of time to reflect on what they were doing. In Peru and Colombia, the EI brought new life to the projects, gave them renewed purpose. This happened in India and Kenya, too. For me, what was most interesting was how the EI opened up a way of looking at projects involving people of different backgrounds, views, contexts and then showed up so many commonalities.

The EI has also shown how not to do things. When you start a project you have to go further than dreaming. Dreaming is good, but it is not enough. Vision must be backed up by detail. If closer attention had been paid to planning, the outcomes would have been wonderful; the outcomes are very good, but they could be more solid. In one case, the EI showed up some bad practice and as a result the project became less enthusiastic about it. What were we to do? We were there to say not just what did make projects effective but also what didn't. In Israel, however, where the EI pointed out the negative effects of excluding the fathers in the project, the project took this right on board. We saw the same thing in The Philippines: changes happening because the EI pointed out problems. In Honduras, when the local team discovered that not all the mothers involved in the project were in fact 'mothers', the project dismissed the non-mothers. But these young ladies would have learnt a lot that they could use when they

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became mothers and the community accepted the measure without posing any resistance. We were worried about bringing about this change but were glad it turned out well.

The issue of whether the EI changed the projects it was assessing is very interesting. Initially, it was not thought to be a good thing, but now people are much more open to the idea of a long-term study on project effectiveness affecting the project processes. Equally, they are more aware of the need for structure and guidelines and a clear strategy not just on what they want to do, but also how to do it and who takes responsibility. It has given the Foundation a model for a lot of our work in the future. None of the experience will be thrown in the bin, as you so often find!

We had earlier found six cross-site themes emerging and wanted to develop them further by giving them to 2 or 3 projects to work on. The projects are still working on these; it's quite a slow process. All the final reports are in, though. Apart from disseminating the findings through workshops, a synthesis of the EI project will be published. We also want to do a publication called *Small Ideas at Work*. We don't pretend to have found all the answers, but we want to put out the issues that have arisen, put them out as questions. They should be useful for donor agencies and for practitioners, government agencies, NGOs, etc. There are policy implications for them. For example, what is the role of the intermediary between the donor and the target community, what is the importance of credibility in the whole process, whose agenda is important? As a donor it is important to be aware that the reality you see is not the reality others see; you have to be aware of your cultural blindness and work within its limits.

What is the importance of credibility in the whole process, whose agenda is important? As a donor it is important to be aware that the reality you see is not the reality others see.

PETER MUCHERU MWAURA. Lead Researcher, Madrasa Regional Research Programme (MRRP), Kenya

Evaluation experience: *Considerable evaluation experience, including some impact assessment experience*

Definition of 'impact assessment': *"In our case, a process of finding out to what extent the programme has met its goal of improving the development and education of the child who eventually has an impact on the community in general."*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at the MRRP regional office, conducted by Hilda Munyua; February 2004*

The goals of the MRRP are to create pre-schools of excellence that use active learning curricula that integrate religious — Islamic — and secular education. The children are the primary beneficiaries; the poor Muslim communities where the programme is established are also

important stakeholders. There are MRRP centres in Kenya, Zanzibar and Uganda, all coordinated by the regional office in Mombassa. The programme is funded mainly by the Aga Khan Foundation.

In 2000, the MRRP was lucky enough to be chosen to participate in a qualitative study entitled 'the Effectiveness Initiative' (EI). The study was funded by the Bernard van Leer Foundation, which went around the world assessing the effectiveness of projects. They were focusing on particular projects, as each project is unique although there may be patterns of effectiveness. Under the EI study, we wanted to find out the dimensions, elements, structures, strategies and patterns of effectiveness, what people mean by 'effectiveness', and the factors behind project effectiveness.

The study took 3 years and this was done together with project activities. I think the strategy of the EI was good, because the money helped facilitate the work; it was not a one-off activity, but was integrated within the project activities. Our project had been in existence for 10 years. It was therefore realistic to study effectiveness. The EI would not have been realistic for a 1-year-old project, as not much can be learned.

When I joined the MRRP, I thought I was good at designing studies, formulating questionnaires and executing the studies, but I now realise that education alone does not make one good at impact studies. It is one thing to think you know, but quite another when you are put in a practical situation. You find that concepts like 'impact' are challenged and you have to rethink their meaning in the context of the programme.

The study had four aspects: the processes and dynamics of programme effectiveness, described symbolically as the 'wheels' of the MRRP; the gender empowerment, referred to as 'opening the gender curtains'; community mobilisation and empowerment; and the practice of active learning. I dealt with the wheels — the process of effectiveness. I did everything, including design and data collection. The Kenya office handled the curriculum aspect, Uganda tackled gender and Zanzibar dealt with community development and empowerment. My role was also to provide advice and coordinate the whole exercise.

For a regional programme like ours, it was very challenging to coordinate activities in Kenya, Uganda and Zanzibar. One would have needed researchers in the three countries, and then communicated with them to make sure things were happening. This would have meant expanding the research department, though, so I had to do a lot of work.

There were other challenges. There were different expectations, depending on where one stood. One has to weigh whether you are an 'objective outsider' or an 'objective insider'. To what extent do you involve yourself? The instruments were also a challenge. There is little investment in creating and validating instruments. This takes time, so the tendency is to adapt instruments. There is a need to select instruments wisely in relation to the objectives of the study and the context in which the study is done.

Education alone does not make one good at impact studies. It is one thing to think you know, but quite another when you are put in a practical situation. You find that concepts like 'impact' are challenged and you have to rethink their meaning in the context of the programme.

Writing the report was a big challenge. The information has to be disseminated to different groups of stakeholders and beneficiaries. The content may be the same, but communicating it in an appropriate language and context is a challenge.

The whole study experience was very good, and the findings seem to agree with the current theories of childhood development. Some of the things that are acceptable in the West were different in our context. In the West, most studies indicate that the child–teacher interaction is dependent on the level of education of the teacher — the more educated the greater the interaction. In the East African context, it is different — and the findings indicated an inverse relationship. The study also showed how the creation of a project takes a long time, how demand emanates from the very process of programme development and how a project has to be ‘for the people, by the people and in most cases with the people’.

If I had to do the study again, I would bring qualitative and quantitative research together and think of them as I work on the design. I would involve more people in the design and demonstrate why the research is needed. I would also try to learn about other similar studies before embarking on the study.

Writing the report was a big challenge. The information has to be disseminated to different groups of stakeholders and beneficiaries. The content may be the same, but communicating it in an appropriate language and context is a challenge.

LIESBETH ZWITSER. Senior Adviser, Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Netherlands

Evaluation experience: *Experience mostly qualitative, and much of it academic rather than in the field*

Definition of ‘impact assessment’: *“Difficult. Was what we did an evaluation? A validation exercise? An exploration of the perceptions of effectiveness?”*

Interview: *Face-to-face interview, at the Bernard van Leer Foundation; conducted by Kay Sayce and Pat Norrish; January 2004*

This Israel project is to do with the Falashas from Ethiopia, the ‘Ethiopian Jews’. Israel in the 1980s had well-oiled machinery to welcome most immigrants, but very little experience of absorbing a community so different culturally. The Bernard van Leer Foundation was asked to help, so it set up the ALMAYA project. It brought in some of the Ethiopians to work with the project, set up home-visiting programmes, education programmes for the mothers, day care for the children, etc. The stakeholders were the Foundation and the project and, of course, the Falashas themselves, who were the main stakeholders. And the donors. The project model was later transferred to Israelis working with immigrant communities elsewhere in the country.

I was in the EI team. One of the most interesting things with EI was that the teams consisted of insiders and outsiders. I was an outsider, and another person in the team had never even been to Israel before. In interviews, outsiders could have been at a disadvantage because we didn't know the culture so well. In fact, we found that we got more out of the interviews than the insiders did. The Falashas opened up to us, told us more than they were telling the insiders. Otherwise, the issue of fathers being left out might never have been discovered. In our interviews with the mothers, they had told us the project focused too much on them; they found the exclusion of the fathers unusual. The fathers felt left out, and this was having a negative impact. But the women had not told the insiders this. I was quite often in a situation where I asked a question and got an answer which pointed up something the translator (an insider) had never heard before. Outsiders have a distance, can be more objective, can give a new perspective.

We worked together as a team on the design, strategy and analysing. Members of the team had specific functions. The team leader and I did the planning. The team leader did the draft report. One of the Israelis in the team was a Falasha who'd worked his way up and got a Masters in social work. We all communicated by phone and e-mail and got together once or twice a year. Most of the work was done by the Israeli team members. We functioned very well as a team because the Israelis did all they could to give us outsiders a good understanding of the context in which the project operated. A team meeting could take a week and was usually held in one of their houses, very informal and warm. They always built in some travelling for us so we could get to know each other. That helped a lot with team building.

In interviews, outsiders could have been at a disadvantage because we didn't know the culture so well. In fact, we found that we got more out of the interviews than the insiders did.

The most significant aspect of the work was the shared reflection process with the stakeholders and the team. Before the EI, the project had allocated very little time for reflective work. All the time was taken up by the day-to-day running of the project. Whenever we had team meetings, the Israeli team members said the space for reflection that EI gave was one of the most important things to them. Development projects often operate in an isolated way and the staff are so busy. There is seldom much time for the reflection sessions that were part of the EI process.

For me, the best thing was the opportunity to look at a project in such detail. I had never had this luxury. And I enjoyed the emphasis on working with stakeholders, which the Foundation encourages. It doesn't put itself in the controlling seat in projects, unlike many other development agencies.

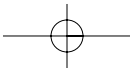
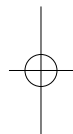
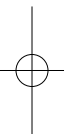
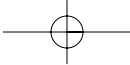
If there was the chance to do the EI again, I would phase it. Start with, say, three projects, as pilots, and build up from there. I felt at the beginning that having 10 projects straight away was quite something to handle, especially with all of them at different levels and stages. Also, I would have structured it more. For the cross-site work, we could have done an overall analysis earlier and have identified a few crucial issues that most sites had in common and looked at those issues in more detail. Also, the lack of structure means it's not clear when it's over. If there had been more structure the end point would have been more obvious.

I think the EI did change the project a little, as in the case of including fathers in the project activities. Also, at one point there was a conflict in the project because the Ethiopian beneficiaries wanted to take it over. The senior project staff were all white Israelis; the Board was all Ethiopian. The Board staged a coup and took over and pushed the white Israelis out of senior positions. Within a year, though, the Ethiopians had recomposed the Board and it contained more white Israelis than Ethiopians! But this is what they chose, so it was different. It is possible that the EI was the trigger for the coup, but this we don't know.

We are still in the process of looking at how to use the findings. The site reports are being summarised and will be disseminated in some form. The cross-site studies are still going on. At central level we are analysing the outcomes and this will take a couple of years, so to this extent the EI is continuing. But the EI deserves more study, more follow up. For example, we need to see to what extent its approach is being integrated into the projects, as an ongoing evaluation. This would be useful to investigate, about 2 years down the line.

On the question of how long one needs to assess a programme, sometimes quick assessments are needed because quick decisions need to be made. One or two weeks. And you just hope you are making the right decision! What we have done with the EI was a luxury. I feel very privileged to have taken part in it. But perhaps something in between is best, between the EI approach and the short, sharp evaluations. I'm not sure. With the EI a big thing was trust — we had time to build up trust so that stakeholders began to say more, much more than they would normally say. We got much nearer the true picture, I think, because of this trust building.

The most significant aspect of the work was the shared reflection process with the stakeholders and the team. Before the EI, the project had allocated very little time for reflective work. There is seldom much time for the reflection sessions that were part of the EI process.



Conclusion

Have the stories moved the story on?

There are two questions in this question. The first concerns the tool itself — storytelling. The second concerns the results of using that tool. The focus of this conclusion is, of course, on the second question, but prefacing this discussion with a brief look at the tool itself seems appropriate.

Is storytelling a useful tool for identifying important issues in impact assessment and helping to build an understanding of the subject? Storytelling is a process through which “people re-experience an event together and learn its meaning collectively” (Kleiner and Roth, 1998). It is a tool that encourages people, particularly those who feel their point of view has been overlooked, to add their perspective to the jigsaw and help complete it. In each story in this book, a perspective is given. Each perspective is a valid, albeit limited, part of the whole picture.

By joining the pieces together to build the bigger picture — a task that should involve all stakeholders in development — it is possible that we will move a little closer to understanding where impact assessment has been, where it is now, what the main issues are and what to do next.

An idea of where impact assessment has been and where it is now is provided by the works in the Selected Publications list in Appendix 4. In line with the studies in this book, there is a bias in the list towards information-related studies, including the pioneering work done in the 1990s by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in an effort to develop a framework to measure the impact of information. Among the works that emerged from this exercise were those by Menou (1993), McConnell (1995, 2000) and Horton *et al.* (2000). The central challenge for the IDRC researchers was: “Logic dictates that information is an essential resource for the social and economic development of Third World countries, but how can this be demonstrated?” (Horton *et al.*, 2000).

The challenge has been further highlighted by the emergence of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) offering new routes for information and communication for development. Much work has been done, and continues to be done, on assessing the role and

likely impact of ICTs in development (Lefebvre and Lefebvre, 1996; Heeks, 2002a, b; Stoll *et al.*, 2002).

By the 1990s, approaches to impact assessment (in general, and in development in particular) had moved on from the predictive and cost-benefit analysis approaches common in the 1970s and 1980s (Pingali, 2001) to more participatory and qualitative approaches, as described, for example, by Goyder *et al.* (1997), Guijt (1998) and Oakley *et al.* (1998). The application of the logframe approach to evaluation became widespread in the 1990s (Picciotto, 1995, 2002; Wiggins and Shields, 1995; McCaul, 2000), as the pressure to measure the impact of development efforts, in terms of poverty reduction, began to grow.

The focus in recent years has moved towards more inductive, flexible, process-based approaches that take greater account of community social dynamics than was the case with the earlier more controlled, deductive approaches. These include learning- and utilisation-focused evaluation (Patton, 1997; Estrella, 2000; Earl *et al.*, 2001; Engel and Carlsson, 2002) and approaches reflecting the growing need for impact-oriented development, such as pathway analysis (Springer-Heinze *et al.*, 2002).

Interesting contemporary process-based work which has moved away from using indicators and towards self-assessment includes the network analysis and 'most-significant-change' (MSC) approaches (Davies, 1998, 2001; Mosse *et al.*, 1998) and the IDRC's outcome mapping approach (Earl *et al.*, 2001). Michael Quinn Patton, during an interview in 2002 on what he considered to be the four 'breakthrough ideas' of the past 10–15 years (Coffman, 2002) cited the following:

- process use (i.e., the use of findings throughout the evaluation process);
- the diverse range of approaches now available;
- the end of the qualitative/quantitative debate (many donors and others commissioning impact studies seem to be unaware of this);
- the need to adapt evaluation to cross-cultural environments.

Those interested in evaluating the impact of information and communication for development can learn a great deal from all this work, though the way in which it should be used or adapted for evaluating the impact of information on development has to be left to individuals and teams.

For all those working in communication and information for development, the central challenge faced by IDRC — to demonstrate that information is an essential resource for development — remains. The stories in this book show that many are now prepared to accept that challenge, whether looking at old or new ICTs. These stories, as well as the books and manuals based on case studies which are now available and the discussion groups on the internet, provide all those working in this area with a rich source of experience to build on.

The issues

Now to the second part of the question. What does the list of impact assessment issues drawn up prior to interviewing the storytellers — the ‘before’ list — look like now? Has an ‘after’ list emerged which differs substantially from the ‘before’ list?

As noted in the Introduction, this book was not intended to offer solutions, but rather to provide the material from which readers would draw their own conclusions. The stories were gathered and have been reproduced for you to interpret. How you interpret them — what the items on your ‘after’ list are — may differ from other interpretations. But, like the stories themselves, your perspectives on the stories will contribute to the bigger picture and so contribute to moving the impact assessment debate forward.

We have drawn up our ‘after’ list, our thoughts on what the stories seem, to us, to reveal about the perceptions and practice of impact assessment as told by those with first-hand experience of it. We offer the list here as a contribution to the debate.

The issues that seemed to feature most strongly in the stories were:

- learning
- context
- communication
- donor issues
- resources
- planning.

And then there was a second set of issues that most storytellers touched on at some point:

- evaluators
- indicators
- methods and tools
- feedback.

It is noticeable that some of these issues were not high on the ‘before’ list (e.g., communication and context), while others that *were* high on that list were hardly mentioned by the storytellers (e.g., accountability and attribution).

We start with the first of the big issues, ‘learning’. The quotations that precede the discussion of this and the other issues are drawn from the stories.

“It’s not good enough to say, ‘There was impact’. You have to be able to say, ‘There was impact and this is how they got there’. You have to be able to say what the route to impact was. Otherwise, there’s no LEARNING.”

“The emphasis was on LEARNING and on sharing the information with others. We really wanted to see how the project did, what it came up with. The study was guided by the principle of learning rather than accountability.”

These are the words of two seasoned evaluators, both putting learning — the need for it and the experience of it — at the centre of the impact assessment process. Learning comes through as a major — if not *the* major — issue in the stories. In many cases, however well or not a study was planned, conducted and resourced and however well or not its recommendations were followed up, the storyteller talks of it as a good learning experience. But it is, almost invariably, an individual learning experience rather than an organisational learning experience that is being described. And the individual learning tends to relate to the impact assessment process rather than the project being assessed.

Important points raised by the storytellers about learning:

- A big question raised in many stories is: Who are the learners? The donors? The project staff? The project beneficiaries? The evaluators? And what are they learning and how are they using it? If the intention of an impact study is that all those involved should learn from it, then what are the implications for the content and timing of feedback? This is linked, of course, with the issue of communication.
- While the evaluators and project staff and beneficiaries among the storytellers see learning as the main purpose of impact assessment, most consider that for donors the main purpose is accountability. This is generally seen as accountability ‘upwards’ — from the project to the donor. In a few cases, accountability ‘downwards’ — from the project to the beneficiaries — is seen as the main purpose of impact assessment.
- In some cases, the storytellers talk of the application of individual learning to organisational learning when the right people are in place in an organisation. This relates to staff turnover rates and commitment; the application of learning to organisational dynamics is more likely when the staff present at the planning stage of an impact study are still there when the study report comes in. This is still, however, relatively rare.
- Learning across agencies, countries and continents is touched upon by many storytellers, including the project beneficiaries from whom the evaluators collect their data. Often, these project beneficiaries talk of their desire to know what they could learn from similar studies in

other areas or countries. Other stories provide evidence of the North learning from the South and the donor learning from the beneficiary.

- Allocating time specifically for reflection *during* an impact study is seen as an ideal that few studies provide but all should offer; the focus here is on long-term studies, where learning and reflection are (or should be) built into such studies in a structured way. For those storytellers who did experience this 'luxury', their appreciation of its value in terms of individual learning and improved impact of the project being studied is very apparent.
- Learning as an ongoing process — as opposed to learning via training workshops at the start of an impact study — is more highly valued by the storytellers. Several of them describe the shortcomings of such training workshops (too short; did not cater for the varied experience of impact assessment among the participants, etc.).

“There’s no such thing as an impact chain. We really don’t want to fall into that trap. More important in everything we are doing is the process and the CONTEXT.”

“Part of the standard approach is to use external evaluators who come up with indicators all over the place — when they have little understanding of the CONTEXT or people’s lives. There is a role for external evaluators from the point of view of objectivity, of course, but they must understand the context.”

For many of the storytellers, context ‘is all’ — the context in which a project is implemented and its impact studied. Context is seen in both its broad sense (project scale and complexity in terms of goal sought, actors involved and countries covered) and its narrower sense (the local context, the situation on the ground in terms of resources, infrastructure, cultural norms, aspirations, power relations, etc.). Those commissioning an impact study need to choose evaluators who show an understanding of the local context. What cultural norms might prevent an evaluator from obtaining valuable data from project beneficiaries? How easy is it to reach these beneficiaries? What local knowledge is required to ensure that the right questions are asked of the right people in the right languages in the right venues at the most appropriate time of day?

They also need to agree, with those conducting the study, on the broad context issues. In a multi-agency, multi-country project, for example, do the resources provided allow for an in-depth assessment of the impact of all facets of the project or only certain aspects of it? Should all areas

(geographically) covered by the project be assessed, or only a sample of them? Does the context dictate that the study should look for impact only at the intermediate levels (at the impact of a capacity-building project on agricultural research institutions, for example)? Or further down the line (at the level of farm productivity and farmer livelihoods)?

Important points raised by the storytellers about context:

- For many storytellers, the supremacy of context means that the idea of using some sort of blueprint approach to impact assessment is not feasible. While impact assessment blueprints were something that the development community sought in the 1990s, they are now seen as inappropriate either for short studies of comparatively simple projects or for longer-term studies of more complex projects.
- Attempts to impose a blueprint, regardless of context, lead to dissatisfaction with, and alienation from, the assessment process among the people on the ground — the project staff and beneficiaries. The donor tendency to send in an evaluator or two for a short space of time, armed with a blueprint, is generally seen as an accountability exercise of use only to the donor.
- The attraction of a blueprint is its potential replicability. But few storytellers seem concerned about replicability, each project and its context being seen, instead, as unique. Where replicability does arise in the stories, it is to do with replicating parts of an approach according to the context, not the whole approach. Many storytellers imply that what is needed is not so much a blueprint or a model but a framework — a way of thinking. And this way of thinking, coupled with the context, will determine the tools and methods to be used.
- The need for flexibility in conducting an impact assessment is raised by many of the storytellers. Without an in-built flexibility that gives evaluators the freedom to adapt the assessment approach to the situation on the ground as they go along, the study findings are unlikely to be a true reflection of project impact. A rigid approach is more likely to produce a set of findings that could almost have been written in advance and bear a close resemblance to the plethora of 'lists of recommendations' that come out of such studies and seldom see the light of day thereafter.
- This flexibility relates to a variety of context-based factors, such as changing tack mid-stream if a study is not producing the data required, adapting tools and methods to suit the skills of project workers and beneficiaries and to address power relations issues among the beneficiaries, and using a dynamic approach in a dynamic environment. Evaluating change in a changing context emerges as one of the major challenges in impact assessment.
- Ensuring rigour when the focus is on flexibility, processes, qualitative information and learning requires time and skills and a good understanding of the context.

“The lines of COMMUNICATION were clear but at times they were difficult. Everyone was very enthusiastic but because, for us, there were three countries involved, we should have set up much better lines of communication.”

“Much of this also relates to good COMMUNICATION skills. I don’t mean just face-to-face communication skills, I mean writing policy briefs, building tools for people to use, building databases, and so on... the importance of communicating what’s happened.”

Communication emerges from the stories as an important multi-dimensional issue, relating to the planning, implementation, follow-up and use of an impact study. Clear lines and channels of communication are particularly important in more complex studies, where there is a need for everyone to be singing from the same hymn sheet if the study process is to be smooth and the findings are to be used and useful. Most storytellers endorse the view that good communication is a prerequisite for learning and transparency. The most frequent communication problem cited is the failure to communicate the findings of an impact study, particularly to the project beneficiaries who provide the study data in the first place.

Important points raised by the storytellers about communication:

- Good communication lends coherence to a study — its process and its findings. Without coherence, the chances of producing a useful study are diminished and the experience for all those involved can become a negative one. Good communication should be deliberately fostered among the various parties involved in an impact study, so that there is a common understanding of the process and goals of the study. Some stories illustrate the benefits of such a strategy; others show the downside of not fostering good communication.
- For some storytellers, good communication between evaluator and beneficiary is unlikely unless local languages are used and local cultural norms are well understood. Many of the project beneficiaries among the storytellers imply that they did not provide good-quality data to an evaluator whose communication with them revealed a lack of knowledge of local norms and aspirations.
- Communication is linked to the issue of power relations. The subtlety of power relations — among all those involved in the development chain, from donors to evaluators to project staff and beneficiaries — is such that, without good communication and good communication skills, evaluators might not be able to get near enough to the truth to provide useful findings. If impact is about whether power relations within target communities, and between those

communities and their 'benefactors', have changed, then the failure to understand these relations is a failure to measure impact.

- Many storytellers express disappointment over the lack of communication about a study's findings once the study has been completed; some of them, notably the project beneficiaries who provided the study data, suggest this could affect the quality of information they will provide to future evaluators who come knocking at their door asking for data.
- Linked to the above point is the communication of findings to those not only in the field but also back at head office. When asked about how the findings of an impact study have been used by those who commissioned it, few storytellers have any idea. The common perception seems to be that the study report was probably ticked off as 'done' and then put in a drawer, its contents never acted upon.
- Where studies ran into difficulties, very often the cause lay in poor communication which could be traced to poor leadership. And those studies characterised by a high level of satisfaction among evaluators and project staff and beneficiaries usually had, at their core, a good leader aware of the importance of good communication.

"The DONOR hasn't influenced our approach at all. Since the funding came through, they've not got involved at all. They don't seem interested in this new learning about participatory approaches to impact assessment. All they asked for were indicators. Any interest they do have seems to be on the quantitative side."

"The changes in DONOR approach were brought about mainly by a change in policy. The UK Government had brought out a White Paper on international aid that changed its focus to poverty. So the indicators became 'poverty focused'. We were being evaluated according to extension-related indicators. We were not an extension project. But the donor wanted to evaluate us as an extension project and asked to see impact on farmers, especially the poor."

The differences of opinion between donors, the project they fund and the impact evaluators they commission as to what is being assessed (sometimes, for example, what the donor is really asking for is an assessment of project performance, not project impact) and why it is being assessed is a

theme that runs through many of the stories. The donor–recipient relationship is generally seen as an uneasy one, although this is less apparent in those studies where a shared desire to learn governs this relationship.

Important points raised by the storytellers about donor issues:

- The stories reveal a tendency for donors to seek quantitative data to demonstrate impact, while development practitioners prefer a qualitative approach or, in some cases, a mixture of the two. This sometimes leads to tension. It also sometimes leads to a situation where parallel studies are conducted, one resulting in an official report for the donor, replete with numbers, the other an unofficial accumulation of qualitative information that project staff feed back into their project.
- The time frame for an impact study, usually imposed by the donor, is often perceived by evaluators and project staff and beneficiaries as too short. Similarly, many storytellers feel that the financial resources committed by donors to impact studies are not enough. It is noticeable how much more rigorous those studies with adequate resources are, and how much those involved in them gain in experience and learning, compared to poorly resourced studies. But there is also a recognition among the storytellers that resources are finite.
- The time horizon of a project, as perceived by donor and evaluator, may also differ. The evaluator, traditionally, comes in at the planning stage of an impact study, implements it, reports the findings and moves on to the next assignment. For the donor, the project and the assessment of its impact are part of a bigger picture extending beyond the evaluator's time horizon.
- The degree to which a donor who has commissioned a study is involved in its planning and implementation varies considerably in the studies. Some storytellers report minimum donor involvement ('interference') and suggest that this suits them, so long as the donor supplies the required resources. For others, the problem is a donor's imposition of a logframe or indicators that the evaluators find difficult to apply, often because they impose a rigidity which might prevent the wider picture or unexpected impact being revealed. And there are those storytellers who touch on the problem of inconsistency in donor involvement, often resulting from changes in the donor's agenda.
- Many evaluators among the storytellers talk of the need to persuade those being assessed — project staff and beneficiaries — that while evaluation is to some extent, inevitably, a policing exercise, its primary function is as a learning exercise whose main purpose is to strengthen current and future projects. The feeling of being policed depends to some extent on who has called for the assessment and on the relationship built up between evaluator and project staff and beneficiaries. Where donor-appointed evaluators parachute

in for a few weeks to assess a project and then fly out, taking their findings with them, project staff and beneficiaries see policing and accountability, not learning, as the purpose of such exercises.

- Many storytellers talk about the problem of producing an impact study report that will please the donor, that will say what the donor wants to hear. Where questionnaires are used, for example, they are geared to eliciting the 'right' responses. Where evaluators do not want to jeopardise their chances of being commissioned to conduct future evaluations, they might play up the positive, play down the negative. This touches on the issue of ownership, which is something to be discussed and clarified at the planning stage.
- Donors often display a poor understanding of context, according to many of the storytellers. This leads, usually, to a mismatch in resources and expectations, culminating in findings that, again, are unlikely to be of much use.
- The previous two points both link to one raised by several storytellers — that of the need to challenge the donor's terms of reference. All too often, evaluators and project staff shrink from making such a challenge because, again, they do not want to be seen as awkward and thus jeopardise finance flows and future job prospects. But this invariably leads to job dissatisfaction and produces findings unlikely to be of much use.
- Donor expectations of the findings of an impact study can often be very high, sometimes unreasonably so. As shown in several stories, it is important to put all expectations on the table, early and clearly, and agree about which of them can be reasonably met.
- Few donors seem to have built into their systems the mechanisms for acting upon the findings of impact studies or for communicating these findings and their follow-up actions to those involved in the project or its assessment.

“The working dynamic that was generated was such that we worked together well and were all motivated. The RESOURCES were so generous that we didn't have any issues with the FINANCING; in fact, it was more than we needed.”

“Given the project's scale and complexity, there is not enough TIME being allocated to the evaluation. Either the time has to be increased or the expectations of our role [as evaluators] have to be heavily cut back. We're discussing this at the moment.”

Running through all the major issues is the question of the resources available to conduct an impact study. The time and money allocated to studies are shown to be decisive factors in the extent to which a study could be said to be enjoyable, rigorous and useful. The human resources — the people conducting an impact study and the skills they bring with them — are determined to a large extent by the money available. The subject of impact assessment clearly comes across as an area where there is considerable tolerance of different approaches and most tread rather uncertainly because there are no fixed rules and little accumulated experience.

Important points raised by the storytellers about resources:

- While the amount of money *per se* for conducting an impact study is not often referred to, money does arise as a factor when it is linked to time and to planning. In the latter case, some storytellers refer to the need to ensure at the planning stage that an appropriate amount of money is available and that this amount can be adjusted where necessary.
- A reasonable amount of time is needed not only to conduct the study itself but also to develop methods and approaches, to build relationships within an evaluation team and with donors, and to develop an understanding of the project to be assessed.
- A lack of time can seriously affect working relationships with local project staff and partner organisations, who may be used to working at a slower pace than that set by the evaluator according to donor requirements.
- It seems from the stories that seldom is enough time allocated to enable an evaluator to build relationships in the field with project beneficiaries or to develop an understanding of the context in which they live and work (so that, for example, evaluators acquire good-quality data because they have shown awareness of the time of day an interviewee would prefer to be interviewed). This links, again, to the pervasive issue of communication.
- A lack of time will influence the extent to which participatory approaches can be used, as such approaches tend to be very time-intensive. In the few cases in the stories where the time allowed is generous, the satisfaction and learning gained from implementing a truly participatory study is very evident.
- Evaluators need to be pragmatic. They are unlikely to be allocated the amount of time they would really like to carry out an impact assessment, and so must be clear on what can be achieved in a given timescale.

“We could have done better if we’d been given more time to plan. There was such a short lead-time. There had been no prior PLANNING. The first time I met my co-evaluator was on the plane. Fortunately, the journey to Fiji is a long one, so we had time to sort out quite a lot.”

“Impact assessment is surrounded by many perspectives and expectations. You have to recognise all of them and PLAN for them, or things get too difficult. We must be honest about what everyone is getting out of a project from the outset, and evaluations should reflect the different perspectives and expectations.”

The issue of planning is highlighted in Studies 1 and 2, which were both only at the planning stage when the interviews were conducted. It is an issue that also comes into many of the other stories. When should an impact study be planned? Who should be involved in the planning? What factors should the planning take into account? What type of assessment should be planned — one that is ongoing throughout the lifetime of the project? Or one at the end of the project? Or some months — or years — after the end of the project, to assess impact sustainability? Or all three?

And should the planning be underpinned by a firm theoretical base — a theory of change (i.e., if such-and-such is done then, theoretically, so-and-so should change) and a theory of action (i.e., a logframe — how to proceed towards which goals based on what assumptions). The best-laid plans could unravel if they lack that theoretical foundation which holds together all the elements of a plan. Similarly, they might prove difficult to follow if they lack flexibility, enabling elements of the planned approach to be adapted to changing needs and contexts without harming the overall study.

Important points raised by the storytellers about planning:

- The need for impact assessment to be built into the planning of a project itself is endorsed by many of the storytellers. The planning of the assessment — its aims, ingredients, tasks and timing — should start when the project starts.
- The importance of planning was stressed for complex projects involving many people in many places with different skills and expectations. Multi-country, multi-agency, multi-tool impact studies need particularly careful planning.
- Careful planning includes involving a wide range of people in setting the study indicators and goals and agreeing on logistics, definitions, lines of communication, roles and responsibilities, reporting requirements, resource allocation and timing. Such as strategy is seen as a way of fostering coherence and a sense of ownership.

- Disappointment was evident among many storytellers (particularly those at ground level), who felt they ought to have been involved in planning an impact study. Had they been consulted, they said, the study and its instruments would have been better tailored to the realities of the local context. The issue of who should be involved in planning emerges as an important factor in the stories.
- Several studies highlight the benefits of conducting impact assessment as an ongoing process alongside project implementation. This allows assessment findings to be fed back into the project, contributing to improved impact. In addition, with evaluators working alongside project staff over a long time-span, there is more chance of a joint learning atmosphere being created, rather than an 'us-and-them' policing situation.
- Often, when an impact study is tagged on to the end of project, with little prior planning, the evaluator is faced with plugging so many holes that the job becomes, at best, a compromise. Several evaluators among the storytellers ask: What are we measuring against? Where is the baseline study? And they resort to inventing one or downplaying its importance.
- Some storytellers talk of impact sustainability, and the desirability of assessing it, but they recognise that such an assessment would need to be conducted several years after a project ends. Planning for such an exercise is rare, not least because people move on, things change, old goals die and new priorities take their place.

And now to the brass tacks issues. These are just as important as the big issues in determining the value of an impact assessment exercise. One way or another, they all relate to choice. Who should conduct an impact assessment? What indicators are needed and who chooses them? Which tools and methodologies are most suited to the job? What should be done with the findings?

These issues are all connected with each other and with the dominant issues already described. Inevitably, therefore, there is an overlap in the lists below of the points raised by the storytellers.

“From whose perspective are we trying to measure impact? Whose impact? And who’s doing this measuring? This is all value-laden stuff. As far as I’m concerned, only the community’s EVALUATION of impact matters.”

“The EVALUATORS were two foreign white men with lots of baggage. All consultants have baggage, but local ones might have done things a little differently. I would have chosen a male–female national team backed up by an external person.”

Who chooses the evaluator, and who the evaluator then chooses to help gather data in the field — these emerge as major concerns in many of the stories. Should evaluators be external to the project and target community? The traditional approach of a donor appointing evaluation consultants, usually from the North, to fly in and assess the project, in the South, is touched upon by many storytellers. Some feel the approach lends a necessary objectivity to evaluation, others that factors on the ground will be missed because outside evaluators cannot be familiar enough with local cultural norms. Several favour (and had been involved in) an approach based on the use of a mixture of outside and local evaluators. This question of who should do an evaluation is strongly linked to issues of ownership and, ultimately, of learning.

Important points raised by the storytellers about evaluators include:

- The issue of ownership is raised in relation to the choice of evaluators. The sense of ownership of — and therefore commitment to — a project appears to be enhanced in the studies where the target group is given the opportunity for self-assessment, and becomes its own evaluator. The stories indicate that this approach is restricted mainly to long-term studies where a good rapport and shared goals have been built up among evaluators, project staff and project beneficiaries.
- The terms of reference for evaluators is raised by many storytellers. Should the evaluators be told what to evaluate, or be given *carte blanche*? Who decides when the evaluators should conduct the study, who they talk to, what indicators and instruments they use, how long they take, what resources they need? In the more traditional approach to impact assessment, there seems to be a tendency to accept the terms of reference laid down by whoever is commissioning the study; in the stories, few evaluators challenge these terms.
- The dual role that evaluators play — or are seen to play — does not make their job an easy one. There is a policing element in evaluation, as noted in the points raised concerning donors, but it needs to be tempered by a strong focus on support and learning. The stories suggest that most evaluators are viewed by project staff, initially, in a negative light, and that the major challenge they have to face is to persuade project staff that they are there to work with, not against, the project. This requires time and good planning and communication skills.

- In many projects, there are parallel evaluations going on (officially), with little or no attempt to merge the experiences and the findings. The donor might be flying in consultants to conduct short-term impact assessments, primarily for accountability purposes, while at the same time the local NGO implementing the project is evaluating the project in line with its obligations to the donor. These parallel arrangements are seen by some storytellers as disruptive.
- In assessments where the plan is based on conducting a baseline study at the outset of a project and then, at the end of the project, measuring impact against that baseline, should the person or group who did the baseline study be the same as the person/group conducting the evaluation? A few stories raise this issue.
- Evaluators need to examine their motives, their 'baggage', their methods, their goals. Several storytellers suggested this is seldom done but much needed.

"It is sometimes difficult to know what donors are interested in, what impact they're after. They are keen to set up INDICATORS, but that's purely for accountability, nothing to do with changing lives. Indicators are just a sort of audit."

"I have not been involved in setting the INDICATORS. This project is meant for the poorest of the poor, and so the people the project is for should be involved in setting the impact indicators."

The use of indicators is widespread in impact assessment studies. In the stories there seems to be a general acceptance that indicators, contained within some sort of logframe, are a necessary basis for conducting an impact assessment. Few storytellers are aware of, or endorse, approaches based on no indicators being used. These approaches have been developed only recently; to some extent, the 'most-significant-change' approach used in Study I falls into this category. The questions to be asked concerning indicators relate mainly to what type of indicators (qualitative or quantitative) to choose, when to choose them, who should choose them and what should characterise them (the acronym SMART is commonly used, whereby indicators should be specific, measurable, action-oriented, relevant and time-bound).

Important points raised by the storytellers about indicators include:

- There is much in the stories about the use of qualitative and quantitative indicators, and the tendency for donors to set quantitative ones, whereas evaluators and project staff are

increasingly more interested in setting qualitative ones. There is an acceptance by many storytellers that a mix between the two is probably the most pragmatic approach.

- Points of view about who should choose indicators range from an acceptance that donors choose the indicators to an insistence that the only people able to choose the indicators are the project beneficiaries themselves. Most storytellers come down somewhere in the middle, with indicators being chosen by project staff working with local agencies and the target group. Often, indicator selection is part of the training provided by the agency organising the impact study, prior to the study being implemented.
- Setting the indicators at the outset of a project, and using them later to measure project impact, is seen as the norm by most storytellers. A few, however, question setting the indicators in stone in this way. Changing indicators midstream because it becomes apparent that they were not going to show impact — or, at least, not the impact sought — is rare in the stories. Some storytellers feel that a flexible approach to indicators might have produced a more useful impact report. They see such flexibility as essential, particularly in long-term impact studies where knowledge about the intricacies of the study — and thus the most appropriate indicators of its impact — is acquired gradually.
- Care in establishing exactly what the indicators are intended to show, in breaking them down to see exactly what they will reveal, is stressed by some storytellers. They see the quality of the indicators as at least as important as who chooses the indicators.
- The question of drafting indicators that will suit the skills of the people collecting the data and analysing them is touched upon. It is a question of realism. Data gatherers and analysts need to understand the indicators and the link between them and the data being gathered and analysed.
- Similarly, realism is required about the extent of the impact the indicators should measure. There is no point in setting indicators intended to measure what is probably unattainable, however much it is desired. And most storytellers see setting indicators that measure intermediate levels of impact as acceptable; it is not always necessary to seek to show impact in terms of poverty reduction and improved livelihoods at ground level.
- Realism and viability also dictate the number of indicators chosen. Several stories touch on the mistakes made because too many indicators were chosen. This is linked, in some cases, to donors, evaluators or project staff being too ambitious about what the indicators should reveal; in other cases, it stems simply from a lack of experience or guidance.

“The ‘most-significant-change’ METHOD is a very flexible, adaptable approach, not a blueprint. It has a strong qualitative content, but can also take in a quantitative aspect. It introduces some rigour into the qualitative approach, which is something we’ve all been looking for.”

“In recent years there has been a proliferation of TOOLS, tools for this and tools for that, dozens of toolkits. The cupboard is stuffed with toolkits. But each project is different, and for each you need a different combination of tools. You can’t just pick up a toolkit.”

To some extent, the search for an impact assessment blueprint or model, prevalent in the 1990s, has been replaced by a recognition that it is more important to devise methods that are predominantly qualitative, easily adapted to the context in which they are implemented, couched in a framework or road map based on sound theoretical concepts and viable objectives, infused with an acceptable degree of scientific rigour, and implemented using an array of context-driven tools.

A clear distinction needs to be made between methods suited to impact assessment and those suited to simply evaluating project performance. The application of process-based methods can become confused with performance monitoring and evaluation, unless their goals are clear. Impact assessment tools vary considerably. From surveys, questionnaires, focus groups, one-to-one interviews, workshops and desk studies to visual data collection tools such as ‘family books’ and river and tree analogies — the stories show that the tool-bag is, indeed, full. The skill lies in choosing the right tools for the job and then refining them to suit particular purposes and people.

Important points raised by the storytellers about tools and methodologies include:

- The impact assessment methodologies used in the studies seem fairly equally divided between the top-down, short-term, ‘latched-on’ approaches that seek to score impact and those where there is a more long-term, participatory, process-based approach integrated into project implementation and seeking to enhance impact through learning and empowerment.
- Among the process-based approaches are the cutting-edge ones based on, for example, self-assessment, network analysis and outcome mapping. In these approaches, it is the process that matters as much, if not more, than the findings.

- More recently devised methods appear to make greater allowance for unexpected outcomes and the multitude of factors influencing a target community outside the project itself. The question of attribution in these approaches hardly arises; in the more traditional approaches, however, it is still visible. Similarly, replicability seems to be less of an issue in these new approaches; the focus is on selecting elements of various methods and moulding and adapting them to suit the context in question.
- While there is a clear preference in the stories for the qualitative methods, most storytellers feel that there is a place for quantitative methods too. Some, however, see no place for 'number crunching' when it comes to assessing the change an information-related project might have helped to bring about.
- In several cases, the evaluation team comprised people from both the quantitative and qualitative schools, who successfully pooled their experience to conduct the analyses. The aggregation and synthesis of qualitative data is seen by most storytellers as more difficult than is the case with quantitative data.
- The choice of methodology is inevitably linked to the resources available. With participatory process-based approaches demanding far more time and money than those traditionally conducted over a period of a few weeks at the end of a project, the former are relatively rare.
- Care should be taken not to let the tools guide the process of data collection, but rather to use them as needed. Otherwise, there is the risk of drowning in data, which is particularly difficult (for those whose job it is to analyse and interpret the data) when it comes to qualitative data.
- The choice of tools depends not only on the job, but also on the resources available. What skills do the data collectors have? Is there enough time and money to use time-intensive tools?
- There are a few references in the stories to a tendency to underestimate the skills of local people used to collect data. Very poor, often illiterate people have proved capable, given the chance and allowed some flexibility in application, of handling apparently sophisticated tools. There is a fine balance to be achieved between choosing tools that data collectors can use and the usefulness of those tools for the job in hand.
- Training workshops are seen by many storytellers as an appropriate setting for choosing tools and learning how to apply them.

“We never got any FEEDBACK from the visits. They would just ask questions and then leave. I have no idea what it was for. I would have liked to know, but I couldn’t ask; it is not the Thai way to ask visitors to your farm things like that. But the questions they asked were not enough to understand our situation.”

“We didn’t really get any FEEDBACK on whether the improvements were due to the project and not other factors. My own observations and experience tell me that the participating farmers greatly increased production over those who were not participating. But it’s difficult to know what the farmers did with their production, how did they use it, did they make a profit?”

The kind of feedback, when it is given, in what form, and to whom — these are factors that concerned many storytellers. Instances in the stories where study findings were fed back to those from whom the data were collected in a way which suits them are few. Feedback is usually to the organisation commissioning the study and tends to be through formal reports. In some cases, several types of reports are produced, reflecting a high priority given to disseminating the study findings widely, based on a planned communication strategy. There are others where one report is produced, for internal consumption only. And there are those where reports are produced (again, mainly for donor and project staff only) at different stages during and alongside project implementation.

Important points raised by the storytellers about analysis and feedback include:

- The project beneficiaries among the storytellers nearly all express disappointment that, once they had answered a data collector’s questions, that was the last they heard of the study. In some cases, communication was so poor that it was not until they were interviewed for this book that they realised they had been providing data for an impact study.
- The data analysis issues referred to in the stories relate mainly to the scientific validity of data, software packages for processing data, preferences for analysing (quantitative and qualitative) data, and the analytical challenges posed by the two types of data.
- Poor response to questionnaires, in terms of percentages and timing, features in several stories, throwing doubt upon the validity of the analysis. Among the methods cited for synthesising data for analysis are statistical analyses of quantitative information, the use of NUD.IST software to process qualitative information, and coding data to produce tabular and graphic information.

- In several cases the evaluation team comprised people from both the quantitative and qualitative schools, who successfully pooled their experience to conduct the analyses. The aggregation and synthesis of qualitative data is seen by most storytellers as more difficult than is the case with quantitative data.
- Producing the study report(s) poses a challenge. In assessments of complex projects conducted over a long period, it is difficult to produce reports that are long enough to be useful but short enough to be read (in an era when people have become used to having information served up in bite-sized proportions, long reports are not popular). So what gets put in? What gets left out?
- What gets left out is sometimes the material an evaluator thinks it best not to tell the donor (or project staff). Implicit in some stories is an attempt to rework a report (e.g., to attribute observed change to a project without reference to other influences) so that a more favourable impression of project impact is portrayed than might actually be the case.
- How the reports are produced differs among the stories. In some cases it is a joint effort by all members of an evaluation team; in others the job is allocated to one person, usually the study leader; and, in some, workshops involving evaluators and project staff are convened to review the analysis and draft the report. The issue of time is relevant here, some storytellers indicating that the time allocated to report writing might be as little as 1 week, others saying that they had a year or more to put the report together.
- Rather than produce only one study report, some studies produced several, in different formats for different audiences — a long, comprehensive one for those who would read it, and a shorter ‘briefing’ paper, backed up perhaps by a condensed version of the paper appearing in a journal or as a summary report for general distribution.
- Some of the storytellers feel that the focus on reporting prevalent among development agencies reflects too much emphasis on impact assessment findings and not enough on the impact assessment process.
- Instances where study recommendations are reviewed in detail and systematically acted upon are rare. Few of the evaluators and project staff among the storytellers knew what had happened to the findings. While many, as noted earlier, talked of how they had benefited from the individual learning the study provided, few could say whether the study had contributed to organisational learning. There were few instances, for example, where an organisation commissioning an impact study had, as a direct result of that study, changed its implementation of the project studied or changed aspects of its general approach to project planning, implementation and evaluation.

Some final thoughts...

That's some jigsaw of issues! It is now the task of stakeholders across the development spectrum to start putting it together as a basis for determining the way forward.

And those three people whom we met in the Introduction, lingering in the corridors of an impact assessment workshop — have they reached a conclusion about what to do next? Let's listen in to their last conversation, before they head for home.

66 *B: The problem of impact assessment is a problem that would be nice to have.*

C: You mean?

B: I mean that a lot of projects are flat out trying to identify what happened after their outputs had been delivered and what the next step is in the process of change and influence and impact. Just trying to work out what happened to people who turned up to a training course, for example, and what they did with the ideas — that is a huge challenge, let alone working out what happened to two or three people down the chain of influence from there, and then further down the chain to the lives of the people who are the primary concern of the project.

A: So you can't even really get to the impact? The final impact?

B: No. If we could sort out all those problems of working out what the intermediate impacts are and could then say, "Right, now what was the final impact?" we'd be in a great position. But we're not in that position. We're all struggling to identify the more immediate outputs of what takes place.

A: I think it's very important to have some sense of change. I read something last week that sounded a bit like using the complexity argument to say, "We can't really tell whether it made any difference." It sort of dismissed the need to have an independent sense of whether things had changed. I think that's a problem. You need an independent standpoint that does try to assess things, but the problem is that it's spuriously linked with positivist methodology which isn't really valid for a complex system. We need a more sophisticated methodology to deal with a sophisticated problem, rather than just assuming that if you implement a project it's going to have an impact.

C: The other facet to that is that people confuse rigour with a positivist approach. And you can have rigour in qualitative process work that has nothing to do with counting, with quantitative assessments. In a project I was involved in, we were asked to have a statistician on board and do proper sampling and interview hundreds of poor peasants. We knew we could have got that information via a couple of really good case studies. And anyway, who was all that evidence for? It didn't convince the NGOs to change. They looked at it and then went and did the research again in their own way. I don't think bringing in a statistician was worth it. In the end, more money went on doing the sampling than on collecting good data.

We need a more sophisticated methodology to deal with a sophisticated problem, rather than just assuming that if you implement a project it's going to have an impact.

A: That's where rigour is the key. For example, if you do a logframe well and use it in a reflective way, it can be a really useful tool. If you just do it because that's what you're supposed to do, it's next to useless. The same goes for qualitative interviewing or any kind of research technique. There is confusion around what's rigorous and what's valid in a given situation. The challenge for me is the complexity that's opening up in social change processes, finding valid ways of catering for it, dealing with the dangers of transferring lots of theories into the social domain where you've got ideology and power and all sorts of things which mean you're not just looking at a natural system with loads of feedback loops, you're looking at a social whole. You have to be rigorous and use your imagination at the same time.

C: Some people are trying to push for rigour in participatory work. It's simple to me. It's about carefully recording things like who's there and who speaks and exactly what they say. You see participatory rural appraisal reports and they're full of diagrams that tell you very little. There's nothing that says, "We sat in a field and it was a very hot day and people were falling asleep, so in the end only two people actually participated." But that's what you need to know. That's where the rigour lies, in the description.

A: And then having time to actually digest information. In terms of evaluation budgets, there's so much headless chicken stuff going on in most development agencies, ours included, because we don't have the time to sit down to digest information and use our critical reflection faculties. It's a real problem throughout, at multiple levels. Not least at grassroots level where people are being asked for an enormous amount of their time to go through what must seem like rituals.

B: That word 'ritual'. I think there's a lot of ritual and magic associated with impact assessment, whereby if you do things in certain ways that will legitimise what you're doing.

C: There's a fixation with methodologies. I put in a concept note for an evaluation recently and they came back with, "We need to know exactly what your methods are." To which my response was, "The methods don't matter at this moment!"

B: Oooh! Very daring!

C: Good interviewing technique is as good as anything. What matters is what you're going to look at, who you're going to talk to, what you're trying to do, your theory of change — all those things. The methods you think about afterwards.

A: Doing impact assessment is difficult — for everyone. But the important thing is that people should have a go. They shouldn't be put off by thinking there's a right way and a wrong way. There isn't. There's a lot of pressure now to do impact assessments. The best way to learn is to have a go and do one.



Doing impact assessment is difficult — for everyone. They shouldn't be put off by thinking there's a right way and a wrong way. There isn't. The best way to learn is to have a go and do one.

Appendices

Appendix I

Interviewers and interviewees

INTERVIEWERS

Cema Bolabola, Fiji	Study 9
Geoffrey Ebong, Uganda	Study 5
Don Griffiths, Thailand	Study 7
Maritza Hee Huoung, Trinidad and Tobago	Study 3
Hilda Munyua, Kenya	Studies 4, 10 and 11
Pat Norrish	Studies 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 11
Yudhisthira Panigrahi, India	Study 2
Shirley Randall, Vanuatu	Study 6
Pilar Santelices, UK	Study 8
Kay Sayce	Studies 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11
Gesa Wesseler	Study 5

INTERVIEWEES

Study 1	Simon Batchelor, Rick Davies, Mary Myers, Patricia Norrish, Claire Sibthorpe
Study 2	David Archer, Jayaram Bariha, Hannah Beardon, Alok Roth, Subrat Rout, Tapaswini Sahu
Study 3	Ganesh Gangapersad, Ibrahim Khadar, Bruce Lauckner, Kyle Otis, Ranjit H. Singh
Study 4	Rachel Blackman, Isabel Carter, Rosalia Oyweka, Graham White
Study 5	Edith Adera, Joyce Adupa, Narathius Asingwire, Edward Juuku, Daniel Serubie
Study 6	Siula Bula, Kevin Clark, Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, George Petro, Marion Quinn, Kaltau Sepa, Ulas Titus, Nicki Wrighton
Study 7	Harvey Demaine, Klong Gaewgoon, Wilai Kothisan, Peter Owen, Sawat Sigongporn, Danai Turongruang, Paiboon Wangchaiya, Mongkol Wongchompoo
Study 8	Jairo E. Borges-Andrade, Maria Delia Escobar, Douglas Horton, Carmen Siri
Study 9	Betty Blake, Leonard Chan, Asenaca Colawai, Stephen Kidd
Study 10	Jane Frances Asaba, Margot Bellamy, Alain Glarmet, Ibrahim Khadar, Moses Mwale, Françoise Reolon, Sue Smith
Study 11	Fiorella Lanata, Feny de los Angeles-Bautista, Arellys Moreno de Yáñez, Peter Mucheru Mwaura, Liesbeth Zwitter

Appendix 2

Interview guidelines

GUIDELINES FOR INTERVIEWERS

The idea behind the CTA impact assessment book is to publish a range of perspectives — STORIES — from people involved in impact assessment studies, people right along the development spectrum, from donors to researchers to project managers to evaluators to the data providers in the target communities.

The idea behind each interview is for you to produce interview notes that we can use to write up these STORIES. Each story should reveal something about the interviewees' role in the studies, what they thought about the experience, what the challenges were, what they thought was good about the study, what could have been done differently.

The storyteller should be 'guided' into telling his or her story, with the interview following an open dialogue format. Obtaining as much verbatim material as possible is important, to help us produce, from your notes, a rich and subjective story. Good listening skills are important if you are to get the full story.

REMEMBER

*The story is a **perspective**. Try to ensure that it reflects the storyteller's perspective, not yours. There should be no attempt to interpret the story.*

*It is the **experience** of being involved in the impact study that we are seeking to reveal, not an account of the study itself (we already have the study report) or of the project that was being assessed.*

Ten important points

1. **Be well briefed on the impact study.** Make sure you've read and understood it before the interview so that you don't use valuable interview time getting descriptions of the project and its impact study from the storyteller.
2. **Don't dive straight into the interview.** Spend a little time chatting before it starts. About anything, not necessarily about the study. This is linked to Point 3.
3. **Try to build up trust with the storyteller.** Although there may not be much time available, trust can be achieved fairly quickly in small ways, e.g., have a relaxed, unhurried demeanour, show you're well briefed on the study, you're well acquainted with local custom/culture, you listen well, are good at eye contact.

4. **Allow storyteller room to tell his or her story.** Create a chatty, relaxed atmosphere rather than a question-and-answer session. Don't display some formal looking questionnaire; rather, memorise as much as possible the questions you are going to ask, and just have with you some questions on a notepad, perhaps, as a prompt to the answers you need and the topics you need to explore. Topics will arise that perhaps you hadn't envisaged in your questions; follow them up.
5. **Follow the storyteller's account carefully.** Be aware of what it was about the impact study that appears to particularly interest the storyteller, as well as areas he or she is not at ease with, or is bored by.
6. **Don't let the scope of the interview get too big.** Remember, what we want is one person's rich, personalised, detailed account of their experience of an impact study from their perspective, not other people's.
7. **Record the interview in a way that suits you.** Some people like to use a tape recorder. Note that this might constrain the interviewees; they might hold back. But if you feel the storyteller is someone well used to being taped or doesn't mind it, then do tape it; and transcribe your tape later. If you prefer taking down notes on a pad, it would be good, if possible, to have a reliable third party present to do the note taking while you do the talking. But you may prefer to do this note taking on your own. Some of you may have a laptop, and prefer to type in notes during the interview, then tidy them up afterwards. Whichever method you use, try to get as much verbatim material down as possible.
8. **It is not up to you to write the story.** This is our job. What we want from you are your notes from the interview, with any additional observations you may have about the interview that you consider would be useful to the story. Your typed up notes (following the format of the attached sample interview notes) should be e-mailed to us. We will be turning the notes from each interview into prose, written in the first person, and between 500 and 1000 words long. This will then come back to you, for you to check that it is a good reflection of what was said; we'll also ask you to ask the storyteller to check the story.
9. **The time for the interview should be between 1 and 2 hours.** Try not to exceed 2 hours. If the interview goes on too long, it could lose focus. Keep an eye on the objective of the interview and keep it focused. With too much time, it would be very easy, for example, to stray into talking about the project itself, which is not the purpose of the interview.
10. **Add a note on your observations, if you think this is appropriate.** After the interview, as suggested in Point 8, you might feel that there was something else about it that you'd like to tell us about. You might feel, for example, that the interviewee was holding back on something. Or that a particular issue seemed to bother the interviewee. Or that he or she seemed to have an understanding of the subject that exceeded your expectations. Add any small observation like this that you think would help us when we are transforming your notes into a story.

As you'll have read in the background notes, the CTA book is all about exploring the issues surrounding impact assessment. We don't know what they are. We want to find out what they are. The list below is just a guess. We hope your notes will reveal something about one or more of the issues in this list — and whether these are the most important issues, or whether there are others that deserve more attention, etc.

Learning and accountability

This is about WHY an impact assessment study is done, what its purpose is

Attribution

This is about WHO takes credit for observed impact

People and participation

This is about WHO is involved in the impact assessment study, and the nature, context and challenges of that involvement

Indicators

This is about WHAT indicators (if any) are used, and how they are selected and who selects them

Scale and scope

This is about WHERE the assessment is conducted (the area it covers, geographically) and HOW MUCH it seeks to address in terms of the different levels of impact

Time and timing

This is about WHEN the assessment is conducted (during and/or after the project; if the latter, how long after) and HOW MUCH planning, implementation and reporting time it involves

Please keep these issues in mind when you are preparing your interview. (BUT don't read them to the interviewees; we don't want to prejudge what the interviewee thinks are important issues.)

When you read our list below of suggested questions for your interview, you will see that they are aimed at exploring some of the impact assessment issues we've listed above, but in an open-ended way.

So here we go with the suggested questions!

Questions

NOTE: you will be interviewing people involved in different ways in the study. A project manager. An evaluator. A target group member. Etc. Some of the suggested questions will apply in some cases, others in other cases. It is up to you, for each interview, to decide which are the appropriate questions for that interview, and how to adapt the questions according to who the storyteller is.

You'll need to start the interview with the basics, e.g., the project goals and stakeholders. As we said earlier, we don't want details on the project itself, but we think it wise to open the interview by asking the storyteller to briefly give a few details on the project that was assessed. But do take this opportunity to make it clear, again, that what you want to hear about is their experience, their story, their involvement in the impact assessment study (not the project).

1. Briefly, what was the project? What were its goals? Who funded it? Who were the stakeholders?
2. How would you define impact assessment?
3. What was the purpose of the impact study?
4. Who was the study being done for? Who had called for it?
5. What sort of time and money were allocated to do the study? Do you think they were realistic?
6. What is your background/experience in evaluation studies in general, and impact assessment studies in particular?
7. What was your role in the impact assessment study? Were you involved in the design and implementation of the study?
8. What challenges did the work pose for you?
9. What was most significant about the study for you?
10. What was good about the study?
11. If there was the opportunity to do the study again, what do you think should be done differently?
12. Do you know what happened to the study's findings, how they were used?

For the specific impact study you are conducting an interview about, here are some issues we'd like you to explore, if not already covered by the answers you've obtained so far.

E.g.: for the SDI study:

Do you have any comments about the scope of the study?

Do the selected indicators qualify as impact indicators?

This study was designed to be a blueprint for CTA studies — what has happened in relation to this aim?

How did CABI and CIRAD work together? What was the link between the different parts of the study and those carrying them out?

How did the methods chosen relate to the research questions?

What was the role of the different stakeholders and how important were the different stakeholder groups to the study?

Appendix 3

Participants in workshops and meetings

WORKSHOP IN AMSTERDAM, THE NETHERLANDS, NOVEMBER 2002

Modupe Akande (Univeristy of Obafemi Awolowo)
Paul Engel (ECPDM)
Douglas Horton (ISNAR)
Christine Kalume (Healthlink)
Ibrahim Khadar (CTA)
Bruce Lauckner (CARDI)
Adiel Mbabu (ASARECA)
Kingo Mchombu (University of Namibia)
Byron Mook (ISNAR)
Kay Sayce (Independent consultant)
Andreas Springer-Heinz (GTZ)
Rob Vincent (Healthlink / Exchange)

MEETINGS IN UGANDA, JUNE–JULY 2003

Joyce Adupa (ARIS)
Sam Chema (ARF)
Shaun Ferris (FOODNET)
Berga Lemaga (PRAPACE)
Adiel Mbabu (ASARECA)
Isaac Minde (ECAPAPA)
Jane Nabunnya (DENIVA)
Jaqueline Nyagahima (AfricaLink Project)
Frank Twinematsiko (ActionAid)
Gerald Wall (Impact Associates)
Jim Whyte (EARRNET)

WORKSHOP IN MAASTRICHT, THE NETHERLANDS, JULY 2003

Paul Engel (ECPDM)
Rick Davies (Independent consultant)
Douglas Horton (ISNAR)
Michel Menou (Independent consultant)
Byron Mook (ISNAR)
Pat Norrish (Independent consultant)
Kay Sayce (Independent consultant)
Andreas Springer-Heinz (GTZ)
Ibrahim Khadar (CTA)
Christine Webster (CTA)

MEETINGS IN SAMOA, TONGA AND FIJI, JULY–AUGUST 2003

Bill Aalbersberg (Institute of Applied Science, Fiji)
 Cema Bolabola (University of the South Pacific, Fiji)
 Lucy Fa'anunu (Ministry of Agriculture, Tonga)
 Peggy Fairburn-Dunlop (Gender Equity Science and Technology, Samoa)
 Sione Hausia (Ministry of Agriculture, Tonga)
 Leba Mataitini (University of the South Pacific, Fiji)
 Lemalu Nele (Training and Advisory Services, Samoa)
 Kamlesh Prakash (Ministry of Agriculture, Fiji)
 Laisene Samuelu (Ministry of Agriculture, Samoa)
 Luagalau Shon (Ministry of Women's Affairs, Samoa)
 Joycemarie Stevenson (IRETA)
 Randy Thaman (University of the South Pacific, Fiji)
 Mohammed Umar (IRETA)

WORKSHOP IN WAGENINGEN, THE NETHERLANDS, SEPTEMBER 2003

Modupe Akande (University of Obafemi Awolowo)
 Arlington Chesney (IICA)
 Paul Engel (ECDPM)
 Rick Davies (Independent consultant)
 Dhaneswar Dumur (AREU)
 Mabel Hungwe (FANPRAN)
 Ibrahim Khadar (CTA)
 Jean Kizito Kabanguka (CEPGL)
 Bruce Lauckner (CARDI)
 E.A. Lufadeju (Lufarmco)
 Adiel Mbabu (ASARECA)
 Byron Mook (Independent consultant)
 Thiendou Niang (REPA)
 Pat Norrish (Independent consultant)
 Mike Powell (Independent consultant)
 Kay Sayce (Independent consultant)
 Alioune Thioune (University of Cheikh Anta)
 Mohammed Umar (IRETA)
 Rob Vincent (Healthlink / Exchange)
 Christine Webster (CTA)

Appendix 4

Useful websites and selected publications

WEBSITES

ALNAP	http://www.alnap.org
Communication Impact!	http://www.jhuccp.org/pubs/ci/index.shtml
The Communication Initiative	http://www.comminit.com/evaluations.html
Creative-Radio	http://groups.yahoo.com/group/creative-radio/
DFID	http://www.dfid.gov.uk/
EarthPrint.com (UNEP bookshop)	http://www.earthprint.com
ECDPM	http://www.ecdpm.org/
EDIAIS	http://www.enterprise-impact.org.uk/index.shtml
Eldis	http://eldis.org
Exchange	http://healthcomms.org
Healthlink	http://www.healthlink.org.uk
IAPA/IAIA	http://www.iaia.org
IDPM	http://www.sed.manchester.ac.uk/idpm/
IDRC	http://www.idrc.ca/
IICD	http://www.iicd.org
INTRAC	http://www.intrac.org/
IRC	http://www.irc.nl
KIT	http://www.kit.nl/
LEAP-IMPACT	http://www.bellanet.org/leap/impact
<i>MandE News</i>	http://www.mande.co.uk
OECD	http://www.oecd.org
WACC	http://www.wacc.org.uk
The World Bank	http://worldbank.org
WWW Virtual Library: Evaluation	http://www.policy-evaluation.org

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

CTA publications

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Appendix 5

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AIT	Asian Institute of Technology
AKC	Atos KPMG Consultants
AKIS	agricultural knowledge in information systems
ALMAYA	Association for the Advancement of the Ethiopian Family and Child
ALNAP	Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action
AOP	Aqua Outreach Programme
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ARF	Agricultural Research Fund
ARIS	Agricultural Research Information Service
ASARECA	Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa
BW	Big World
CABI	CAB International
CADMB	Collective Action in Drought Mitigation in Balangir
CARDI	Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute
CATIA	Catalysing Access to ICTs in Africa
CBO	community-based organisation
CDAC	Central Drought Action Committee
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEPGL	Communauté économique des pays de Great Lakes
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CIRAD	Centre de coopération internationale en recherche agronomique pour le développement
COLF	Community of Learners Foundation
CR	Community Representative
CSO	civil society organisation
CTA	Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation
CWL	Catholic Women's League
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DANIDA	Danish International Development Agency
DENIVA	Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Association
DFID	Department for International Development

DoF	Department of Fisheries
DOVE	Department of Vocation Education
DR	Democratic Republic (of Congo)
DWHH	Deutsche Welthungerhilfe
EARRNET	East Africa Root Crops Research Network
EC	European Commission
ECAPAPA	Eastern and Central Africa Programme for Agricultural Policy Analysis
ECART	European Consortium for Agricultural Research in the Tropics
ECD	early childhood development
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
EDAI	Electronic Delivery of Agricultural Information
EDIAIS	Enterprise Development Impact Assessment Information Service
EI	Effectiveness Initiative
EIA	environmental impact assessment
EU	European Union
FANPRAN	Food, Agriculture and Natural Resource Policy Analysis Network
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations
FID	Federation of Documentation and Information
FONAIAP	Fondo Nacional de Investigaciones Agropecuarias
FWCC	Fiji Women's Crisis Centre
FWRM	Fiji Women's Rights Movement
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HIS	Hospital Information Systems
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
IA	impact assessment
IAIA	International Association for Impact Assessment
IAPA	Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal
ICM	information and communication management
ICT4D	ICTs for development
ICT	information and communication technology
IDB	International Development Bank
IDPM	Institute for Development Policy and Management
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IICA	Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture
IICD	International Institute for Communication and Development
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IPM	integrated pest management
IRC	International Water and Sanitation Centre
IRETA	Institute for Research, Extension and Training in Agriculture
ISER	Institute for Social and Economic Research
ISNAR	International Service for National Agricultural Research
ITDG	Intermediate Technology Development Group
ITU	International Telecommunications Union

KAP	knowledge, attitudes, practices
KIT	Royal Tropical Institute
LRTTO	Legal Rights Training Officer
M&E	monitoring and evaluation
MCT	Multipurpose Community Telecentre
MRC	Madrasa Resource Centre
MRRP	Madrasa Regional Research Programme
MSC	most significant change
NAMDEVCO	National Agricultural Marketing and Development Corporation
NARO	National Agricultural Research Organisation
NARS	national agricultural research system
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NRI	Natural Resources Institute
NZ	New Zealand
NZAID	New Zealand's International Aid and Development Agency
ODA	Overseas Development Administration (<i>now</i> DFID, UK)
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PARC	Performance Assessment Research Centre
PIA	participatory impact assessment
PLA	participatory learning and action
PM&E	planning, monitoring and evaluation
PRAPACE	Regional Potato and Sweet Potato Improvement Network in Eastern and Central Africa
PRONOEI	Programas no Escolarizados de Educación Inicial
RAAKS	Rural Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems
REAP	Rural Extension with Africa's Poor
REPA	Réseau d'expertise des politiques agricoles
RRRT	Regional Human Rights Education Resource Team
RUFDATA	reasons, uses, foci, data, audience, timing, agency
SACCAR	Southern African Centre for Cooperation in Agricultural and Natural Resources Research and Training
SARL	South African Radio League
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDI	Selective Dissemination of Information
SIA	social impact assessment
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SMART	specific, measurable, action-oriented, relevant, time-bound
SPIA	Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (TAC)
STI	sexually transmitted infection
STI	scientific and technical information
SWOT	strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats
TAC	Technical Advisory Committee (CGIAR)
ToRs	terms of reference
UNCST	Uganda National Council of Science and Technology

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USP	University of the South Pacific
UWI	University of the West Indies
VASS	Voluntary Agencies Support Scheme
WACC	World Association for Christian Communication
WHO	World Health Organization
WSB	Wan Smolbag Theatre



partageons les connaissances au profit des communautés rurales
sharing knowledge, improving rural livelihoods

TECHNICAL CENTRE FOR AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL COOPERATION (ACP-EU)

The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) was established in 1983 under the Lomé Convention between the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) Group of States and the European Union Member States. Since 2000, it has operated within the framework of the ACP-EC Cotonou Agreement.

CTA's tasks are to develop and provide services that improve access to information for agricultural and rural development, and to strengthen the capacity of ACP countries to produce, acquire, exchange and utilise information in this area. CTA's programmes are designed to: provide a wide range of information products and services and enhance awareness of relevant information sources; promote the integrated use of appropriate communication channels and intensify contacts and information exchange (particularly intra-ACP); and develop ACP capacity to generate and manage agricultural information and to formulate ICM strategies, including those relevant to science and technology. CTA's work incorporates new developments in methodologies and cross-cutting issues such as gender and social capital.



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