Impact Assessment: Understanding and assessing our contributions to change

Maureen O'Flynn, October 2010

Introduction

The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, endorsed by government donors, partner countries and multi-lateral institutions in 2005, binds its signatories to build stronger, more effective partnerships in order to enable partner countries to achieve their own development goals. The UK Charity Commission now requires NGOs to report against their core strategic objectives. These and other pressures have resulted in NGOs and civil society organisations making much greater efforts to demonstrate their own effectiveness, as well as that of their partners. They need to be able to identify the difference their efforts (and funds) have made to the poorest and most vulnerable communities; as well as to demonstrate that these efforts are effective in bringing about change. That apart, there is, and should be, a moral obligation on all of these organisations to understand the implications of their work; to be accountable to those for whom they are working (their stakeholders); and to constantly strive to achieve better results.

These increased pressures have led to a groundswell of activity around the production of tools and frameworks to assess impact. In spite of these, and the endless papers that are produced on the subject, there remains a surprising lack of clarity about what 'impact assessment' actually means, and how it differs from 'evaluation'. Judging by the growing request for training in this area, there appears to be a pervading lack of confidence in organisational ability to carry out effective and useful impact assessments. This paper addresses these issues in a practicable way, aiming to provide clarity on what impact assessments are (or should be); and how they differ from and complement processes of M&E. It is written for staff and development practitioners working with or for international NGOs or other complex organisations. It considers some of the key challenges and practical difficulties that these practitioners face in carrying out impact assessments; and offers some good practice guidelines.

Part 1: What is impact assessment, and how does it differ from or complement processes of monitoring and evaluation?

The word 'impact' is well understood in everyday language, but somehow, when used as part of development-speak, it seems to take on a mysterious complexity which leaves practitioners feeling unsure and lacking in confidence as to what is really meant.

It is worth taking a few minutes to grasp the concept of 'impact' before getting involved in development terminology:

> **Understanding impact:**
> Think about an event or a person who made a significant impact on your life (a birth or death of a family member or friend, a relationship, a marriage, an accident…)
>
> What does **impact** mean in relation to this? What concepts or ideas does it include? Key word is likely to be **change**: either **intentionally** (e.g. a marriage) **or unintentionally (**e.g. a car accident)**.** The impact may affect you temporarily or permanently**.** You may feel that **the change has been positive, or it may have had negative consequences.** It may just be that your life is different.
>
> The **assessment of impact** involves **understanding the nature of the change that has taken place** in you and **to determine its significance** in your life.

The development arena is crowded with definitions of impact assessment, some more complex than others. The key features described above are all relevant. In assessing impact, organisations should explore the following areas of enquiry.

In relation to our efforts:
- What has changed?
- For whom?
- How significant was it?
- Will it last?
- In what ways did we contribute to these changes?

One definition that captures the concept effectively is:

> "The systematic analysis of lasting or significant change –positive or negative, intended or not – in people's lives brought about by an action or a series of actions "[1]

Why assess impact?

There are a number of reasons to assess the impact of our development efforts. These are not always compatible. We need to:
- Demonstrate success (to donors, ourselves, the public; to be seen to supporting progress in meeting MDGs etc), both to justify funds received and to solicit further funding
- Learn to understand how our efforts impact on local communities in order to improve the effectives of our interventions ; to make a more significant difference in people's lives
- Be accountable to the people (stakeholders) for whom we are working: we should not 'do development to local communities' but rather work with them to understand the changes they want to make in their lives and then to analyse progress (or no progress) together.
- Use the findings from impact assessments to advocate for changes in behaviour, attitudes, policy and legislation at all levels.

This list demonstrates that impact assessments need at the same time both to demonstrate success and to learn about where we could do better. These ideas are not necessarily happy bed fellows.

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[1] Roche, C (1999) *Impact Assessment for Development Agencies*, Oxfam

How does impact assessment fit with the processes of monitoring and evaluation?

An income generating project for women in Tanzania was very successful in that it provided the women with money that they could use for feeding and educating their children. The women in the community were delighted with the success of the project. Monitoring reports confirmed that the project was doing what it said it would do. The mid-term review and first evaluation noted that it was an effective and well conceived project.

However, although the women were happy, other members of the community were not. After a period of time, the project had to close as too many of the women found that having access to their own income led to tensions and violence within their homes. One of the unintended and negative impacts of this project was that some women were being forced (sometimes with violence) to hand over their earnings to their husbands who used the money as they saw fit. The evaluation process did not pick this up as it did not explore the impact questions.

Traditionally, and mostly guided by log frame thinking, development plans follow a logic which starts from the expression of a development goal which is broken down into objectives (or purpose); then into outcomes (or results) and outputs (and activities). In terms of monitoring and evaluating this plan, monitoring will relate to **effort** or the work that goes on in relation to a project or programme (the activities and outputs); evaluation relates to **outcomes** or the results of these efforts*,* and impact relates to **changes in peoples' lives that relate to these results**.

In a project to build social housing for a local community, for example:
- **Monitoring** would relate to the purchase of materials, and building the houses according to plans that have been drawn up.
- **Evaluation** would assess the results of these efforts: how good was the plan? How well were the houses built? Was the project cost effective? But the questions cannot stop there. It's possible to have well-built, cost effective housing schemes which are no use to those for whom they were intended (e.g. aborigine 'settlements'). In development, there are thousands of 'successful projects and programmes' which fail to make a positive impact on the lives of people they aim to serve. Some projects result in negative impacts.
- **Impact** therefore assesses the 'So what?' question: how has this project actually affected the lives of the people it aimed to support?

The table below clarifies the difference between **monitoring evaluation** and **impact** in relation to development planning**.**

Monitoring	Evaluation	Impact Assessment
Measures ongoing activities	Measures performance against objectives	Assesses change in peoples lives: positive or negative, intended or not
Main work during implementation	Main work in middle or at end of project/programme cycle	Can be included at all stages and/or can be used specifically after the end of programme/ project
Focus on interventions	Focus on interventions	Focus on affected populations
Focus on outputs	Focus on outcomes	Focus on impacts
'What is being done?'	'What has happened? Did we achieve what we set out to achieve?'	'What has changed? For whom? How significant is it for them?'

Different approaches to impact assessment

Development organisations have always worked to their own implicit or intuitive understanding of change (i.e. they have visions, missions, goals and ways of working) but historically their analysis of change and their role in implementing it has not been rigorous. This, in turn, has meant that they have often struggled to assess the impact of their interventions.

In line with their interpretation of the concept of change, and their different reasons for assessing impact, they have approached the task in a number of different ways. Three broad, and sometimes overlapping, approaches are often used:

- The first approach is likely to include be a retrospective study of a project which has, typically, been planned using a linear approach to change (as developed through logical framework analysis for example). More often than not, this assessment involves the use of an external (or partly external) team who conduct the assessment at a fixed point after the completion of the project. The main purpose of this approach is to test or verify whether the logic of the project was correct: did it achieve the changes that it set out to?
- The second approach is more process driven – and less judgemental – than the first. Stakeholders are involved in all stages of the project or programme cycle: in the design and the development of the project or programme, they are included in identifying the changes that they would like to see in their lives; during the implementation phase, they influence the direction the project takes. They are consulted in the process of monitoring and evaluation, and, in supporting the assessment of impact, they discuss and identify changes that have taken place in their lives in relation to the project or programme. This type of assessment is clearly empowering for stakeholders; and it makes valuable contributions to organisational learning.
- The third approach is somewhat different from the first two. It is a study that takes place some years after the completion of the project or programme. It sets out firstly to identify changes that have taken place within the community, and secondly, to what extent they can be attributed to particular interventions. The purpose of this type of assessment is to understand to what extent organisational efforts are making a difference to the lives of the people they claim to be working with and for. Although this type of assessment is more complex and time consuming, it is one that all organisations need to consider carrying out from time to time.

All three approaches – and variations on them – have their own validity in relation to the main purpose of assessing impact. Often, a combination of elements of all three approaches will be necessary in order to understand both planned and unplanned changes.

Understanding the nature of change

But how should we understand and report on the changes our efforts are making? However convenient it would be for change to happen as we plan it, it doesn't. Change does not happen in a linear path (e.g. A leads to B which results in C). Rather, it is:

- Complex in that many different changes can take place simultaneously in people's lives
- Continuous in that nothing in society or the environment is ever static
- Variable in pace, scale and/or over the course of any intervention
- Not necessarily lasting or sustainable.

A brief and possibly helpful analogy is that of throwing of a stone: if you know the weight of the stone and the velocity of the thrust, you can predict with some accuracy how far the stone will travel and land. This works for stones, but not for people. In assessing impact, some

organisations fall into the trap of assuming that achieving stated goals follows the logic of the stone throwing exercise: they develop and describe a logical sequence of actions that will be carried out; and expected consequences of these actions, and assume that the sum total will add up to the achievement of their articulated goal. Their focus on change remains within these narrow confines. In reality, change does not occur so neatly or as predictably as this. Impact assessments designed along these lines will be of limited value.

For impact assessment to be useful for learning and accountability, we need to look beyond project logic and focus on changes in relation to our target groups. The question to ask is not 'What did we achieve'? but rather 'What has changed in relation to our efforts'?
Types of enquiry which will support our understanding include:

- Who or what was involved in the change? (e.g. individual actors or state institutions)
- What strategies were used to bring about the change? (e.g. reform, mass mobilisation)
- What were the contexts that affected how the change happened? (e.g. urbanisation, power relationships)
- What was the process or pathway of change? (e.g. demonstration effects, cumulative progress)
- How were our efforts connected to this?[2]

Making the understanding of change more manageable: Theories of Change

The complex nature of change and the need for organisations to understand and report on it has been a driving force for many organisations to develop an organisational 'Theory of Change'. A Theory of Change provide a succinct and clear vision of change; and in relation to this, the problems it wants to solve, the people it wants to work with and an **overview** of what it hopes to achieve in relation to its stated goal.

Theories of Change can be set at different levels – organisation, programme or project (and each looks slightly different). They differ from (but can complement) logical framework thinking in that they:
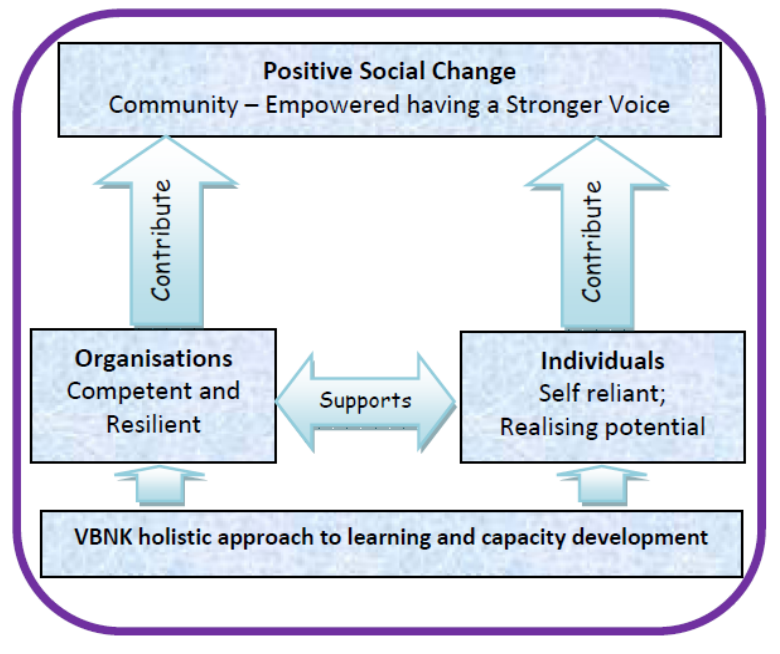
- describe a causal pathway by specifying what is needed for goals to be achieved

- require the articulation of underlying assumptions which can be tested and measured.

- change the way of thinking about implementation strategies: **the focus is not so much on what will be achieved, but rather what will change**.

As a framework for impact assessment, a Theory of Change offers organisations the opportunity to describe the changes in the world that they set out to make, and to understand and demonstrate progress (or lack of it) along the way. It offers an opportunity for greater clarity, better communication and the potential for improved accountability.

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[2] Adapted from '*How Change Happens',* Oxfam GB Research Report, February 2007

Example from VBKN Cambodia[3]

VBNK's holistic approach to capacity development is based on a set of assumptions that underpin our theory of change: when we provide quality learning services we enhance the ability of individuals to promote learning (their own and others). This in turn will lead (i) to more transparent and accountable management of development organisations; and (ii) to improved effectiveness and quality of development practice and services in the social development sector. These two outcomes are precursors to the ability of the social development sector to more effectively contribute to positive social change.

Dimensions of change

Theories of Change, which are set at an organisational level, are often further developed by identifying 'dimensions of change' to which all of their efforts will contribute. These dimensions form the backbone of their impact assessment process. They are inter-related so that any one project or programme may be supporting changes in one or more of these dimensions. Equally, all organisational interventions should be explicitly working towards changes in one or more of these dimensions. They are usually designed to be interpreted according to regional and national contexts, but broad enough to be able to facilitate comparability across different regions and countries. Progress against these dimensions is assessed through monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment processes.

Climate Change and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) – Dimensions of Change[4]

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[3] VBNK (2009). *Annual Impact Assessment Report.* September 2009, pg. 5
[4] Developed for CDKN by Maureen O'Flynn, Sept 2010

Part 2: Key challenges for organisations in assessing impact and ways of mitigating them

Consider the following case study and the questions that accompany it:

Case study: Bahati

Bahati is a 13 year old boy living in Arusha, Tanzania. Like many in his community, he is HIV-positive. He lives with his grandmother who has less than a dollar a day to care for herself and the five grandchildren in her care. Bahati is a pupil in the local primary school, he is a member of the youth club at his local church and he is a star in the local football team. He loves music and he has a wide circle of friends. All of the individuals and institutions mentioned above aim to influence Bahati's life on one way or another. These aims are often in conflict with each other.

As Bahati grows into a young adult, how do these individuals, businesses, and institutions identify the extent to which their efforts are changing Bahati's life? How can they be sure that changes can be attributed to their efforts?

This is an ongoing situation where the impact of individual interventions is already difficult to assess. Now consider the case of the three development agencies which have come to work in this area. Each has its own vision and mission and different ways of working. They all have a common goal of improving the quality of life of the local communities: one organisation focuses on education, one on livelihoods and the third on supporting people living with AIDS.

Bearing in mind that there already complex and conflicting influences in Bahati's life, to what extent can the three development agencies – each with their own different goals, aims and objectives – realistically identify changes that their specific efforts have made to Bahati's life? How do they really know what difference (if any) they have made to his life?

While many organisations have successfully developed processes to monitor and evaluate their projects and programmes (at the level of outputs and outcomes), the majority fail to look beyond their individual projects or programmes to really assess the difference they are making in people's lives. They struggle to assess the impact that their efforts have on target communities, individuals or environments.

Reasons for this include:
1. Lack of organisational clarity about the differences between M&E and impact.
2. Development organisations often work through partners. They then struggle to understand the scope of their influence and the levels at which they can realistically assess impact (and what their partners should be assessing).
3. Attributing evidence of change to specific interventions is challenging, if not impossible.
4. The design of the impact assessments is too complex; or it attempts to address too many needs.
5. Identifying useful starting points from which to assess impact, including baseline data and deciding which indicators to work with.
6. There are so many tools and processes available that designers of impact assessments overly complicate the process; and/or require staff and partners to work with tools that they are unfamiliar with.
7. Honest impact assessments are hard to find. Its very hard to tell the truth if it will

negatively affect chances of funding, or if it threatens relationships in any way.

8. Impact assessment findings are not used creatively or effectively, so their value is not always recognised.
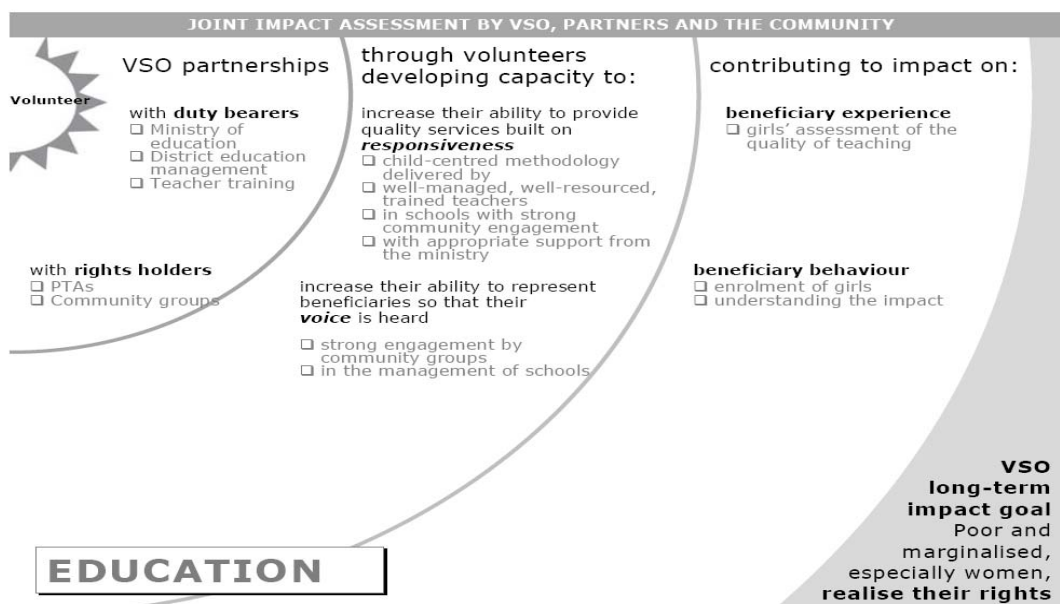
1. Lack of organisational clarity about how processes of planning, monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment complement each other

Unless and until development organisations and donor agencies invest time in understanding how processes of planning are linked with those of monitoring and evaluation and the assessment of impact; and how M&E processes complement those of impact assessment, efforts to understand change will always be compromised.

2. Development organisations who work through partners struggle to identify what they should be assessing at impact level

As so many organisations now work through national or local partner organisations, they struggle to understand what they should be assessing in terms of impact, what their partners should be assessing, and the relationship between them.

The key here is to understand and communicate the organisational 'sphere of influence' – what changes can realistically be linked to your organisational efforts? A good illustration is provided by VSO.[5] The diagram below demonstrates VSO's implementation strategy is for volunteers to work directly with partner organisations to build their capacity to effect change in the community. Their **direct 'sphere of influence'** therefore is with building the capacity of their partner agencies. This should form the primary focus of their impact assessment. In this model, a key 'dimension of change' that they need to assess is that of partner capacity to deliver services and support target communities. There is a concomitant responsibility to explore changes that take place at community level, but this should be the primary responsibility of the partner organisations. VSO will be able to provide illustrations of changes at this level, but not to assess it. VSO has an important role to play in building partner capacity to assess impact at community level.

JOINT IMPACT ASSESSMENT BY VSO, PARTNERS AND THE COMMUNITY

Volunteer

VSO partnerships

through volunteers developing capacity to:

contributing to impact on:

with **duty bearers**
- ❑ Ministry of education
- ❑ District education management
- ❑ Teacher training

increase their ability to provide quality services built on *responsiveness*
- ❑ child-centred methodology delivered by
- ❑ well-managed, well-resourced, trained teachers
- ❑ in schools with strong community engagement
- ❑ with appropriate support from the ministry

beneficiary experience
- ❑ girls' assessment of the quality of teaching

with **rights holders**
- ❑ PTAs
- ❑ Community groups

increase their ability to represent beneficiaries so that their *voice* is heard
- ❑ strong engagement by community groups
- ❑ in the management of schools

beneficiary behaviour
- ❑ enrolment of girls
- ❑ understanding the impact

VSO long-term impact goal
Poor and marginalised, especially women, **realise their rights**

EDUCATION

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[5] VSO *Baseline Information Report for Partnership Programme Arrangement (PPA) Strategic Objectives*, 2008

3. Attribution or contribution?

As the Bahati case study illustrates, attributing change to particular interventions will always be problematic, if not impossible.

The greater the gap between an organisation's point of initial intervention, and the people it is trying to affect, the harder it is for the organisation to confidently claim direct impact on the lives of target beneficiaries, or *'attribute'* the impact to their interventions. This is because changes within the community are likely to be the result of a complex mix of not only INGO-supported changes in partner capacity/levels of development awareness etc, but also a whole host of other factors such as changes in national policy or the economic environment. It is virtually impossible for any agency to claim attribution for a successful change when working in coalitions and/or networks or when advocating over a period of time for a pro-poor policy improvement.

Recognising this complexity, many development organisations are now working to explore and document their **contribution to change** rather than claiming ownership of changes that have taken place. ACTD – a coalition of Christian development agencies – has, for example, described all of its work on impact assessment as 'understanding our contribution to change'.

Attribution may possibly be claimed in areas where the intervention directly affects a target group such as providing water and sanitation for a community; income generation for HIV-positive people, or building capacity of a partner organisation, but the examples are limited. Bearing this in mind, it is important in designing impact assessments to consider what level of exploration around impact is feasible: are we able to measure it? assess it? or to provide examples of change and link them loosely to more direct interventions? All three levels have their own validity. The mistake is to try to measure something that is well beyond your own sphere of influence.

4. The design of the impact assessments is too complex; and/or it attempts to address too many needs

As stated earlier, there are many reasons for conducting impact assessments. Time and resources often dictate that all of these needs should be addressed through one process. This is possible but both the assessment process and the reporting formats need to be designed very carefully. Ideally, organisations should develop impact assessments for their own learning and reporting needs and then adapt them according to the various needs of donors and other stakeholders. An essential component of any design will be to ensure stakeholder involvement in the planning and implementation of any impact assessment process

5. Identifying a 'start point': planning for impact

As with all M&E processes, the assessment of impact should be considered at the design stage. A budget line for this process is acceptable to many donors (up to 10%, as a ball park figure).

Organisations working with Dimensions of Change can build in mechanisms to track changes in these areas from the start of the interventions. This also provides them with the possibility of developing 'rolling baselines' against which future changes can be compared and assessed.

Where this isn't the case, baselines can prove enormously difficult to work in terms of impact assessments because, at the time of developing them, staff were 'best guessing' what they would need to know as the project progressed. When it comes to assessing impact, useful information is either not available, or not relevant. Where this is the case, rolling baselines can be created. The simple addition of a set of impact questions to already existing M&E frameworks

('What's changing?' 'For whom?' 'How significant are these changes?') can serve this purpose effectively, if the same questions are asked and analysed year on year. Another, less reliable way of recreating baseline is to develop a process to ask key stakeholders to recall changes that have taken place in their lives (that are related to particular interventions) over the last X years.

A less ethical method involves comparing changes in a community where interventions have taken place with one in the locality where there have been no interventions. The ethics of interviewing community members when there is no intention of working with them is very questionable.

6. Deciding which indicators to work with

Indicators which are designed to **verify outcomes** – or expected changes – are different from those designed to **understand impact,** As impact assessments should be able to capture both the expected and the unexpected, as well as the positive and negative changes that are taking place, impact indicators should be seen more as 'areas of enquiry' or a focus for asking **open-ended questions,** rather than the more closed tick-box type of indicator which is used to prove that the expected change has taken place. Impact indicators which are not developed with input from stakeholders and partners are unlikely to be relevant to them.

While the majority of impact indicators are likely to capture qualitative information, this information can be converted into quantitative data if planned carefully. The use of score cards and ranking systems can be very useful in these circumstances.

7. Selecting and using appropriate tools to assess impact

The range of impact assessment tools that have developed in the last few years means that designers and planners of impact assessment are often tempted to overcomplicate the process in an attempt to use new and interesting methodologies. It must be remembered that every new information gathering idea that emanates from HQ can prove to be a headache for country directors, project managers, partners and members of the community!

A selection of very few, user-friendly tools is recommended. That said, a mix of methods is also important for the purpose of triangulation.

Some of the 'old faithfuls' which continue to collect data effectively include semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. **Stories of Change** and **Most Significant Change**[7] methodologies are becoming increasingly popular. While these methods provide excellent data and insights, they are **best used to illustrate change rather than assess or measure it**. Tools such as these provide a valuable complement to other, more focussed or traditional methods. Be aware that the process of developing, recording selecting and analysing these stories, especially when stakeholders are involved in the process as they should be, can be very time consuming.

Appreciative Enquiry[8] is another approach/methodology which can be successfully used and adapted for impact assessment. As a planning for impact tool, it has the advantage of actively encouraging stakeholders to visualise and record positive changes in their lives. PRA methods, such as Venn diagrams, life lines, community maps etc, can be used to solicit valuable information and, if used year on year, can form part of a rolling baseline.

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[7] www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf
[8] www.appreciative-inquiry.co.uk

Time invested in piloting the use of tools and training assessment team members in their use will produce valuable returns. Adding a few judiciously chosen questions to existing M&E systems (rather than setting up new processes) will greatly reduce the data gathering burden on staff and partners in-country.

In terms of who to gather information from for impact assessments, there are questions of sampling and disaggregation to consider. Time and resources limit the numbers of affected communities who can be included in these assessments, so decisions need to be made about what constitutes a reliable sample. Typical decisions around selecting samples include interviewing a combination of affected community members who appear to have benefitted from the intervention and a group of those who have not. This may not be very rigorous, but is often what happens. Involving stakeholders in such decisions is likely to provide more useful samples. Further guidance on this should be sought before determining sample sizes.[9]

In terms of disaggregation, serious efforts need to be made to reach those members of the community who are otherwise likely to be overlooked. For example, in exploring changes for girls in a given intervention, experiences of girls in school, child mothers, child wives, orphan children etc will all reveal different experiences.

8. Honest impact assessments are hard to find

Making this a little personal, when was the last time that you told a lie (or were economical with the truth)? We all do it. Why? Reasons for lying include a wish to protect someone else, to avoid aggression, to avoid disappointing someone, or to avoid retribution or punishment. Looking at the issue from the flip side, when do people feel able to tell the truth? Possibly when there is an atmosphere of trust; an absence of fear, no likelihood of redress or withdrawal of good will.

Considering this, the challenge of collecting information and data which demonstrates negative or unintended impact should not be underestimated. The greater the levels of trust that exist (from donors, senior managers, project managers etc) the greater the likelihood of being able gather useful information. Time invested in ensuring that partners and stakeholders understand the purpose of the assessments (and ensuring that the information is used for the purpose specified) will not be wasted.

9. Impact assessment findings are not used creatively or effectively, so their value is not always recognised

Impact assessment reports are not often used creatively or effectively. More often than not, they are completed in a hurry at the end of the exercise, usually to a tight deadline. Typically, they are read by the donor and/or senior management team, and then left on a shelf.

A well designed impact assessment process should be able to satisfy donor demands, provide valuable insights for organisational learning and reflection, and be used by stakeholders to review and adapt the direction of programmes and projects that affect them. They can provide excellent evidence for advocacy; and be used effectively for fundraising purposes. Put like this, it is surprising that organisations are not clamouring to do more impact assessments!

In addition to the traditional impact assessment report, findings can be used to:
- Facilitate consensus and planning workshops with partners and other stakeholders. The use of scenario planning workshops based on impact findings can prove very motivating

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[9] Easton, VJ and McColl, JH (1997), *Statistics Glossary v1.1*, The STEPS Project

and valuable.[10]

- Develop case studies, stories of change, YouTube videos, plays etc to communicate messages to stakeholders, to advocate for change, to raise funds, to build coalitions of interest, to report to donors etc.

Part 3: Lessons and recommendations

The following recommendations are key to developing effective impact assessment processes.

Planning for impact
1. Encourage the development of an organisational Theory of Change, and develop a few broad dimensions of change that will inform the direction of impact assessment areas of enquiry.
2. In relation to this, clarity about realistic your organisational 'sphere of influence' will encourage a more effective understanding about where impact can be measured and/or assessed; and where changes can be illustrated but not directly attributed to your organisational efforts.
3. Work to build the assessment of impact into existing planning, monitoring and evaluation policies and systems. Build 'change questions' into existing reporting formats and processes. Collecting and collating this 'emerging impact' will prove invaluable both for developing rolling baselines and for adapting programme plans to suit changing needs. Organisations such as Action Aid and Save the Children (to mention just two of many) have developed very coherent planning, reflection and learning processes which encourage the embedding of impact assessments into organisational learning and planning. In this way, impact assessment becomes part of everyday thinking.
4. Ensure stakeholder input in all stages of design and development of impact assessment processes.
5. Consider using Outcome Mapping when planning interventions with partners, networks and coalitions.

Gathering data
6. Use a few tried and tested methods (which allow for triangulation) over complex or innovative and untested ones that are not clearly understood at field level.
7. Involve stakeholders in gathering information. Build their capacity to do this effectively.

Reporting
8. Use findings widely and creatively for improved impact of impact assessments!

The most important recommendation is: Don't give up! Impact assessment can be challenging but equally it can be both rewarding and inspirational, especially when there is evidence that efforts have led to improved programmes and improved relationships with stakeholders.

Depending on the approach, it can either be complex and frustrating exercise, or an essential part of organisational planning and learning. As development workers, we need to take the exploration of changes that we influence in people lives seriously.

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[10] Schoemaker, Paul JH (1995) *Scenario Planning: A Tool for Strategic Thinking*, Sloan Management