

A reflection from experiences on evaluation in the Andean Region
focusing in the donor-recipient relationship within an intercultural context

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The purpose of this paper is to share a reflection on some recent experiences carried out in the field of the evaluation of development projects. These refer mainly to projects supported by Northern NGOs and implemented by indigenous organizations in the Andean countries. The reflection topics will address the socio-organizational, cultural, and political aspects, which are involved in the relationship between donors and recipients and its implication for the evaluation of the projects. However, before going into the matter, I consider it necessary to offer a brief general characterization of the evaluation practice and of the socio-political context in which the indigenous populations are immersed in order to put this reflection in context.

The evaluation practice

The evaluation practice, in the sense of the application of a systematic methodology and instruments for quantitative and qualitative measurement is still at an initial stage in the region. The advances achieved in this area may still be considered primary. However, the idea that it is necessary that programs and projects be explicitly evaluated is increasingly gaining acceptance. For instance, it is worth mentioning that in the case of Peru, the Congress now requires that a cost-benefit analysis be included in every draft of a law concerning development projects.

In general terms, it may be said that it is due to the pressure of the international financial and technical cooperation that planning, monitoring and evaluation systems (PMES) are being implemented and accepted. To a certain extent, PMES are more an external demand on developmental organizations, both in the public and private sectors, rather than an internal demand. This would explain why so few efforts of internal systematic evaluations take place and would also explain the fact that evaluation processes are carried out mainly because they form part of the financial agreement with the corresponding cooperation agency.

However, in the past decade there has been an increasing number of educational and training organizations, including universities and higher education centers, that offer courses and workshops (usually of a short duration) aimed at training the participants in PMES. And there is also an increasing demand and supply of training and counseling activities dealing with topics such as organizational development and institutional strengthening.

The predominant methodology is that of the Logical Framework, a methodology which has been strongly promoted by technical cooperation agencies, namely by the GTZ, USAID, COSUDE (the Swiss Cooperation Agency), and the European Union.

¹ See note on the author at the end of the paper.

The most widespread aspect of this methodology –and mostly applied, as well– is the elaboration of the planning matrix. However, instead of being the result of a thorough analysis and decision-making processes –thus providing a tool that can be used as a synthesis chart–, the common practice is to go directly to the elaboration of the planning matrix with the consequence that the project will have a rather precarious analytical base.

A participative approach is also used to elaborate the planning matrix. The idea here is to carry out a planning workshop with the participation of representatives of all the stakeholders identified as relevant to the project. The resulting matrix, therefore, is considered legitimate as it is a product based on consensus. It should be said, however, that in not few cases, this is more the result of compromise than of a real consensus due to time limitations and to the difficulty to go into a deeper analysis. Some times the product looks like a patchwork rather than like an integrated and coherent development plan.

In many cases the participative approach has an unintended consequence: the plan becomes either “frozen” or rigid, since those persons responsible for its implementation feel that they do not have the authority to reformulate the plan, and, moreover, because the organization of a mid-term workshop to review and/or adjust the plan with the participation of all stakeholders is usually not considered.

In general, the best and most elaborated part of the planning matrix is the one related to the description of the objectives, outcomes and activities, even though it is not infrequent that a clear differentiation in the hierarchy of the objectives –and between these and the outcomes– is not achieved. Generally, the indicators and their corresponding sources of verification are only pointed out and no ulterior effort is made to establish the procedures for their application. Finally, the less understood part of the planning matrix –and hence, the least elaborated part which is usually stated at a very general level– is the one related to the project’s assumptions. Evidently, this contributes to the vulnerability of the project and adds a risk factor since the existing problems of feasibility are not discovered, analyzed or treated.

In the area of development programs and projects, it is important to distinguish between those projects carried out by public organizations, by NGOs, and by organizations representing different population groups, either at the level of a local community, at the level of second grade organizations (representing a group of local communities) or at the level of regional and national confederations which conform a third and fourth-floor organizational type.

Public organizations and NGOs have professional staffs, usually trained at universities. The organizations representing communities or population groups, on the other hand, have leaders who usually do not have a higher education. This is the case of indigenous grass roots organizations. It should be noted that in the Andean region an important part of the population is formed by indigenous groups scattered all over the highlands of the Andes and extensive areas of the Amazon region.

Despite some of the previously mentioned difficulties, the logical framework methodology and monitoring and evaluation tools are being used in both public sector and NGO programs and projects, but for the indigenous organizations their application becomes much more complicated and difficult. A serious problem of

intercultural relation arises here between the cooperation agencies (the northern NGOs) and the leaders of these organizations, who should be taken into consideration. Moreover, internal organizational processes within the indigenous organization also play an important role.

Indigenous Peoples and the Political Context

For a better understanding of the practice of projects and cooperation programs oriented towards indigenous populations, we should first make a reference to the socio-political context where these take place.

In general terms, it may be said that a position of subordination and of exclusion has been the characteristic of the indigenous populations in the Andean countries (I refer mainly to Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia). This characteristic which was inherited from the colonial society, has in some way continued throughout the republican era and has resulted in a constant violation of their rights as peoples.

In the past ten to fifteen years, the indigenous populations began a process of articulation and of social and political movements that, especially in the cases of Bolivia and Ecuador, enabled them to achieve important recognition of their cultural and social rights, both in the new constitutions that were adopted in these countries and also in the enactment of some laws. In Ecuador, the indigenous movement played an important role in recent government changes and several prominent leaders of the indigenous movement currently hold important positions in the executive or have a seat in Congress.

In the case of Bolivia, even though the indigenous movement has still not achieved a nationwide articulation, the impact of their mobilization has forced the government to participate in several processes of negotiation. The situation is different in the case of Peru where no important process of articulation or of indigenous mobilizations has taken place. What we find here are local processes oriented at the defense of local resources and which respond to the pressure of the extractive mining, oil, and timber companies working in the area. A well-known case is the project for gas exploitation in the area of Camisea, a project that has generated great expectations in the Peruvian administration because of its likely positive macro-economic impact. Notwithstanding, the issue of the indigenous peoples is not a priority issue in the political agenda of the country.

It is also worth noting that the articulation between indigenous organizations of the Amazon peoples and the indigenous organizations of the Andean highland peoples is still incipient both in Bolivia and Ecuador, and especially in the case of Bolivia where the most important issue in the agenda of the indigenous peoples is the recognition of their community lands (*tierras comunitarias de origen*). In Ecuador, indigenous demands are more political and centered on issues such as the authority system and the administration of justice. Another recent demand of the indigenous peoples has to do with the recognition of the indigenous territories.

A critical issue is that constitutional advances in these fields cannot be achieved without the enactment of laws that make them possible. And even when this happens, several problems arise due to the reluctance of government officials to

accept change in the respective administrative offices and due to the opposition of private interests. These matters are related to the power structure and to processes of change in power relationships.

PMES and Indigenous Organizations

This section addresses some reflections which focus mainly in the relationship between the donor agency and the recipient organization in a context of intercultural encounter. I would like to call your attention to this relationship as a crucial factor for development and then suggest its inclusion in the monitoring and evaluation processes.

About partnership

From my point of view and experience, I believe that the process of development is possible only when it is based on relationships of cooperation, mutual understanding and creative trust. This means that true partnership relations are developed only assuming all the tensions that naturally happen in the course of social interaction.

In this sense, greater importance and attention should be given to the donor-recipient relationship. In a social and cultural milieu of exclusion, subordination and manipulation, the relationship itself between donor and recipient should be addressed and be a departure from which the traditional and usual patterns of social relations may acquire a new meaning, fostering relations of partnership and development. For this purpose it is necessary to develop a sensibility regarding the situation of cooperation as an intercultural encounter.

The construction of partnership in development requires the sharing of meaning between or among the parties involved. This implies not only that donor has an understanding of the organization's vision, mission and objectives, but also that the organization has an understanding of the vision, mission and objectives of the donor agency, and on how both lines of thinking and feeling come together or cross their paths. Only in this way will the interaction between donor and recipient be fully meaningful.

Based on my general experience, and not only in the case of indigenous people and organizations, this mutual knowledge is usually missing. Generally the recipient knows very little about the donors' philosophy and overall strategies, and view them almost only as a financial source, calling them *las financieras* (the financial agencies) which largely reduces their meaning as developmental social actors.

Shifting from general trust to performance evaluation

Initially, the relationship between a recipient organization and a donor agency is based on a general agreement of support and on the construction of trust between them which includes some involvement of personal ties with the expectation of a lasting relationship. There has been a tendency to reproducing a relationship of dependence. The situation is aggravated when a single cooperation agency is the unique financial source. The expectation of the organizations is that the financial support will continue indefinitely, regardless of whether the established objectives for

each financial period were accomplished or not. The bond is experienced by the organizations as something which is lasting and obliged, and includes some sort of paternalistic expectation.

But currently the donor agencies are under a strong pressure from their own sources of financing whether public or private to show impacts. The donor agencies now require the organization to design much more clear-cut objectives and strategies and to document outcomes and impacts for every new project to be funded. In this way the idea of evaluation as a requirement is strongly introduced reforming their relationships with the recipients and shifting to a relationship based on performance evaluation and impacts.

This change produces attitudes of disappointment on both sides and some disturbance in the relationship. And this is one of the current challenges in the ongoing process of cooperation for development: how to introduce the elements of PMES in a friendlier and more adequate intercultural approach.

The cooperation relationship as an intercultural encounter

It should be recognized that, at least in the case of indigenous organizations, the relationship of cooperation has the characteristic of an intercultural relationship, a fundamental trait that people on both sides are not entirely aware of.

The notion of project is brought to the indigenous organizations by the cooperation agencies and with it the systems of planning, monitoring and evaluation that accompany this notion. Additionally, the idea that all expenditures must be accounted for is also included, and this implies that indigenous organizations have to adopt accounting and budgetary control systems that comply with agencies' requirements of formality and thoroughness to duly support their fund application.

All these elements are indeed cultural contributions provided by the modern western culture. But they are mandatory for the indigenous organizations: if they want to obtain the support of the donor agency, they have to adopt and manage them. Such notions, methodology and technical instruments are accepted as a compromise in the transaction but they are experienced as a cultural imposition. The problem is how to establish a culturally creative understanding on these matters.

Projects with a wide range of objectives

Given the fact that organizations do not have any other financial source and that they have several needs to meet, what they actually do is to prepare and submit project proposals with objectives that indeed encompass multiple objectives, expected outcomes and numerous activities. Consequently, the scarce resources provided by the donor agency are dispersed and therefore the effectiveness of the organization efforts tends to be at a low level.

People tend to establish objectives including a great number of elements. This expresses a way of thinking, which I once called "bus thinking", that is, a "bus" with a lot of passengers who are not necessarily related. This tendency is quite generalized and it may also be observed in non-indigenous professionals working for NGOs.

Moreover, the project proposals are designed in such a way that the objectives, outcomes and activities are not established in a clear process that links the means with the ends².

The problem of language

Another difficulty encountered when working with indigenous organizations is that all the information required by the agency is in Spanish, a language that many indigenous individuals speak with difficulty. Needless to say, this difficulty is even greater in the written language. At various levels there is an interlanguage combination of Spanish with native words, and a syntax that follows the principles of the native language, linguistic structures that specialists call *interlecto* (interlanguage) in Spanish. This implies that a process has to take place to clarify concepts and meanings in the social encounter between the donor's officers and the indigenous people in order to achieve a common understanding of reality; otherwise misunderstanding will plague the communication.

It is very important to remark here that in terms of communication the indigenous people including their leaders are mainly oral, because this is their cultural tradition, and because a bilingual education was only very recently introduced in the educational systems of the Andean countries, with a still very limited extension and quality, so they continue to be oral in the context of the Spanish language. However, the organizations must present their proposals to the donor agency in the form of a written document in Spanish. For the officers the proposal and planning documents they receive are difficult to understand, and the situation is even worse when the project proposals have to be translated into the official language of the donor agency.

All these intercultural aspects that are revealed in the language problems constitute a weak area in the endeavors of developmental cooperation³.

About the implicit theories of change

We do not pay much attention and really do not know how people of the recipient organizations think or what their implicit theory of change could be and how it relates to our own implicit theory of change. The people who live in the countryside, especially in the more remote areas are subject, at a much greater extent than us, to the conditions that depend on the cycles of natural life. They face and solve very concrete and immediate problems. Historically they have created and developed their own knowledge to understand reality and to survive and grow in their environment. Then the problem is how to work together to make explicit both their

² To build some awareness on this problem, I usually ask the participants who attend a workshop to list the objectives, outcomes, and activities in three separate columns and then to establish a link between the items listed in the different columns. In this way, not only do they discover to their surprise the occurrence of imbalances but also the presence of loose elements.

³ By the way, it is interesting to note that there is a problem in the continuation of work made at a workshop. Afterwards, the organization leaders do not pursue further analysis nor reflection on the matters dealt with at the workshop despite the fact that the treatment is usually incomplete and that there is a variety of doubts and questions than need clarification and answer. In the following workshop one finds that the situation is the same. The question is Why? The most probable answer is that the instruments (PMES) are not culturally friendly, and there is also the language barrier.

and our theory of change and look into their strategies to bring about the desired and anticipated outcomes.

The use of time

There are cases in which the ways in which time is used also evidences a cultural tension. This emerges in the workshops, especially in those cases in which the indigenous people perform recurrent rituals (worship, chewing coca leaves, drinking alcoholic beverages). In this way, the discussion and treatment of project issues have a slow pace, but it is very difficult to treat all the anticipated points –or these are only covered superficially– since the workshop usually lasts only one or two days. Consequently, the function of the meeting goes more in the sense of reassuring the relationship between donor and grass root organization than in the sense of an effective planning, reviewing or evaluating meeting.

Monitoring and evaluation practices

With regard to monitoring and evaluation practices we have to discriminate between the recipient's practices and the donor's practices.

Within the indigenous organizations monitoring and evaluation practices are performed following the ongoing process of life organization without any application of formal PMES' tools. The directors of the organization will most likely concentrate on M&E in those moments when they have to send the corresponding project report to the donor agency. When we look at these reports what appears is mainly an indication of the activities which were accomplished, some diffused ideas about outcomes, and excuses for the activities that were not carried out.

On the donor's side, a short visit to the organization is usually carried out once a year. During this visit, a meeting is held to review the progress of the project with the participation of both leaders of the second floor organization and community leaders. An important point here is the identification of organizational weaknesses and an exhortation from the donor officer to a better accomplishment of the activities and results stated and agreed upon in the project document, and an expression of a renewed commitment on the side of the organization directors.

In addition to these processes of M&E the donor agency recurs also to external evaluations. This practice is carried out with wide time intervals, usually with a low level of people's participation, and apparently there is not so much learning for the organization since the proposal presented after the external evaluation usually follows the same previous pattern and shows no major change.

4. Concluding remark

It is in contexts similar to those mentioned in this paper that the application of PMES methodology and instruments appear problematic. There is a call for greater flexibility in the use of management systems for programs and projects, in the sense of creativity by means of intercultural understanding between partners.

There is a need to promote processes of interchange of experiences on MPES within the professional communities in the countries of the South in order to produce a local agenda and a more equitable interchange with the professional communities of the North. This may also be viewed as a process of construction and strengthening of the civil society. In other words, it is necessary to transcend the simple reactions to the North imposition in PMES and convert this into a more creative and generative attitude.

It is also very important to look for and promote an internal drive for M&E on the recipient's side in order to allow growth in learning and to develop greater capacities in the design and implementation of successful programs and projects.

Finally, I consider that it is essential that the proper relationship between donor and recipient be brought into the focus of M&E given the high relevance it has in the construction of partnership since this is a fundamental base to foster positive connections and loops for development.

Note on the author

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