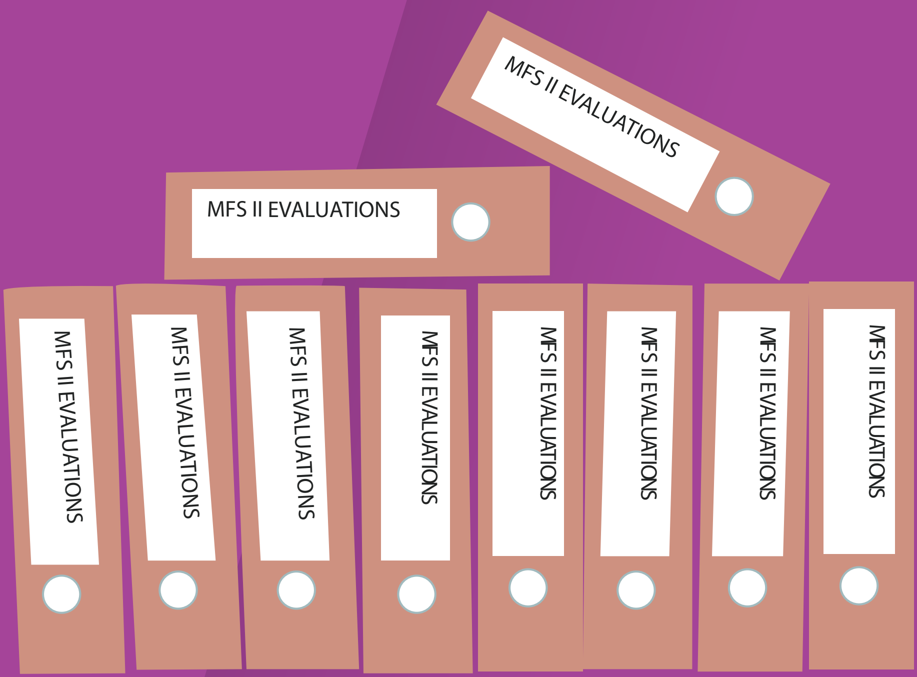
Room for development

Reflections on the results of the MFS2 Evaluation



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REFLECTIONS ON THE RESULTS OF THE MFS2-EVALUATION

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Partos is the Dutch sector association for international cooperation. The association promotes the interests of 114 Dutch private development organisations that work to reduce poverty, provide humanitarian aid, and promote human rights and sustainable development. Together with its members, Partos actively pursues cooperation, quality development, innovation and increased civic support in order to contribute to worldwide, inclusive and sustainable development. www.partos.nl

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What matters is how good we want to be

Foreword by Bart Romijn, Managing Director of Partos

Some 175 researchers have thoroughly evaluated five years of work performed by 64 development organisations, united in 19 alliances. For practical reasons, they limited their research to a random sample of programs and organisations, and two measurements, taken in 2012 and 2014 respectively. The researchers produced approximately 11,000 pages of findings. The general conclusion was that the organisations had operated effectively. The complete collection of documents can be found on the Partos website.

From as early as 2014, before the final reports were even published, learning sessions and webinars on a number of subjects had been taking place place, in which participating organisations, the researchers, WOTRO and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs took part. The collective evaluation, sometimes quite challenging, has yielded many enriching insights and products. This book, *Room for Development*, provides easy access to this extensive study. It gives the reader a clear and brief summary of key findings and adds many concise reflections. The interviews, with stimulating and sometimes contrary views that do not shy away from sensitive subjects, give extra shine to this great book. To the authors, Wouter Rijneveld, Marc Broere and Ellen Mangnus, I'd like to say: well done! And, of course, many thanks to all the people who were interviewed and everyone who otherwise contributed to this book.

The generally positive findings of the evaluation certainly do not mean that we can allow ourselves to stop learning now. After all, what matters is not how good we were, but how good we want to be. And this is both important and urgent. In many countries, civic d still have a long way to go.

Business as usual is not good enough. We must learn to use the space we have much better than we do now, and expand it where possible by proactively investing in the learning mindset, flexibility and effectiveness of organisations, by developing new work methods and by entering into adaptive and impact-focused alliances.

The Joint Evaluation Trust ('Stichting Gezamelijke Evaluaties'), which was coordinated to great satisfaction by Mirjam Locadia, and by Lucia Helsloot at a later stage, has played its part and will be discontinued. As a sector association for civic development organisations, Partos, together with Dutch and international partners, will keep facilitating knowledge exchange, collective learning and innovation. I hope that this work will electrify us all and so contribute to creating a tipping point on our way to a more just, livable and sustainable world for everyone

Bart Romijn

Chairman of the Joint Evaluation Trust, Managing Director of Partos

1 A unique model

From the foundation of Novib via the co-financing programme to the strategic partnerships: this chapter gives a brief overview of the history of Dutch development cooperation history to put the MFS 2 evaluation in perspective.

'I can explain the concept hardly anywhere in the world,' Sylvia Borren once said when she was still the managing director of Oxfam Novib. The Netherlands was the only country in the world where the government provided grants to critical civic organisations who were not afraid to criticise that very same government. This former co-financing programme remained in place for decades. Four organisations – Oxfam Novib, Cordaid, ICCO and Hivos – annually received 10 per cent of the Dutch development budget not only to support partners in the South, but also to keep a critical gaze on the policy of their own government.

This co-financing programme had never been the original aim of the organisation which in later years was managed by Borren. When Novib was founded in 1956, its ambition was to be the sole national development organisation. Member of the board included representatives of employers, employees, religious organisations, political parties and many other civic organisations.

From the very beginning, it became clear that the organisation was not solely concerned with foreign aid in developing countries. During a meeting held in January 1955, at which the foundation of Novib was discussed, 'founding father' Simon Jelsma said: 'It is definitely not our intention to just hold campaigns and raise funds. Above all, we want to inform, educate, to wake up the public's conscience, to direct attention at emergencies, to call upon a feeling of solidarity. In short, we want to create an environment in which the spirit of aid can grow. As such, our goal is spiritual. Funding is a concrete goal. But the need to influence public opinion is connected to it, it is at its very core.'

A flying start

Novib had a flying start and it put the Dutch private foreign aid sector on the map. Its early years make for a nice story: Novib held office at the residence of its managing director, Ger van Vlijmen, at De Eerensplein in The Hague, before the organisation moved into Noordeinde Palace in the same city. Van Vlijmen introduced a number of novel ideas, ranging from founding Novib committees in almost all Dutch towns to the first televised campaign, 'Food for India', in 1966.

He was also a pioneer when it came to projects. Between 1956 and his retirement in 1975, he visited over 98 countries. In his book *De Bewogen Beweging – Een Halve Eeuw Mondiale Solidariteit* about the history of global solidarity in the last 50 years, he states: 'When anyone sent us a proposal for a project, I went to the location to see if it fitted our goals. My secretary would send a letter, informing them what plane I was on, and there would always be someone there to pick me up. Nowadays, every development organisation has project staff who travel all over the world, but back then I was practically the only one in the Netherlands to do that. I would sometimes run into someone from Germany or England who did the same work, but no one else.'

Unique Dutch model

When in 1965 the first minister for development cooperation, Theo Bot of the KVP (Catholic People's Party) was appointed, the co-financing system was put into place. The co-financing organisations – of which there were only three at the time – received 3.5 per cent of the total development cooperation budget. Protestant-Christian organisation ICCO and Catholic organisation Cebemo (currently named Cordaid) both received 40 per cent, while Novib received 20 per cent. Novib, which had always presented itself as the only national development umbrella organisation, suddenly ranked lowest among the three organisations. In 1978, the humanistic Hivos joined the programme. The co-financing system developed into a unique Dutch model. Together with SNV, and with strong and innovative ministers such as Jan Pronk, Jan de Koning and Eveline Herfkens, the co-financing system made the Netherlands one of the most respected donors in the world. Additionally, we were one of the few countries who respected the agreement that 0.7 per cent of the gross national product should be spent on foreign aid. The co-financing budget grew to 10 per cent of the total development cooperation budget.

However, the privileged position of these four organisations also drew criticism. Why were these four included and not others? Was 'pillarisation', the Dutch tradition of segregating society along political and denominational lines, not a thing of the past? They were cynically called the 'gang of four', or 'the cartel'. Managing Director Ron van Huizen of Terre des Hommes even took the matter to court in order to make the programme accessible to other organisations. 'The four organisations did everything in their power to deny us access. These so-called freethinkers are strikingly conservative,' he once stated in an interview with monthly magazine *OnzeWereld*.

First change of course

Much to Van Huizen's pleasure, Minister Herfkens changed course in January 2000 by first allowing Foster Parents Plan and then Terre des Hommes to join the programme. Opening up the programme would drive competition and improve quality, the minister argued. Additionally, she founded a separate thematic grant office that immediately began to finance 64 organisations. Her successor, Agnes van Ardenne, reorganised the grant programme even further by applying identical conditions to the large co-financing organisations and the thematic organisations. This so-called MFS1 policy framework was a very clear deviation from the trend. Apart from supporting local partner organisations, Novib, ICCO, Cordaid and Hivos were also always taking positions in the international economic and political context of the poverty issue, by lobbying and campaigning for matters such as fair trade, debt relief or international agriculture politics. In Van Ardenne's new system, organisations focusing only on concrete development projects could also apply for government grants, even if they did not have objectives with regard to the international context.

Organisations also had to align their programmes with Dutch government policy, in which the millennium goals took centre stage. Moreover, the minister's new requirement that organisations were to earn 25 per cent of their income on the market led to an increased need for organisations to present themselves to the public. Additionally, Van Ardenne put major pressure on organisations to show immediate results. They had to pay much more attention to monitoring their partner organisations in developing countries. This called for even more planning, monitoring and evaluation.

Forced cooperation

In February 2007, Van Ardenne was succeeded by Bert Koenders. In 2009, the new minister, of the Dutch social democratic party (PvdA), announced a new co-financing system, which has become known in the sector as MFS2. The minister said he would put the axe to the number of grant requests and force development organisations to cooperate. While under Van Ardenne a great variety of organisations had been supported, Koenders indicated he would provide grants to no more than thirty organisations or alliances. Additionally, he labelled the sector 'the aid industry', which was grist to the mill of critics.
MFS2 received a lot of criticism, because the accountability requirements were even more strict than under the previous programme and organisations had to plan their activities in accordance with the requirements of a rigid logframe. 'This is a lot of bureaucratic nonsense that has absolutely nothing to do with development cooperation,' Managing Director Jack van Ham of ICCO responded. 'All of this detracts from actual foreign aid,' Farah Karimi, Oxfam Novib's managing director, agreed. Director René Grotenhuis of Cordaid even considered to not apply for any grants at all. On the day of the deadline, a great many requests were submitted.

The findings of the extensive MFS2 evaluation were published in 2015. Things turned out to be going rather well, and even right-leaning national newspaper *De Telegraaf* had positive headlines: 'Development organisations are doing good job'. While some in the sector had been wary of the study, its general conclusion turned out to be quite positive. However, left-leaning daily newspaper *De Volkskrant* stated that no amount of compliments could hide the fact that the report came a bit late. 'The government has already decided to discontinue the co-financing system. Projects are ended and NGOs have announced mass layoffs.'

The circle is round

The current government is making record cutbacks on development spending, and Dutch development organisations are only receiving half of what they used to receive. There is a budget of 185 million per year for twenty-five organisations and alliances participating in strategic partnerships. Additionally, organisations can participate in various 'calls' in those areas Development Minister Lilianne Ploumen wants to focus on. According to the minister, this amounts to approximately 25 per cent of the development cooperation budget, as requested by the majority of Dutch parliament.

The minister is framing the strategic partnerships as new and innovative, but they are not all that different from the old co-financing programme that existed until the beginning of this millennium, with the notable difference that the minister's money cannot be used to finance projects; only for lobbying and for advocacy activities.

In an interview with *Vice Versa*, the minister expressly stated that she does not want to tell strategic partnerships what to do, but they do need to conform to her policy. The margins of freedom of the organisations remain quite vague – but maybe that can be seen as an exciting opportunity? 'In this policy there is ample room for organisations to chart their own course,' Ploumen says. 'They are not subcontractors hired by the government. To the contrary, every organisation may focus on what it does best and answer the question whether it can contribute to the objectives of the ministry from its own perspective.'
She also promised to do her best to keep restrictive rules to a minimum and acknowledged that MFS1 and MFS2 were more about providing quantitative information than about promoting substantial results. 'The relationship between government and civic organisations has become too technocratic in these past few years, and there has been too much focus on quantitative reports. Instead, we need to talk about how we can cooperate to get rid of extreme poverty by 2030, and what role we can take in that,' says Ploumen.

In less than a year, the Netherlands will face new elections. It is unclear what changes are awaiting the Dutch development sector. Will the next minister reorganise the policy framework again, and break up the strategic partnerships? Of will the next minister stay on course and give the model a chance to develop? 'I hope this framework will exist for a very long time,' says Ploumen in the *Vice Versa* interview.

2 Strengthening capacity

Introduction

One of the most important goals of the MFS grant framework was to strengthen the capacity of organisations in the South. So, in the scope of this evaluation, the question if the capacity of organisations had increased was of great importance, as well as the question if the Dutch organisations had contributed to any recorded increased capacity.

Five core capacities:

The capacity to

1. Take action and commit the organisation
2. Achieve objectives
3. Adapt and renew
4. Build and maintain strong relationships
5. Remain consistent

The so-called 5C Model was used to measure the increase of the capacity. This model distinguishes five core capacities (see adjoining text box). The capacity of 58 organisations in the eight countries selected was measured at the beginning of the study and again at the end of the study. One finding was that organisations had a fair degree of capacity at the beginning of the study. They mostly had a score above 3 on a scale from 1 to 5. On average, organisations were a little bit stronger at the time of the second measurement: 0.3 points. Only very few organisations had become weaker. It is much more difficult to answer the question if increased capacity can be attributed to the efforts by Dutch organisations, because there are so many other forces at play as well. The in-depth analyses that were carried out provide mixed evidence. In DR Congo, the efforts had no noticeable positive effects on most of the organisations in that country, especially due to the difficult external circumstances. In most other countries the interventions by Dutch organisations did matter, but always in conjunction with other factors. If these factors were not positive (e.g. poor leadership), training activities and workshops had little effect.

Two findings of the evaluation should be given more thought. The first question to be answered is if stronger capacity results in better results. There are various examples where the announced end to financial support by a Dutch organisation turned out to be a positive trigger point for strengthening capacity, which raises the question if ending cooperation might sometimes more effective than continuing it.

Is there any sense in strengthening capacity?

Strengthening capacity was and still is an important objective to many development organisations. But does strengthened capacity translate into more tangible results? Besides, what does the term capacity actually refer to?

What the evaluation tells us

The evaluation emphasises the capacity to achieve objectives (see text box), i.e. to produce results. In this context, the four other capacities have an indirect importance as they are all elements whose role it is to contribute to the most important capacity: to achieve objectives.

No evidence was provided by this evaluation that a stronger capacity contributes to achieving objectives or to producing results more effectively. The capacity of various organisations has been strengthened, but no better results were reported. Correlation calculations seem to suggest that the capacity to take action and to commit the organisation and the capacity to adapt and renew are two capacities that seem completely irrelevant to producing results. The evaluators raise the question whether Dutch organisations should focus on strengthening capacity if there is no evidence that this increases results produced. At best, strengthening capacity can be a way to better achieve the objectives of the organisation, but as yet the evaluation does not provide evidence that strengthening capacity is an effective way to produce better results.

First reflections

These questions raised by the evaluation touch upon an important pillar of Dutch organisations' right to exist. For years, the thinking – articulated or not – was that 'we are strengthening the capacity of organisations in the South, helping them to achieve the objectives of change in their societies'. Investing in capacity and then not see better results somehow belies common sense. Nevertheless, some aspects require some more thought.

Mutual cooperation in practice

For a long time, the transfer of knowledge from and the support by organisations in the West to organisations in developing countries was what we believed capacity building to be. We no longer want such a one-sided relationship. Instead, we are becoming increasingly aware of the value of strengthening each other's organisations. We form partnerships and replace hierarchical donor-recipient relationships with horizontal networks consisting of several parties. What does mutual capacity building look like? We asked Nazmul Bari, director of the Centre for Disability in Development (CDD) in Bangladesh, and Lieke Scheewe, programme coordinator at Dutch partner organisation Light for the World. They say that cooperation becomes much more relevant when parties learn from and with each other.

Relevant strengthening of capacity

Bari claims that capacity building is not simply a package of standard interventions. Not all organisations need to achieve the same capacity. 'Building capacity effectively requires, first of all, that receiving organisations can specify what is currently lacking. Organisations do not always know that. An organisation needs to have a clear understanding of its objectives: what does it want to achieve and what is the best way to do this? Only then can it determine which capacity is needed and if enough capacity is present in the organisation. 'Such an analysis is required to flesh out the capacity building, but they are carried out only sporadically.' Bari laughs: 'When we began our organisation we had no idea of our strengths and weaknesses. Of course, we did have a strategy and we did have projects. Carrying these out was simply our priority. Our organisation grew rapidly, and then we reached the point where reflection came into play: did we have sufficient capacity to handle the expanding portfolio? We asked ourselves the question if we had enough expertise to manage this.'

'The Dutch organisation Light for the World helped us to answer these questions. They were very experienced in the fields of organisation development and learning together.' Bari admits: 'Maybe their expertise existed equally well in Bangladesh, but we did not know where to look for it. And we had been working with Light for the World for a long time.'

A number of consultation rounds followed. 'Light for the World gave us complete freedom to articulate our needs and expectations. We discussed our shortcomings and they helped us reflect on what kind of support would be needed to overcome these. This process was of great value in getting a clear idea of where we want to be in fifteen years. And we are working on it now! Light of the World has given us much organisational support, but they are not the only ones with whom we cooperate. In each case, we determine the specific support we need and look for the party or the consultant who is best suited to give us that support.'

Mutual capacity building

For Light of the World, too, much has changed in the last few years. Their cooperation with CDD made the organisation reflect on its own practice. Scheewe explains: 'We used to have project-based relations with our partners. We funded specific projects, which in the case of CDD were mostly projects related to eye care.' 'CDD was a critical partner from the very beginning. They pointed out to us that our focus on eye care was actually very one-dimensional. In their opinion, the environment of the individual suffering from visual impairment affects their quality of life at least as much as efforts to improve their vision. For example, the way teachers teach and how the environment treats the children. This changed the way we see disability and how we think about inclusion.'

'This feedback resulted in us redefining our target group, our vision and our mission. Our focus went from eye care to general disability while pushing for inclusive communities,' says Scheewe.

Scheewe comes up with another example of learning mutually and learning together: 'Before MFS had started, CDD and our management were having talks and it was decided to form a strategic partnership. We share a similar vision and they were perfectly placed to manage all partnerships in Bangladesh. This has developed into a yearly partnership evaluation to systematically evaluate what goes well and what we learn from each other, which things we would like to develop together, et cetera.'

Bari feels that their partnership is based on parity: 'We had an opportunity to provide direct input into the strategy of Light for the World. Our director had been invited to take part in strategy debates. We as well as other partners were also invited when other strategy debates took place and when it was Light of the World's own turn to be evaluated. This approach ensures equal capacity strengthening.'

However, we must also be aware of the need for internal exchange of information based on parity.

Bari asserts: Organisation analysis really requires a group process. The capacity of an organisation depends on the people the organisation is made up of. We used to make the mistake that two or three individuals at the top of the organisation decided on what was needed. However, others in the organisation began to complain and asserted that they considered the lack of communication a major problem. In their opinion, the management showed a lack of transparency. A big meeting was held and we identified our needs and our questions. The outcome was surprising: our conclusion was that a reorganisation was required. First of all, the management needed to be shared with more people. Since then it has not been just senior staff coordinating our meetings and discussions, this is a role that now rotates among all staff members. We also discovered that not all capacity needed was present in-house. Could we give training to our staff, or should we recruit new staff?'

He continues: 'Now, when we cooperate with partners, we build in a learning method from the very beginning. We used to evaluate our partners on the basis of some general lessons learned. Now, we analyse our cooperation experiences together and determine what needs to be improved.'

First we consider the relation between stronger capacity and better results. Before stronger capacities translate into better results, a lot of processes take place. For instance, an organisation may improve its financial system, its leadership model, or its use of existing knowledge. The basic assumption is that this improves the design and the execution of new projects. This may also apply to existing projects, but once they are running it is difficult to change their course. Changes need to take place in the entire organisation as well. A time-lag will therefore often occur between strengthened capacity and better results, which means that it only makes sense that in the two years in which capacity was strengthened no improvement of results could immediately be observed. The evaluators themselves acknowledge this.

A more fundamental question is how to actually define capacity. Is it correct to say that capacity is just a means to achieve results? And how then shall we define these results? Are they the objectives that were determined at the moment the project was designed? Or could it be that an organisation is able to respond flexibly to changes in its environment? However, the position that the existence of strong organisations is an objective in itself can also be defended. A strong organisation can act as a counter force that can have its voice heard where necessary; it represents people and brings them together to shape a society; it represents values that strengthen such a society and give it its value. An organisation which only focuses on good project implementation and getting the best results from these projects risks to develop into a project machine that has little connection with people, lacks public support and is no longer able to raise a critical voice. This does not mean that achieving results or good project implementation is not important, but it is a very narrow vision if this is what the vision on the organisation is all about.

A third question that can be raised is if the thinking on strengthening capacity in the MFS grant framework, and consequently in the evaluation as well, could be considered to be a symptom of an outdated paradigm, the so-called 'aid chain'. In this model, it is 'us' that need to strengthen 'their' capacity over and over again, and a possible lack of results is always evidence that our efforts to strengthen capacity are still direly needed. This model teaches partner organisations most of all to obediently put our ideas into practice, thus tearing them apart from their own supporters. After many years of strengthening capacity one would expect that enough capacity has been built up. This is indeed often the case, and that is one of the reasons why in countries funds are made available directly. This has led to the progressive introduction of a newer and more relevant paradigm, in which cooperation is embedded in networks and alliances and in which each organisation, of whatever origin, makes contributions that serve the common purpose best. Achieving results thus becomes a responsibility of each organisation and strengthening capacity turns into a process that can take place among all organisations. The above story illustrates this point.

Shall we stop or shall we continue?

Grant frameworks and funding often have a close horizon, often too close to observe long-term changes. Many organisations, however, tend to attach great importance to continuity and long-term partnerships. This raises the question if ending funding implies ending the relationship with a partner.

Interview with Rina Molenaar

'Creating a beautiful legacy together'

Shall we stop or shall we continue? Is long-term solidarity important, or will the announcement that funding is going to be withdrawn be a positive trigger point for your partner? These are questions to which Rina Molenaar, a board member at Woord en Daad ('Word and Action'), knows all the answers.

When we meet in her spacious room in the office of protestant development organisation Woord en Daad in Gorinchem, the Netherlands, Rina has just returned from a business trip to India. Coincidence or not, the topic we discuss today is exactly what her trip was about. Molenaar opens the conversation with the remark that Woord en Daad 'ranks long-term relationships very highly'. 'We are an organisation that believes in investing in partners. When we start a relationship based on cooperation we agree that we need to get to know each other first. Are there any norms and values we have in common? Do we have a similar vision of international development? Does what is written in reports reflect what is actually put in practice? In this way you reach conclusions on how you can build things in a country together.

This agreement is the basis for long-term cooperation agreements. Which is not the same as saying that both parties then start operating on automatic pilot. The organisation at times decides to get a third party involved as a means to shake things up a little. Molenaar mentions Haiti as a case in point. 'We have been there for over 25 years now. After the earthquake we wanted to give vocational training a new start, but we noticed that our existing partners did not respond well. The interim director of one of our organisations was an entrepreneur and involved in a '100,000 jobs' plan. This attracted our attention and we wanted to join in. We challenged our existing partner to join this plan as well.'

In the last few years, Woord en Daad has put increased focus on assessing needs on national and regional levels. 'We have taken a certain distance from our partner's perspective, and now look at things from the context of the country. If you look at what is needed through the eyes of partner organisations, you end up feeding them instead of identifying what is needed in their community. It drives your look inwards, while Woord en Daad wants to challenge its partners to look outwards and see what is happening around them.'

New forms of cooperation

In the development sector, Woord en Daad has the reputation of being one of the most hands-on organisations. Skills and know-how are very important to the organisation, which moreover refuses to get mixed up in hypes of any kind. This approach is possible because the organisation has a stable financial situation, which in turn is the result of its large pool of supporters. Since 2011 Woord en Daad has worked with regional alliances, in which five-year objectives are agreed upon each time. The different way of cooperating with partners fits in this new approach. India provides a good example. Molenaar explains: ‘In India, we are in the process of taking leave of our partner financially. We are not ending the relationship, but are investigating if we could become mutual knowledge partners.’

This was not an easy decision. ‘Our announcement in 2011 that we were going to cut back financial support came as a great shock to our partner. How is this possible, they thought, isn’t Woord en Daad one of us? It took about two years before the penny had finally dropped. But on this trip I noticed that some very promising things were happening. Much more than in the past they are now the owners of their own organisation, and they have embarked on fundraising activities on their own. The spoke about a ‘mindset change’ and thought that the time had really come for rich Indian business people to take action.’

South Africa provides another example. ‘We ended the financial aid to our partner, who worked in the fields of vocational training and health care. They managed to obtain a grant from USAID which they use for their own capacity building. They did that very successfully. They have turned into an organisation that supplies services to the government and is completely independent financially. My colleague Jan Lock went to South Africa recently to officially take leave and now it was his turn to be challenged. Our former partner organisation said: ‘We are a member of a network and you might be interested.’ We are still travelling to South Africa, but now with the purpose of sharing and exchanging knowledge, while we always look out for opportunities where they could mean something to all our other African partners. These are examples of other forms of cooperation, where partners stay partners but without the financial relation.

A beautiful legacy

Molenaar thinks it is essential that partner relationships are ended correctly. At an international conference in Berlin last year, the Netherlands received heavy criticism for the sudden way it had ended development relations. 'We always cut back step by step,' says Molenaar. 'We have built in in a nine-year transitional period for our partner in India. We are lucky to have a large financial income, raised by our own supporters, and that we do not depend on, for instance, the Dutch government. We never terminated a relation with an organisation just because our own income fell short of expectations. In Thailand, too, we helped a partner to become independent step by step. We introduced them to other donors, such as the government and the business sector. That is how we define partnership: creating a beautiful legacy together. It is a fine experience to embark on this process with our partners and witness how they pick up ownership.'

During the interview, a meeting with representatives of a partner organisation from Bangladesh takes place one floor below us. 'Yesterday, the attendants discussed the vision, the mission and the target group, and why this particular target group,' says Molenaar. 'We start with in-depth discussions and widely exchange views on substantive matters. Only then do we move on to the financial aspects. This is quite different from starting out with an Excel sheet and fixing a budget. These are lessons one learns from being in partnerships and approaching partners in new ways. For instance, we always say to our partners that they should not start a frantic fundraising campaign before working out the details of their programmes. It is much better to have a look at the scope of the programme first and determine the exact objectives together with your partners.

Warming up to the subject, Rina Molenaar gives one example after the other of different relationships with partners. 'I recently visited two companies, and the first thing I told them was that I did not need a penny from them. All I wanted was access to their

What the evaluation tells us

The evaluation is ambiguous on this point. Projects with a duration of more than four and a half years produce better results than projects with a shorter duration. This applies to the design, the implementation, results achieved and the relevance of the project. The evaluators explain that this outcome is self-evident, because most projects concern complex processes of change, which moreover take place in a challenging context. In that situation, long-term investments are more effective. Some findings point in another direction, networks in India and South Africa and permission to link it to our partner organisation. Companies like that very much, because this strengthens their networks there. For this approach to work, our own people need to be able to introduce elements of entrepreneurship into their work. We recruit very different people now than we did ten years ago, and our work has become much more project-based. Our people are not only responsible for the content, they also need to be able to identify market opportunities. Building networks and programmes has become a larger part of work than writing project proposals and monitoring if they are implemented in line with the rules.'

To conclude, what is her dream for the future? 'I'd like to see that partner organisations themselves decide whether they want you or not. At a recent conference, we challenged our partners to put us on the spot and play their role with more self-confidence. Also, partner organisations are becoming more critical. We are no longer donors, but rather we form a network together. Look at our partners in South America, they are a good example. We provide feedback on their multiannual plans. If they want to increase the quality of their plans, they can hire a Woord en Daad expert to provide assistance. They do need to pay us a fee for that. We provide a detailed breakdown of the cost. We challenge them to find a local expert who meets the required quality standards but might actually be cheaper. This helps us to remain relevant and maintain our added value. Our partner in Nicaragua received a quote from us and he responded in a much more business-like manner than before. He wanted to pay us for three hours and clearly specified what he wanted us to get done in those three hours. This is quite a different way of thinking, with chunks of entrepreneurship on the way.'

however. Several times the end to funding, or rather the announcement that funding was going to come to an end, was mentioned as an important cause for further capacity building by receiving organisations, such as organisations in India and Liberia.

First reflections

A lot of criticism concerns the short terms of policy makers and grant frameworks. Development and change require endurance. Existing programmes are often supported by successive funding arrangements. When the end of a funding arrangement has come, it is common practice to look for a source of funding that will accept a renewed proposal and so ensure the continuation of the programme along existing lines. The new proposal will be tweaked to match the conditions, preferences, language and style of the new source of funding, but the substance of the strategy remains unaltered.

The evaluators, however, note that if we look at things from an organisational level rather than from programme level, the renewal of financial arrangements may take place too easily and too automatically. The continuity of funding is ensured anyhow and it is the long term that counts, so efforts to adjust and improve remain minimal. So despite the negative views on cutting down and ending funding, the withdrawal of funds does in some cases result in organisations being shaken up and taking more responsibility for their own future. So, withdrawing funding is not always equal to destruction of capital, but can actually lead to new initiatives. And maybe a partner relationship can be much more substantive and balanced when funding is no longer part of that relationship, although this requires an added value that exceeds the flow of money.

Similarly, the question is justified whether the current day and age rather require flexible forms of cooperation, with different parties and different roles, depending on the changing situation, and in which the direction of the flows of money is not predetermined. Or, on the contrary, in the context of ever faster changes, could it be important to go for long-term involvement and long-term relationships and funding arrangements between organisations? And if cooperative and financial arrangements are eventually to come to an end – be it on purpose or not – does it then make any difference how this end is implemented? What is good partnership in such a situation? The case discussed above is the story of a long-term partnership in which the announcement that funding was going to be ended had a positive effect.

3 Civil society

Introduction

Strengthening civil society was one of the main goals of the MFS grant framework. The civil society is the space existing between families, public sector and private sector. Their interests are promoted by individuals, groups and organisations filling this space. If the players who fill this space are strong, they can become a critical counterpower to public or private sector, and encourage positive values such as solidarity and equality. The question was if the efforts by Dutch organisations have contributed to a stronger civil society.

To answer this question, the evaluation used the *Civil Society Index*, a framework developed by CIVICUS, the international alliance for citizen participation (for the five dimensions of this index, see text box at the right). CIVICUS uses this tool to assess the power of civil society in various countries.

The five dimensions of the CIVICUS Index:

1. Getting citizens involved
2. Level of organisation
3. Values in practice
4. Noticeable impact
5. External environment

This section of the evaluation is quite complicated: civil society is defined as the totality of groups and organisations promoting interests that they may or may not have in common with other groups and organisations, but the evaluation focuses on individual organisations, asking questions such as how are their relations with citizens, are they well organised, and do they put positive values into practice? As a consequence of this approach, a series of 76 reports about specific organisations was produced. The reports describe in great detail how the organisations had contributed to changes in the civil society that surrounds them: changes in networks, labour unions, groups, committees and within the organisations themselves as they are a part of civil society as well.

The most important conclusion is that external factors, such as the law or the degree of stability, have a much larger impact on these changes than the actions of an individual organisation. In an environment open to social change and with room for activities of organisations, it is easier to contribute to change. This openness is currently declining. This is the first issue that this chapter will explore in-depth.

Next, the effects of working with groups, the smallest form of civil society, were studied. Sometimes working with groups is a way to achieve economic or other objectives, and sometimes working with groups is a goal in itself as it contributes to a stronger civil society.

Finally, this chapter will discuss working in alliances. All of the Dutch organisations who received MFS grants needed to form alliances. Sometimes, this idea was exported to partner organisations. The question to be answered is if organisations formed alliances to successfully apply for funds, or if alliances created an added value that lasted beyond the duration of the grant framework.

Freedom of action

In many countries, the space in which civic organisations may perform their work is increasingly curbed. Organisations handle this reduced freedom of action in a variety of ways. The evaluation provides some handles for further reflection.

What the evaluation tells us

Six of the eight country reports describe how the room civic organisations have to play their role has become smaller. In many cases, laws ostensibly designed to fight terrorism and corruption were passed, which led to a stronger 'regulation' of the activities of organisations. This sounds good, but in practice it often means an increased obligation to write reports, a ban on certain activities, increased checks and bureaucratic or legal harassment and delays, while holding meetings becomes subject to approval.

For instance, in Pakistan these laws meant that international organisations had to go to great lengths to get permission to remain. In India, they meant that the activities of organisations aiming to bring about change in industry sectors where important interests are at stake are closely monitored. In Bangladesh, organisations find it difficult to not get involved in political strife, which is often accompanied by violence.

The best-known example is Ethiopia, where organisations receiving more than 10 per cent of their income from abroad are not allowed to propose or influence national policies. Furthermore, organisations are required to spend at least 70 per cent of their budget directly on their target group and no more than 30 per cent on operational costs and activities to strengthen capacity.

Freedom of action

The evaluation concludes that the playing field for organisations in civil society is shrinking. CIVICUS found that the space for counter forces became smaller in over one hundred countries in the last year. How do organisations respond to these developments? Which strategies do they use and how can Dutch organisations support them? Two organisations share their experiences and ideas with us.

Fighting for human rights in Sudan
Finding democratic answers to Sudan's deep-rooted conflicts was the mission of the Al-Khatim Adlan Centre for Enlightenment and Human Development (KACE). Since 2007, the work of education centre KACE has involved conflict analysis, conflict solution and cultural reform. We are meeting with the founder and director of the organisation, **Albaqir A. Mukhtar**.

Al-Khatim Adlan Centre for Enlightenment and Human Development (KACE)
'KACE was called after Al-Khatim Adlan, one of Sudan's most important political activists and a liberal thinker. He inspired many people, especially young people,' says Mukhtar. 'Most of all,' he adds softly, 'he was a good friend of mine. We were both asylum seekers living in London and for six years we both worked for Amnesty International. In 2005, he died of cancer quite suddenly. By sad coincidence, his death occurred just after the Sudanese peace treaty had been signed.'

Mukhtar then became a senior fellow at the United States Institute of Peace. But in 2007, he decided that he wanted to return to Sudan and devote himself to his country there. 'I wanted to return to Sudan and set up a centre devoted to peace. I called the centre after Adlan. Adlan used to say that it is not possible to reach peace by waging war. He called on the population to embrace a culture of radical change. "All great nations," said Adlan, "have learned from their experiences. They advanced not by waging war but by finding solutions for internal differences between groups in their countries. We must learn from the past and make rules for living together that make those differences irrelevant to our lives." The philosophy of the centre is based on his mental legacy,' Mukhtar continues. 'We promote peace, democracy and diversity.'

Promoting peace
'We engaged in a wide range of activities. We held workshops on the background of the crises in Darfur and

South Kordofan. But we also fought for women's rights and access to education. For instance, we ran a campaign aiming to soften the discriminatory character of the school curriculum and to make schools accessible to a wider population. We suggested a curriculum based on multiculturalism. We also set up a youth parliament and we trained young people as defenders of human rights. And in 2010 we played an important role in the process of monitoring the elections.'

'In five years, KACE developed into a major centre praised nationally and abroad. There were three staff members when we began and ended up having a staff of sixteen plus ten fulltime volunteers. We ran a cinema, we published dozens of books and everybody felt welcome in our centre, irrespective of their ethnical background or economic status. Also, quite often professors and intellectuals from other countries came to visit us to give lectures and do research.'

On 31 December 2012, a delegation of the Humanitarian Aid Commission of the Sudanese government rushed into the KACE offices. Mukhtar was told that KACE had been removed with immediate effect from the list of approved non-governmental organisations allowed to work in Sudan. So, forced by the government, Mukhtar had to close his centre overnight.

A government feeling threatened

'In 2010, KACE put up a coalition of over one hundred civic organisations to monitor the elections. All in all, we managed to recruit 3,200 observers and with their videos and photos we were later able to report all irregularities.' Mukhtar continues, 'This did not please the government. The security services of the state began to harass us. They had cunning ways to do so and proceeded with care. They began to harass us with questions such as, "Why do you receive so many foreign guests?" Our centre was indeed popular with foreign leaders, embassies and international organisations. "Why do you welcome howaidas, white people?", they asked us. Next, they offered their services as security guards during events and film screenings. We declined their offer politely. But their questions grew more insistent and they watched us ever more closely.'

'In 2011, the referendum on the independence of South Sudan took place. The government was totally unprepared, as they had been convinced they could talk our southern neighbours out of this referendum. But they couldn't, and South Sudan seceded.'

'This has brought us back to square one in terms of development. The government has fallen back on very conservative principles and has banned all other ways of thinking. It claims that Sudan is an Arab country, and in this country we want the pure Islam. The leaders introduced a strict form of sharia. Moreover, immediately after South Sudan's secession they closed all newspapers and banned all activities with regard to democracy, human rights and multi-ethnicity. After 2012, they began to issue more and more prohibitions, up to a ban on social events.'

What now

Mukhtar continues, 'When I realised that the government was really after us, I opened a regional office in Kampala. That proved to be a good move, because when in December 2012 they unexpectedly closed the centre, they took everything with them: computers, materials, and the little money that was still on our account in Khartoum. So, from Kampala we now try to continue to train and educate young people. Which is not simple. We are trying to bring Sudanese young people to Uganda for training activities. Our work to involve the Sudanese diaspora in activities in the region is another example.

We launched an online newspaper to inform people. On Youtube, I host a talk show followed by tens of thousands of Sudanese. Through the surveillants we had trained in Sudan, we are still able to conduct opinion polls and report on them. And my former colleagues have set up an IT training centre and are now educating people from Khartoum's disadvantaged districts on how to set up their own film clubs.'

A bleak future

Mukhtar sighs, 'To me it is as if Sudan is in the Middle Ages. Since South Sudan seceded, the government discourse is religious conservative. They marginalise minorities, and discriminate against women. The leaders, the media and the imams even promote polygamy. They firmly believe that men have more rights than women. It is disgusting,' he says angrily. 'We even have a law giving every public officer the right to arrest and bring up before the court women who he deems to be dressed indecently. And these women are then sentenced to forty lashes. Official statistics show that in Khartoum alone 480,000 women were punished in 2011. In other words, almost half a million women were battered with lashes. So truly, as far as I am concerned, the years from 1998 to now are the Sudanese Middle Ages.'

A meaningful role for Dutch organisations

'Everybody knows about the degrading situation in Sudan,' says Mukhtar. 'International organisations can help us by pushing their governments to put pressure on the Sudanese government to protect the freedom of speech and the freedom of association, as the Sudanese government is dependent on aid from the EU and from Saudi Arabia.' With emphasis, he says, 'I really think the international community does too little. I think aid should be dependent on the extent to which governments protect human rights.'

'I also think that the donor community could be more flexible in their support of civil society in Sudan. The rules for fundraising should be adapted. For instance, my organisation, KACE, continues its work underground, but we cannot request support because we do not have a valid registration. Fortunately, we have an office in Uganda and receive support from organisations with whom we have had a working relationship for years, such as Cordaid, PAX and the Prins Clausfonds.'

Environmental activism under fire

Vladimir Slivyak, a Russian, devotes his life to environmental activism. He is a lecturer of Environmental Policies at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, the author of books and articles about nuclear energy and member of the board of the Nuclear Information and Resource Service (NIRS), a network of antinuclear activists. Twenty-five years ago, he founded Ecodefense, an organisation devoted to a healthy environment and to inform the common citizen on this issue.

'Our focus is on nuclear energy, the coal mining industry, and sometimes gas and oil,' says Slivyak. 'We began in Kaliningrad, a Russian exclave on the Baltic Sea, surrounded by Poland and Lithuania. But soon we understood we needed to expand our work territory. People in Russia are ill-informed about the environment and climate change. Our government disregards these issues. Things here are not like in Europe, where they are a hot topic everywhere.'

Over the last few years, Slivyak's organisation has increasingly been facing challenges. The Russian authorities are not happy with Ecodefense and they make this abundantly clear.

Shrinking space

'We activists in Russia had our best days from 1999 until 2001, when there was room for having your voice heard. Starting 2001, this freedom has diminished. In that year, Putin had been in power for two years and he then began to change the political climate, little by little. Over the fifteen years that he has been in power, the room for free speech has only gone down. Public life is more and more controlled by the state.'

'Not only does the government control civil society, it also controls the business sector. Our political system has many elements characteristic of fascism or dictatorships. For Ecodefense, Putin is the Russian version of Pinochet. The average Russian has been brainwashed, it's really true. State propaganda is everywhere, even more so after the war with Ukraine broke out. We are going through the most severe economic crisis after the Soviet Union, but state propaganda does what it can to draw attention away from this problem and turn people's focus towards issues such as Syria and Ukraine.'

'The authorities hate us with a passion, because we obstruct major government projects and reveal the truth. Our situation is different from that in Europe, where, with the exception of France, nuclear plants are in the hands of private investors. In Russia, they are state property. So when we campaign against nuclear energy, we are campaigning directly against the government.'

Working in a challenging context

'In 2012, they introduced the Foreign Agents Act. Putin believed that the West had funded demonstrations against him. Since then, any politically active organisation receiving money from abroad has had to register as a "foreign agent'. The term "foreign agent" is not neutral; it originated in the Stalinist period. In those days, a foreign agent was the same thing as a traitor. If the judge decided that you were a foreign agent, you would generally be sentenced to death.'

'The organisations classified as foreign agents must mention this on their website and in their publications. They are placed under heightened supervision. As a result, nobody wants to cooperate with them anymore, because they all fear that they will be watched as well. The fines for dodging this regulation are considerable: some 7,000 euros, or even imprisonment for NGO staff.'

Slivyak continues, 'Since 2014, not the judge but the Ministry of Justice has had the authority to designate an organisation as a foreign agent. Our organisation is one of the 65 so-called foreign agents in Russia. This status challenges our work, because not a single public official is permitted to work with us. Moreover, the government has started a series of court cases against us. Since 2014, there have been fifteen of them. That has cost us a lot of time and money.'

'We have always greatly benefited from our international network. We gained substantive knowledge, but we also shared ideas on strategy and campaigning. The fight against nuclear energy is an international fight, and most certainly so from the financial point of view. We have lost a lot of money on court cases and support is now very welcome, for instance to make a new start with our members' magazine.'

The evaluation reveals that some organisations have managed to handle these limitations in a satisfactory way. The projects of other organisations, however, faced major delays resulting from all kinds of red tape, and sometimes organisations were actively thwarted. It would appear that organisations whose objectives are partly or wholly tangible, for instance in agriculture or education, are less frustrated by the imposed restrictions. In Ethiopia, many projects work with relatively small groups and aim to bring about social change. Unlike the organisations themselves, these groups can in some instances talk to the government and stand up for their rights. The organisations remain silent or restrict themselves to constructive dialogue.

First reflections

The shrinking space for organisations in civil society that the evaluation mentions is no new development. CIVICUS publishes yearly reports about the state of civil society and has observed for the past nine consecutive years in a row that this space is becoming smaller. In more than one hundred countries, in all parts of the world, it observes mounting pressure, often from the political powers, but also from the private sector or from religious extremism. In the worst case, human rights advocates are threatened or even killed. Simultaneously there are all kinds of developments, especially in the space occupied by citizens and their organisations: from the response to the Ebola crisis in West Africa, in which civic organisations played a crucial role, to bottom-up peace initiatives in Central Africa and populist and other movements against governments and their leaders.

A first point getting a lot of reflection is how to respond to measures fighting terror. One of the most important reasons to restrict the room for civic organisations is the so-called ‘war on terror’. When the terror threat is real, this creates support for imposing legal and financial restrictions on organisations. The question is if the negative consequences this has for civic organisations are fully unintentional, or if the ‘war on terror’ is used as a cover-up for efforts to restrict the room for critical organisations.

If the freedom of organisations is reduced, this may lead them to shift their focus from bringing about social change to providing for basic needs. Organisations whose activities are in the service sector meet with less obstacles than projects or organisations who play the watchdog role or act as a thorn in the side of the authorities. CIVICUS reports that the available funds are increasingly oriented towards the service sector, and in this context it mentions the strategic partnerships *Samenspraak en tegenspraak*[1] as a positive exception. This raises the question which is the more sensible thing to do: either play an openly critical role to push for more freedom and try to find political allies to change the rules, or turn the focus to the provision of practical services and use this position to develop an insider strategy and get access to policy makers with whom issues can be discussed and so increase the space in which they can operate. Ethiopia provides an example of how government reacted to voices from civic organisations: it relaxed the rules with regard to the maximum authorised operational costs of 30 per cent, and training sessions may now also be entered as project costs.

Organisations, however, that explicitly focus on social change or change of structures have an alternative. The evaluation shows that many of the organisations in Ethiopia that were evaluated worked with small groups on village and community level. This often includes constructive dialogues with lower government levels. Such dialogues are sometimes initiated by the organisation, but more often by the groups of citizens with whom the organisation is working. This too can be a way to bring about positive change.

Working with groups

Almost all projects and programmes work with groups. These groups come in all shapes and sizes. Some groups existed, and some groups are formed. Is it exactly this multitude of groups that defines the power of civil society? And what are the benefits of working with these groups?

What the evaluation tells us

Many projects work with people in groups. There is a nearly endless variety in the types of groups mentioned in the studies: groups against AIDS, girl groups, villages groups on children's rights, support groups for HIV positive people, all kinds of savings groups and self-help groups, farmers cooperatives small and large, parents groups, literacy groups, education groups, participation groups at schools, groups to encourage the washing of hands, groups to maintain water pumps, groups to look after forests, peace committees, women's solidar-

1 'Dialogue and Dissent', see https://www.government.nl/documents/decrees/2014/05/13/dialogue-and-dissent-strategic-partnerships-for-lobby-and-advocacy

ity groups, lobby groups, village development committees and much more. In many cases, these groups were formed as a part of the intervention. Sometimes, organisations work primarily with existing groups, such as the Ethiopian idirs (traditional groups whose members deposit money and then use it).

Projects dealing with issues in the context of the Millennium Development Goals were mostly evaluated by comparing their effects on individuals. The results were mostly positive, but sometimes negative. It is difficult to establish the added value of working with groups. Occasionally, the way people thought about the functioning of groups was studied, for instance in the case of parents and teachers at schools in Uganda. In Ethiopia, the effect of a series of village meetings about the rights of children and women was tested by using clever ways to ask questions about sensitive subjects. The effect of these group conversations turned out to be positive.

Specific studies into civil society do indeed look into the way groups that organisations had worked with had changed, but do not have much to say on the effects this change had on the individual members of these groups. Many of these studies look in great detail into the mechanisms that contributed to positive change. In India, for example, it appeared that cooperatives formed by female farmers obtained better access to the market. Not only the project had contributed to this result, the demand for organic produce did so too. In Ethiopia, an organisation worked with support groups for people with HIV and AIDS. These groups aimed at increasing their members' income, for instance through the small-scale sale of items. Training programmes and the provision of starting capital contributed to their success. These groups contributed positively to the integration of people with HIV/AIDS into society, which was indeed an objective, but a positive economic outcome was to be attributed to people taking up work as day labourers.

First reflections

The model of cultural differences by Geert Hofstede is well-known. In one of the five dimensions suggested in this model, individualism is opposed to collectivism. The Netherlands scores high on individualism. The eight countries where the evaluations took place are rather more collectivistic. Even so, or precisely for this reason, many Dutch organisations have adopted working with and through groups as a key strategy. Someone from a rural community in Benin even said, 'NGOs do not know the individual, just the group.' The finding is somewhat sur-

Working with groups: the success formula from the Netherlands

In the Dutch development cooperation sector, working with groups is the prevailing approach. We asked Director Irene Visser of the Netherlands-African Business Council and Director Kees Blokland of Agriterra about their experience. 'In countries with well-developed associations, the gap between rich and poor is just that little bit smaller.'

At the beginning of our conversation, both emphasise that they are not representative of the NGO sector. But working with groups is a theme that is familiar to Irene Visser and Kees Blokland. The Netherlands-African Business Council (NABC) works with Dutch businesses who want to enter the African market. So it works with individuals. Arnhem-based Agriterra works to professionalise farmers' cooperatives in developing countries. So it works with groups. The conversation is only just under way when it becomes apparent that the situation is not so black and white. On the contrary, Visser sees advantages of entrepreneurs entering into an association, while Blokland emphasises that the members of the cooperatives supported by Agriterra are born entrepreneurs, every single one of them.

Setting the ball rolling, Blokland says, 'We work with organisations which existed before we arrived and which will continue to exist after we are gone. Our only contribution is to strengthen them.' Nodding, Visser says, 'In Africa, we always join existing organisations, such as investment promotion agencies, chambers of commerce, and sector associations of local companies. When I worked in Africa I often heard the term "donor fatigue". Some government departments spent more than 80 per cent of their time to reporting to the various donors, who all applied their own guidelines. This is not the way to achieve results. By the way, I do think that the donor community has become aware of this and that this is now changing.'

Both are, each in their own way, strong proponents of working with groups. In the recent evaluation of programmes under MFS2, the farmers' cooperative is mentioned as an example of the form a group can take. This is the type of organisation with which Agriterra works. Blokland, however, thinks that these cooperatives cannot be compared with the wide range of other groups mentioned in the evaluation. 'A cooperative is a company controlled by an association. It is a way to run a business that turns out to have certain advantages and attracts increasing attention worldwide, including in the Netherlands.'

The large agricultural cooperatives with which Agriterra works besides farmers' cooperatives often start study groups on expert knowledge about technology, fertilizers and seeds. They also join forces to acquire more power in the production chain. These organisations are important because together they are influential and able to promote the interests of the farmers,' explains Blokland. 'They ensure that the voice of the farmers is heard: by the policy makers and by anybody who plans activities in the country, even if it is only building a road.'

The need of group interaction

NABC is primarily concerned with promoting trade and investment relations between Dutch entrepreneurs and Africa. 'By encouraging and informing companies and by providing concrete support,' says Visser. The NABC director notices that Dutch entrepreneurs who want to enter the African market have a need for group interaction. 'This need is especially present with SMEs. Entrepreneurs know that Africa is the continent of opportunities. In Africa, there is still economic growth, there is land available, natural resources are plentiful – an entrepreneur has every reason to look towards Africa. But these entrepreneurs are also aware of the challenges. In the media, after all, Africa is often portrayed as the continent of Ebola, HIV and terrorism. As a result, entrepreneurs are often hesitant to take the first steps. They need to be given a leg-up. And that is why we offer group interaction.'

The NABC does so by organising trade missions and by bringing together entrepreneurs from similar sectors in the Netherlands and in the receiving countries. 'This gives entrepreneurs great encouragement,' says Visser. 'In a group, entrepreneurs encourage each other and begin to look for trade partners or a local agent they can share. Such things make the whole operation just that little bit easier. We also facilitate missions of African entrepreneurs to the Netherlands. Working with individual entrepreneurs is impossible to do. That is why we prefer to work with groups of African entrepreneurs, for instance from one region or sector, and arrange for them to visit the Netherlands. In turn, this may attract Dutch entrepreneurs to attend a seminar or a matchmaking event.'

The Netherlands, a country of associations

Blokland thinks it is no surprise that Dutch organisations tend to favour working in groups. 'There is not a single issue in the Netherlands which is not covered by some distinct organisation.

The Dutch have a strong tendency to form associations, in all shapes and sizes. It has always been Holland's recipe for success. It began one thousand years ago, when water authorities and guilds were founded. Indeed, the transition to the modern agricultural society took place after farmers took control and positioned themselves on the market as cooperatives. It is a worldwide phenomenon: countries where people form associations and associations from small to large abound are often developing into countries that attain a higher degree of democracy, with fewer differences between rich and poor.'

Blokland holds up South Korea as an example. This country has developed very fast by using cooperatives as a base. He has noticed that large Dutch companies do not operate as tactfully on the African markets as other foreign companies do. American multinationals in the coffee and cocoa sectors fit in with organised farmers and give them a place in the chain. The Dutch have a tendency to set up a production line or trading activity all by themselves and bypass organised agriculture as they believe this is the easier way. If they do this with money from the budget of the Ministry of Development Cooperation, I think this needs to be watched critically and that it is legitimate to subject these activities to certain conditions.'

Battleground or learning curve?

Visser has observed another trend, with companies and NGOs moving in each other's direction and needing to rely on each other, for instance in the case of the production of beer and the cultivation of staples such as sorghum and cassava. 'Companies feel the pressure from the consumer who wants to know the origin of the products they eat and drink. So it is important to run the production chain adequately, and NGOs have expertise in value chains that multinationals do not have. So multinationals see that cooperating with NGOs can be a positive thing.'

Blokland is not fully convinced. 'One shouldn't be overly idealistic,' he says. 'It is nothing less than a real battleground. It is easier said than done to bring together companies with commercial objectives and NGOs with social objectives. The business sector can exert considerable pressure. Development organisations need to play a critical role, right up to the boardrooms of the multinationals.'

Visser smiles. 'I don't think it is a battleground but rather a learning curve,' she says. In my view, multinational and companies going to Africa and aiming for durable success have no other option than to work together with local authorities, local business people and local organisations. Companies fully understand that finding markets is not enough and that they have to be prepared to enter into long-term investments projects. There has been a recent development of businesses investing in demonstration farms and providing training to local farmers. All parties need to be invited to the table, and they all need to be aware of their responsibilities. This is not a simple process, but a willingness to invest is the company's key to a successful future.'

prising, because more than once international cooperation has been accused of exporting western individualism.

Why do organisations seem to find working with groups so attractive? In village development projects, working with groups was an established strategy, but recently it received an impulse from working with microcredit in groups, with the groups' social capital being an economic advantage. Even more recent are the many self-help and savings groups; their emergence is sometimes referred to as the 'savings revolution' and these groups often fit in with more traditional forms of savings and credit groups. Working in groups often has positive outcomes, but they can also give rise to critical questions.

For instance, one might ask if the emphasis on groups comes at the expense of caring for the individual. Do cooperative groups aiming at economic development eventually not hit a ceiling and need a strong entrepreneur to further develop value chains? In the water sector, for instance, it was gradually understood that groups of well-meaning villagers are not necessarily the most effective keepers of water facilities.

Another question is if there is a limit to the number of groups that can be absorbed by a community. Likewise, what is the maximum number of groups an individual can be a member of if they also just have to earn an income? The man from Benin mentioned above said there was not only a general development committee in his village, but also development committees for every NGO operating in the area as well committees linked to specific projects and themes. The organisations had pushed this structure. He thought that this ensured that each organisation and each project were served in accordance with the organisations' strategies. The organisations believed that setting up these committees was an effective way for their work to bring about durable results. It raises the question whether a more critical approach might be needed before people are invited to participate in yet another group or yet another committee.

‘Substance rather than money’

Under Minister Koenders, ‘creating alliances’ was a MFS2 buzz phrase and any application for an MFS2 grant that did not contain this buzz phrase had practically no chance of being approved. Some alliances have now been dismantled, other organisations prefer to continue as an alliance even after government grants were withdrawn. In this respect, MFS2 was a trendsetter. We have a talk with Dicky Nieuwenhuis, who is the coordinator of a large alliance of disability organisations.

‘This has been a good month,’ was Dicky Nieuwenhuis’ feeling when the request by the Alliance for Disability-Inclusive Development to form a strategic partnership with Minister Ploumen was turned down on 30 January 2015. She had been on the payroll for exactly one month, having been hired to develop this alliance of the Liliane Fonds (‘Liliane Fund’), Leprastichting (‘Leprosy Foundation’), Light for the World and Karuna Foundation.

Nieuwenhuis had not experienced the stress involved in preparing this request, but she was seriously annoyed just the same. ‘I had had a good start and was really disappointed. I had read the request and did not think that the quality of the proposal alone was enough to receive a grant – it was not bad, but it was not among the best either. Nevertheless I believed we would get the grant, especially because we were a coalition. None of the organisations in the alliance had received substantial grants from the government; they are not the well-known co-financing organisations that have been part of the system for decades. They were a different type of organisations, having access to marginalised groups not or hardly reached by the ministry. I hoped that the ministry would award this request.’

She was asked to prepare a consultation with the presidents of the various supervisory boards. It was concluded that, despite general disappointment, everybody was firmly resolved to continue this alliance, even without financial support by the Dutch government. ‘At the time, the Netherlands were in the process of ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. This convention is an important benchmark for local and international organisations representing persons with disabilities. Development cooperation is part of this convention. So if we did not take advantage of the momentum to table this issue then, when would we? We also considered the rejection of the partnership as a sign that the ministry still had not understood the importance of this issue. I believe that the momentum was of more importance than a strategic partnership with the government. The issue itself was more important than the financial setback we would suffer. Maybe that is even more important. I would have been excited to be the one to set up consultations with the ministry. But then I thought again and concluded that the way things are now are maybe even more exciting: an alliance focused on substance and not on funds.'

What do parties contribute?

By now, the alliance has been running for about a year and a half. What do the various parties contribute to it? Nieuwenhuis works through the list. 'The Liliane Fonds,' she says, 'is the party that has the highest brand awareness. They also contribute their vast supporter base and a committed network in the Netherlands. In the South they are a real grassroots organisation, with a network that extends into the capillaries of society. Until a few years ago, the Liliane Fonds applied a one-on-one approach: helping children with a disability. The organisation is now in the process of moving towards a communal approach, with families, disabled people organisations (DPOs) and local governments.

Light for the World is an organisation built around expert knowledge. They primarily aim at mainstreaming the issues of disability and inclusion, similar to what is happening in the gender community. On the one hand, specific programmes are needed to remove hurdles faced by people with disabilities, and on the other hand, general programmes need to be made accessible to people with a disability. Light of the World provides training to governments, the education sector, companies and NGOs. The organisation is also skilled in influencing policies and they contribute an international network. They also know their way around the United Nations.

Next, the Leprastichting. Their background is again a completely different one; they are traditionally a primarily medical organisation. Their evidence-based work methods are their forte. All their programmes testify to this – they are usually based on thorough research. And they are good at combining this with working with local networks and authorities. Finally, the Karuna Foundation. This organisation is good at strengthening local health programmes. Their focus is to prevent the occurrence of disabilities and to strengthen the social networks of families of children and adults with disabilities.'

And how exactly do the parties cooperate? What do they do together and what do they not do together?

‘The agenda for influencing policies is an entirely joint activity,’ says Nieuwenhuis. ‘It is laid down in a year plan and implemented by a working group for lobbying. We also look for possibilities to develop joint learning agendas. We do so mostly through the ‘Leave no one behind’ platform, of which I am the president. Furthermore, we hold inspiration afternoons once a year with people from the various organisations sharing things they are proud of and from which others may learn. This creates a lot of positive energy. We are also forming stronger bonds with the disability sector in the Netherlands together. We notice that Dutch disability organisations often show respect for people with disabilities in developing countries. “What a fighting spirit they have,” they often tell us, “we in the Dutch sector can learn a lot from that.” We want to use our alliance to encourage this exchange and are drawing up plans to introduce our Ugandan partners and the Dutch movement to each other. Finally, in selected focus countries with many official Dutch development programmes, we are going to work hard and actively seek contacts with the embassies. We are going to approach a number of strong Southern partners in our network and set up a robust programme on policy influencing in order to find ways to ensure more inclusive embassy policies.’

Their own agenda

Let us now have a look at the passion and conviction that the various partners contribute. Each alliance, team or cooperative is as strong as the weakest link. ‘They all have their own agenda,’ says Nieuwenhuis. ‘Light for the World is also a member of the ICCO cooperative and it is part of an international network of its own. The Leprastichting is in the middle of the process of hiving off their country offices. That takes a lot of energy. Sometimes, this leads to interesting new developments. For instance, the office of the Leprastichting in Indonesia may become the strategic partner of the Liliane Fonds in that country. The Liliane Fonds is of course the largest organisation, and the one I deal with the most. I often work from their office in Den Bosch, but make conscious efforts to alternate this with working in Amsterdam (the Leprastichting office), Veenendaal (Light of the World) and Arnhem (Karuna Foundation). It cannot be helped that people sometimes say ‘you guys’ to me and think they are speaking to a Liliane Fonds representative. “I am not the Liliane Fonds,” I will respond. All in all, I believe that I have been able to maintain an independent position.’

Pitfalls and preconditions

Which are the alliance’s potential areas of tension and pitfalls? Nieuwenhuis thinks for a moment and then says, ‘Referring to my role as a coordinator, I believe that maintaining that independent position is crucial. You need to be very attentive to that. Sometimes competition crops up, when one party believes they are better than the other. Apart from that, we have had a clear agreement from the beginning that all partners bring up any issue of interest they may have, even if it is just a financial interest. Just say so, these are obvious and legitimate concerns. If you think you’ll be able to use the alliance to raise more funds, please say so, rather than pretending it is just about substance. This remains a complicated issue in an alliance, because all parties have their own interests and of course, there are moments that this results in irritations. We clearly pledged that this substantive agenda will be our driving force and that it is important to roll out this agenda towards the ministry and the sector, and to work with our international partners to push the agenda further. Meanwhile, our members obviously need income, too. Currently, no one has given me this concrete task, but I am curious how this is going to develop. I sometimes sense that the partners of the alliance have implicit expectations that the alliance is going to bring in money one day. But I will need a concrete task to make that come true.’

And then some words on the preconditions required for successful cooperation. ‘I believe confidence is a very important precondition,’ says Nieuwenhuis. ‘If there is no basic confidence in the people with whom you cooperate, the smallest mistake can be the beginning of growing mistrust. Investing in the alliance is another important condition. If you keep a hand on the purse strings, it complicates matters, because you will need a minimum capacity. If only for internal communication and to produce occasional newsletters. It is also important that the member organisations work to create internal support, because if that does not happen activities end up taking place in a vacuum. As a coordinator, it is one of my tasks to play an encouraging role in this respect, but it is not something I can do all by myself. There must be common ground and there must be clear objectives. If a cooperation is based on a vague idea that ‘things are so fragmented in the Netherlands so let’s work together”, it will not work. No, there has to be a narrative and the partners must share the idea that they are going to do a job with a beginning and an end.

And which are the requirements for a coordinator? ‘They should minimally have completed a journalistic education and have studied political science,’ jokes Nieuwenhuis, actually referring to her own background. But then, on a more serious note: ‘I believe you need to be sensitive to the nature of the mutual relations. In this alliance, the Liliane Fonds is the biggest party, both in terms of staff and financial volume. It is important not to make oneself subservient to their sole interests. On any issue, I need to be free to tell anybody, including the Liliane Fonds, that I do not agree with them. You also have to beware of not becoming a lone wolf. One sometimes sees that happen to coordinators of alliances. They are busy creating their own little empires and nobody knows what they are doing apart from them being very busy all the time. You have to connect but you must also maintain some degree of autonomy. Do the dirty work, but give responsibility to the organisations and make them the owners of the alliance. If not, the alliance ends up merely being the coordinator's playground. And when you are out of office for a week, nobody will remember the alliance ever existed.'

4 Tangible Results

Introduction

The objective of the MFS grant framework was to contribute to the millennium development goals (see text box) and to address two additional issues as well: fragile states and good management. The evaluation studied 57 projects contributing to these goals in eight selected countries. In all of these studies, the researchers attempted to demonstrate as clearly as possible how these projects had contributed to these goals. Most of the time, this involved taking measurements in control groups, and comparing the results of the first and last measurements in both the control group and intervention group. These factors combined led to conclusions concerning the difference a project had managed to make.

The projects were all very diverse in nature. For instance, the twenty projects working on the first millennium development goal (halving poverty) mainly involved agricultural practices, the business climate, market access, small companies and saving and credits. The size of the target groups of these projects varied from just over a hundred to tens of thousands of people. This diversity made it difficult for the evaluators to add up or even compare results of projects contributing to the same millennium development goal. In order to be able to compare the projects, the researchers gave marks to factors such as design, execution and results.

It is clear to the researchers that the Dutch organisations and their partners know what they are doing and are generally performing well. Based on the marks mentioned above, the programme can be deemed successful. The organisations achieve many of their objectives. Poverty reduction projects helped credit and savings groups or cooperatives to become financially stronger and

Millennium development goals 1 through 7:

1. To halve extreme poverty and hunger
2. To achieve universal primary education
3. To promote gender equality and empower women
4. To reduce child mortality
5. To improve maternal health
6. To combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. To ensure a sustainable environment for more people

gain solid footing on the market. In some cases, it could be shown that members had gained more food security or resilience during difficult times. Education projects helped to eliminate the learning deficit of disadvantaged groups. The evaluators saw better access to and a better quality of healthcare and an increased knowledge on matters of health. Some goals of the organisations had not been achieved by the end of the measurement period, however. In many cases, for example, no improvement of health could be demonstrated. Environmental projects, while having a good effect on the environment, encountered operational problems relatively often, and planting more trees often did not yield higher profits or incomes for those involved. Most projects concerned with improving management or stabilising a fragile region did not have any demonstrable effects. The measurement period was too short, or the scale too limited, for these ambitious projects.

Two subjects will be discussed further below. The first concerns working in fragile regions. According to the evaluation, these regions yield the most modest results. At the same time, the researchers indicate that the projects in these areas often are relevant. Secondly, we will discuss the issue of identifying which people are reached. The evaluation does not specifically cover the process of selecting target groups, but it does give a few interesting examples where results were achieved with certain specific groups.

Results in fragile regions

Working in fragile regions is difficult. It is much harder to achieve results than in a more stable and democratic society. Yet, interventions are often relevant for the people concerned. What role can organisations and their projects play in fragile regions?

What the evaluation tells us

Five projects in DR Congo and Liberia had set objectives concerning fragility and security, emancipation of women, agricultural development or business development. The projects concerned increasing mutual trust in the community or personal safety for women. None of the projects managed to achieve these objectives. Other objectives of the same projects were achieved slightly more often, but the results failed to be very convincing.

One example is a project in the east of DR Congo. This project was aimed at improving the economic position, the negotiating position and the security of women who had become victims of violence. The evaluation could find no proof that the project made any tangible difference in the context of these objectives. Nevertheless, the women told the researchers that the project had real meaning to them. The evaluators suggest that objectives concerned with fragility are too ambitious for individual organisations, and that it might be better to view fragility as an external factor, one which, by the way, makes achieving results much more difficult.

There were also projects without any objectives with regard to fragility, but that were based in areas suffering from conflicts, such as parts of Ethiopia, northern Uganda and DR Congo. The study shows that these projects also achieved markedly less results than those in countries where the context is much less fragile.

First reflections

Projects do not contribute much to reducing fragility and conflict, and such difficult environments in turn cause project objectives to be much more difficult to achieve. The forces keeping conflicts going are much stronger than the effects of a project that only lasts for a couple of years. Besides, the study shows that larger projects are generally more successful than smaller projects. They have more of an impact.

Yet, one would think that many small effects could eventually lead up to a turning point, and that an approach starting at the basis – the people – might be the only sustainable road to change in this context. Groups of women with improved social positions, groups of villages learning to deal with conflicts, people learning to deal with traumas, people getting a bit more income stability, people gaining more trust in each other through cooperation. Are these not the many small changes that eventually bring about a turning point, to be followed by the big change? If this is indeed true, this would be an argument for working with organisations that are close to people and communities, and to remain present even when the work appears to yield insufficient tangible results.

Despite the poor results, the researchers do indicate that the presence of organisations is relevant and has meaning to people. They do not recommend to leave and move to areas where results would be easier to achieve. This touches on a deeper issue: the value of presence as opposed to that of intervention. A presence implying that care is more important than cure and that room for the

Double interview with Ayaan Abukar and Jan Gruiters

Start at the bottom and keep on going

The evaluation shows that working in fragile states is very difficult. Why is this so? And how could you achieve results nevertheless? We asked two experts: political scientist Ayaan Abukar and PAX director Jan Gruiters.

The observation that projects in fragile states were the least successful in the entire MFS2 programme does not surprise them at all. 'Just consider the complexity we face in fragile societies,' Gruiters says. 'It really requires a long-term approach. In order to bring about any improvement, you need to think in terms of ten to fifteen years, or even entire generations. This evaluation covered two years and only studied a limited number of projects. I am not surprised that no major results were achieved. The international community overreached itself with regard to fragile states, and we civic organisations do not have a silver bullet either. I do believe that progress can be made if you adopt a long-term approach and work from the bottom up.

Abukar nods her agreement. 'You need long-term plans and a long-term vision,' she says. 'The quick fix approach most donors expect is at odds with the difficult circumstances you face when working in countries that recently were or still are in conflict. Attempting to achieve quick results there is far too ambitious. Besides, you need to be flexible. Big donors often require you to go through a checklist and conform to a certain template, but that is far too complicated in fragile states. You need a flexible approach and to get people from all ranks of society involved. You simply cannot do that in two years.'

We are talking in Gruiters' office in Utrecht. Gruiters has been the director of PAX since 2000 and comes from the peace movement. PAX has a big track record when it comes to working in fragile states. When Minister Lilianne Ploumen created the strategic partnerships in January 2015, PAX, Oxfam Novib, IuCN and Both ENDS were the only organisations to receive the highest 'A' mark for their application. Abukar is a political scientist specialised in migration and international security. Abukar also advised the Somali government, and advised the Somali Navy on founding its own coast guard. Our conversation quickly becomes fascinating and substantive, and work in fragile states is discussed in great depth. Abukar relates her experiences in Somalia to us. She is of the opinion that the donor community in Somalia approaches interventions in all the wrong ways. 'Donors just picked a few elements to focus on. They chose to invest mainly in better administration and in political processes. The reason for this is that the donor community required the new Somali government to organise free and fair elections within four years. However, this comes at the expense of matters such as education, economic growth and reconciliation.'

And that is not without its consequences. 'As a result, young Somali people are now attracted to terrorist organisations. In some regions, Al-Shabaab enjoys wide support from the local population, because they deliver basic services such as water and education in the regions they control. At the same time, the government, with the help of the donor community, spends all its resources on projects to do with federalism. The mindset is completely different. People want Al-Shabaab back because they dug wells and provided free water.'

Gruiters agrees: 'There is often a tragic mismatch in fragile states between what people want and what donors have to offer. That is a painful reality, even more so because other movements, with vastly different motives do manage to provide what the people want. This is not only the case with Al-Shabaab in Somalia, but also with Hamas and Hezbollah in the Arab and Palestinian world. It is very painful to see them filling the void that the departure of the international community has left.'

One of the themes of the conversation is the orientation towards the state versus one towards local communities and civic organisations. 'You are dealing with the donor community, which is a community of states,' Gruiters argues. 'They view the state as the most important starting point in the context of development interventions. This leads to a toolbox with tools such as democratisation and good governance. I believe that neither the state nor civic organisations are the key solution. Much more important is how to create a social contract between the local communities and the government – including the army and police – and get them to talk with one another about what they need from one another in order to bring about development and security. This method avoids the trap of working with governments of fragile states, which are often riddled with corruption and clientelism and mainly concerned about their own position of power. Researcher Alex de Waal once said that fragile states are a marketplace that accepts only two kinds of currency: violence and power. In such a context, focusing on the government is very dangerous.'

Additionally, Gruiters believes it is

important to strengthen people's claim making capacity. 'How to improve local people and communities' ability to bring about change in such a way that they become visible in the arenas where the decisions bearing on them are made? This is a vital question in our strategic partnership. We want to give people a better chance to be heard and to be heard in an organised way.'

Abukar adds, 'In Somalia, the principles of the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States are being followed. They are international agreements on how to build our efforts in fragile states. The country may indicate what it has need of, but everything is decided together with the donors. Local NGOs are involved, but it is almost always the usual suspects from civic organisations who are asked to contribute to such programmes. The organisations that are all but out of reach for the average person. A woman selling tomatoes on the streets of Mogadishu will never be aware of foreign interventions. When you are an EU development expert from Brussels, it is very hard to determine who, on the local level, is really innovative, and so it will be much more convenient to choose someone you saw at a conference in Nairobi or Addis Ababa. Searching for the right people must become a much more innovative activity.'

Gruiters says, 'You have to look very carefully for people who contribute to the cohesion of a community. Zoom in and cooperate with people who have authority at a local level. If this had been the focus of the MFS2 evaluation, it would definitely have shown positive results. For instance, the dozens of local peace agreements we settled in South Sudan have flown under the radar of the evaluation.'

The MFS evaluation states that no results have been found in fragile states at all. Gruiters does not agree. 'PAX only figures in the margins of the evaluation. Our programmes in fragile states have not even been looked at, which is disappointing in a way. Some aspects of our work are very interesting, but also very complex due to their long-term nature. For instance, we have been involved in researching an oil syndicate in South Sudan for the past ten years. This kind of process is invisible and and incompatible with MFS1 or MFS2 and with the perspective of an evaluator. Nevertheless, it is a very interesting issue.'

Abukar adds some examples from her own practical experience. 'An evaluator will view projects in a certain reference framework and test them according to the norms of that framework,' she says. 'Fragility is not a consideration in that context. Examples of fragility are weak institutions and fragmented societies. If you view projects in such a way, it is not very surprising not to find any project that achieved its objectives. Besides, in this type of countries it is very difficult to determine exactly what has been achieved. Perspective is a fundamental norm in the evaluation of fragile states. Who do you interview? What questions do you ask? The population of Mogadishu experiences more peace than it used to, but I still do not feel safe in the city and have to be escorted from A to B.'

Both Abukar and Gruiters believe that working in fragile states will only become more important in the future. Gruiters expects that 60 percent of the work done by development organisations will take place in fragile states, because 60 percent of the poor will be living in these countries. 'However, will they be able to adequately deal with conflict?' he wonders aloud. 'Will they consider those two currencies of violence and power? You have to think very carefully before entering that context with traditional development tools. The context is largely determined by these aspects of power.'

But support from an unexpected source seems to be on its way. Gruiters says, 'I have noticed that our soft approach of human security is increasingly shared by the people on the 'hard' extreme of the security issue. By this I mean for example people who are involved with antiterrorism. Take young people in North Mali. Their options are limited. They can join criminal groups, which is very dangerous but gives them the opportunity to make a lot of money. Alternatively, they can join extremist groups, which makes them feel like they belong and which gives meaning to their lives. They can wait for their government to provide them with an education or perspective. Or they can try to make the crossing to Europe. These are the only options they have, so it is hardly surprising that there are problems with terrorism and migration. Increasingly, people on the hard side of security are arguing for an approach that focuses on giving people more perspective.'

He also thinks that the development sector needs a new strategic story: 'You have to place yourself right at the heart of the political debate and politicise the discussion. Our sector sorely needs to do so if it wants to have a voice in the debates concerning safety in Europe or migration. We have to reposition ourselves instead of staying on the sidelines with discussions on whether we should give 0.7 percent of our GNP to development aid. This is how the sector marginalised itself.'

Abukar agrees and furthermore believes that coherence is an important issue in politicising this debate. 'I think that working in fragile states should be part of a country's overall foreign policy,' she says. 'The arms trade, for instance, has everything to do with this issue. Al-Shabaab benefits from the arms trade and the Netherlands are very important in the international arms trade. Two weeks ago, a shipment of AK-47 rifles was intercepted on its way to Somalia. Where did they come from? You are not helping fragile states until you address the root causes of these issues.'

Gruiters agrees: 'Those are the international stress factors that bring processes in fragile states to a standstill. The arms trade is one example, but so is the exploitation of natural resources.'

Alternatively, a development organisation may choose to completely leave fragile states. That way at least you are sure to achieve results more easily. Abukar shakes her head: 'No, to the contrary: you need to invest in countries where challenges abound. Despite my criticism, Somalia did benefit from the attention it was given. It was exactly because of all the international attention for Somalia that everything was done to keep up the progress. The institutions are being re-established and life on the street is starting to get back to normal.'

Gruiters agrees. 'Shortly after Petra Stienen had left the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she evaluated our Syria programme. We were barely making any progress there. Nevertheless, she argued in favour of continuing our involvement, however limited. You see, our support was like oxygen to the forces working for change in that region. We also discovered just how important human relations are in fragile states in Africa, how important it is to be able to trust one another and support each other in difficult situations. Even though being part of the international cooperation sector means that we work in an effectiveness-oriented context, we find that human relations are incredibly important.'

fundamental notion of comfort is provided. Comfort by means of a caring closeness where pain and suffering are acknowledged, where the notion of manipulability by interventions has been abandoned, but where hope has not. A presence with the associated principles of availability and accessibility, and relations based on solidarity and loyalty.

This debate has been a hot topic in the care and welfare sectors in the Netherlands for the past few years. The question can, however, be posed differently: what determines success or professionalism in organisations? Are these just the quantifiable results, or is there room for people's feelings on the role that the presence of organisations – and the solidarity that this implies – has in their lives?

Who do we reach?

Many projects achieved positive results. But who benefit from these results? Everyone? Do the most marginalised groups, the poorest communities, also benefit?

What the evaluation tells us

The projects that were evaluated were aimed at many different target groups. In many cases, rahter than projects selecting the individuals that are to benefit from their interventions, individuals select themselves. When working with forestry committees, for instance, selection was mainly based on motivation. And when it came to projects aimed at raising awareness, the entire population was targeted, or all young people, or all women in a certain age category. And the target group of projects aimed at improving existing facilities, such as clinics and schools, often consisted of everyone using these facilities.

Many projects were aimed at specific target groups, such as farmers who grow certain types of crops. Sometimes the projects targeted people in a vulnerable position, such as illiterate people, women who are victims of sexual and other violence, disabled people, people who are HIV positive or ethnic minorities. Hardly any project in the evaluation had selected its target groups on the basis of poverty-related criteria.

The evaluation inquired about the relevance of the projects, which in this context referred primarily to the relevance of the results for the target group and not necessarily the relevance of the selected geographical areas or selected specific target groups. The relevance of the results is rated positively in the evaluation. Projects concerned with improving health, providing access to water and improving the position of women received above average scores, while projects concerned with the environment, improving management, fragile states and poverty reduction scored less than average.

In the case of some projects in India, the main conclusion was that the project had in time succeeded to eliminate learning disparities between disadvantaged target groups and other children. One of these projects is discussed in more detail above.

First reflections

Is it or is it not advisable to select specific people for an intervention? First of all, this is a non-issue for many projects such as those aimed at improving existing facilities, the running of governments and improving their policies and laws or working on changing standards and beliefs or raising awareness. Other projects, however, do have the possibility of selecting specific target groups, especially if the provision of services is part of the interventions.

In all cases, we have to consider whether the positive effects also benefit the poorest and most vulnerable people. Time and again, it turns out that there are social mechanisms in place that cause specific groups, such as people living in extreme poverty, to be excluded or to exclude themselves. This may happen because they are not told about a meeting discussing a new project, or because they feel they do not belong at such a meeting as they do not have the right footwear, or because they are just too busy trying to get food on the table that day. Projects almost always function on the basis that individuals take the personal decision to step up and participate. Those unable to do so fall by the wayside. Sometimes, it is assumed that a trickle-down effect will cause the poorest section of society to benefit from better education, healthcare or water supply, but this is often shown not to be the case, even – or especially – in programmes where money is given directly to the selected poor people.

Even if selecting participants to a project on the basis of certain characteristics were possible, it may be worth considering whether this is always a good idea. Is it a good thing to know you were selected to participate in a savings group specifically for people who are HIV positive? The positive effects of specific selection are at odds with the stigmatising effects such a selection process may have. The risk of stigmatisation and the loss of dignity and respect may be a reason not to work with specific target groups, but to still make sure that the intended vulnerable groups are represented. After all, this does not always happen automatically.

Sometimes, an organisation may decide not to work with the very poorest, but instead select people with economic potential. This decision is understandable; after all, this target group yields better results. It is a fact that the investment costs and the social category of target groups are related. It takes a large investment to get those last few children to school, and the same applies to providing access to healthcare to the very poorest communities. This is especially true economically, since the poorest are not often gifted entrepreneurs. This gives rise to the question on which factors our decision either to achieve the most positive results or to reach out to the poorest and most vulnerable people is based . How much do we want to spend on inclusion?

How a vocational training and rehabilitation centre attempts to bring about change for vulnerable groups

Reaching the very poorest and meaning something to them costs time and money, and both of these are in short supply for most development organisations these days. Often, a larger number of people can be reached when interventions are aimed at those who live in less isolated locations or who have had some education, as they will digest new information easier. And with increased pressure on organisations to deliver, this is an assessment that many of them are making nowadays. Yet, was development aid originally not meant to help the most vulnerable people? People who are shut out by their government and society? Are there any organisations left today who would still go through fire and water to help the very poorest? We went searching for an example.

Development organisation Red een Kind ('Help a Child') helped us find one such example. 'What is so admirable about the Vocational Training and Rehabilitation Centre (VTRC) is that they have always remained loyal to their target group: the poorest and most vulnerable people of society. During the first few years, HIV/AIDS patients were shunned by almost everyone. They were often people of a lower caste or a tribal group. VTRC made it its core activity to stand up for those groups. They have never given in to the temptation to choose target groups that are easier to reach. Besides, VTRC has a large network of other civic organisations and through this network, VTRC pushes them to work 'inclusively', meaning that they have to keep looking out for the poorest people,' Director Leo Visser of Red een Kind tells us.

VTRC is devoted to helping children in poor communities in Tamil Nadu, India. Isolated areas that are extremely hard to reach and where children are often used for labour. Bringing about change in such a context is a big challenge.

How does VTRC work? Director Paulus Samuel, who has devoted his life to this organisation which was founded by his father in 1969, explains, 'VTRC has always worked with the very poorest. At the very beginning, we devoted all our energies to saving baby girls from communities where boys enjoyed higher esteem and girls were abandoned in temples or on the streets. No one wanted to care for these abandoned children. We set up a home where they could be safe. Later on, VTRC devoted itself to people with HIV/AIDS in rural areas, as these people were being highly stigmatised.'

'These experiences taught us that you do not solve a problem by a single intervention. In order to really put an end to certain practices and bring about lasting change, you have to make structural changes. This is why we started doing community work. By changing behaviour, rules and values at a community level, you provide a long-term solution to these problems.'

Which is exactly why Red een Kind admires VTRC so much: the organisation manages to reach a great many people and bring about lasting change with a limited amount of resources and the use of existing channels.

Stimulating change on a community level

'We are convinced that presence at village level is needed to have any real impact,' Samuel says. 'You need to move among the people and be part of the community to be able to bring about change from the inside. We always work with contacts in the village. That is vital to understanding the local dynamics. The only people who understand their situation are the people from the community themselves. Especially in a country like India, where there are so many different communities, each with its own history, rituals and unique mix of people. If you achieve success in one village, that does not mean that this method will yield the same results in the next village.'

VTRC pays a lot of attention to influencing prominent villagers, such as older women and religious leaders, in order to change, for example, the position of girls and women.

Samuel explains how they work: 'In new communities, we first contact the village leaders. We tell them that we have come to support of children with an education and ask them to designate someone we can train as a tutor. Such a tutor needs to be someone who is open to change and is willing to support and monitor children in exchange for a small fee. He or she has to be able to identify which children who do not have access to education or who have fallen behind. This is not an easy task, since the children concerned often have very diverse backgrounds.'

Through intensive cooperation with government, village leaders, educational staff and healthcare staff, VTRC is able to identify the most vulnerable groups. 'We really do work in the poorest communities,' Samuel says. 'And in the communities with the most vulnerable people: the children of parents unable to support them in their development.'

‘ Our team of experienced teachers trains the tutors and together they develop a curriculum. These curriculums are not just comprised of educational content, they also include ‘life skills’, such as how children should behave and how they should treat others, but also how they can defend themselves. In the evening, the tutors bring together the children who need extra support. These are mainly the children of parents who have not had an education themselves, such as labourers who own no land. They often do not have the time or the ability to watch and support their children. By bringing the children together and having a tutor watch over them, they receive proper support and are able to keep up with the pace at school. We pay the tutors for some three hours of work per day.’

Children as a target group

‘Our interventions are aimed at children and young people, because they are the rich soil in which the seed of change can be planted. During an HIV campaign, we saw that it is very difficult to change the habits and ideas of adults, much less expect them to contribute to efforts to change existing structures in their society.’

‘Besides, children can be a beacon of hope for the entire community. After a few years of working like this, we saw that the parents who had not been involved in the intervention had come to see that their children would benefit from an education. Moreover, it is not just the future of the children that changes, but that of the entire family.’

‘We do not just work with children, however; we also work with the parents. We unite them in a parent-tutor association, in order to inform them and ask for their advice. Most parents do realise the importance of giving their children an education. They just do not have the capacity to support them in that endeavour. Apart from that, the tutors attempt to persuade the parents to let their daughters go to school for as long as possible, including secondary education. They work out together how to do this. For example, some communities worked with the government to put in place safe transportation.’

Reaching the poorest people is a challenge

‘The biggest challenge is that teachers do not always remain with their communities,’ Samuel says. We cannot pay them a great deal, but our training enables them to apply for better jobs in nearby cities. Or they get married and go and live with their husband in another community. Or their partner gets another job and they move out together. There are many reasons as to why we are dealing with a large turnover of staff. This means we are constantly training new teachers. Additionally, it is very difficult to get the teachers to attend training outside the village; they often have a family to take care of beside their teaching job. They can spare half a day, but not attend an entire training session. Currently, we organise training sessions in clusters; we train people in a village that is within reach of multiple communities.'

We ask Visser of Red een Kind what he has learned from VTRC. He responds: 'Sometimes, working with VTRC was quite difficult. We need to comply with the donors' requirement to present them with figures and results here at home in the Netherlands. But trying to tell VTRC what to do is often counter-productive. Yet, the end result is always positive, even in the current climate where the emphasis is on being professional and efficient. VTRC showed us that a business case can be made for any social issue, without having to give up on the most vulnerable target groups.'

The results

'The teachers report to us,' Samuel tells us. 'Their reports about the children we supported are positive. But we can also see it in the children themselves. After having taken part in our evening support classes, it is quite visible that they get along with other students much more easily. We see that they are no longer afraid to ask questions in class, are able to make their own choices and communicate with a variety of people. Moreover, we see the number of child marriages falling because girls stay in school until a later age.'

5 Disbursement of funds

Introduction

One of the evaluation questions was if funds were used efficiently and effectively. What needs to be assessed is if funds used were spent in the best possible way and if investments made were proportionate to the results achieved.

This efficiency question can be answered on various levels.

1. The easiest way to answer the question is to look at how the organisation spends its money. Is the organisation cost-conscious? Does the organisation try to find the best price-quality ratio? Does the organisation compare actual cost with projected cost? Is expenditure not excessively high? An analysis on this level implies the presentation of financial data and accounts of the operations of the organisation. But it does not include a genuine comparison between investment and results and this level of analysis is therefore often unsatisfactory.
2. A more detailed analysis will also look at how expenditure relates to results achieved. Direct outputs will be linked to the cost incurred to produce these outputs. This results in the calculation of the cost per unit or the cost per person. When the activities are of a fairly comparable nature, these costs can be compared with each other, or benchmarks can be set to assess the level of efficiency. But this comparison is often unsatisfactory as well. At the end of the day, it is not essential how many activities there are and how expensive or inexpensive they are; what matters are the real changes: the outcomes. A bigger investment can result in a higher return than a lower investment. For example, a project can consist of a superficial training of half a day to a large number of farmers. The expenditure is low, but the level of benefits is most likely limited. The project could also consist of an intensive training with a follow-up, coaching and an exchange programme. That is more expensive, but more likely to yield substantial benefits.
3. This is exactly what happens in the third and most in-depth level of analysis. The outcomes of a project are compared to the cost of the project. Calculating the cost associated with an extra year of life is an example of this type of analy-

sis conducted in the healthcare sector. If the outcomes of projects are comparable, than the associated costs can also be compared. However, this is easier said than done. For instance, just think of projects aiming to strengthen the position of women, to improve the performance of village committees, or of projects set up with the aim to influence local governments to change their policies. Sometimes, these analyses go one step further and express the outcomes in financial terms so the return on investment can be calculated. A well-known approach using this type of analysis is the 'Social Return on Investment'.

This chapter describes what the evaluation found on how organisations manage the process of spending funds. It prompts another question, on how to find the proper spread of an investment and avoid spreading it too thinly: is it better to invest substantial amounts and achieve substantial results, or should the investment rather be spread over a larger target group, so many people will benefit a bit?

What the evaluation tells us

Efficiency has only been evaluated with regard to projects targeting millennium goals, to the exclusion of projects focusing on strengthening capacity or strengthening civic organisations. It was too difficult to analyse the latter projects.

The evaluators gave marks for efficiency to 35 out of a total of 53 projects. The basis of their marks is not clear, but mostly they seem to reflect the cost-consciousness of organisations. The average of the marks awarded is 6.8 (on a scale from 1, low, to 10, high). Many positive remarks are made about the efforts organisations make to not spend more than is necessary. The exact contrary was reported as well. For example, one organisation did not make any efforts at all to share transport equipment among its own projects that were all in the same area.

With regard to 32 projects, the cost per person was also calculated. This amount varied from 3 to 1,347 euros per person and the average cost came to 216 euros. The significance of these figures is limited, as the project duration varies from just over a year to five years; with regard to some projects, calculations were made on the basis of the total number of people and in other cases on the basis of the number of people reached in any given year. Also, differences in spending power were not taken into account. Moreover, the evaluators faced the problem that the projects they evaluated consisted of a wide range of interventions, making it difficult to compare them with each other. The evaluators tried to identify benchmarks for the cost per person, but these turned out to exist for a limited range of activities only.

Comparable data were hard to find and it was often difficult to attribute financial data of the project to the various activities within the project, as organisations do not always account for their expenses along these lines. The evaluators concluded that organisations do not have a clear notion of their efficiency and are insufficiently interested in analysing it; as a result, they are unable to develop or implement efficiency-driven policies. This receives severe criticism from the evaluating team and they label it as one of the most important conclusions of the evaluation and one that calls for immediate action.

First reflections

The evaluators have touched upon an important issue. Many organisations are trying hard enough to measure their effectiveness by recording details on results achieved and changes implemented, but they do not systematically pay attention to efficiency issues. Apparently, they are failing to order their financial records in a way that allows investments to be linked to what is delivered (the outputs), and even less in a way that allows investments to be linked to what is achieved (the outcomes). Staff monitoring financial operations are often not the same individuals as those monitoring the substantive project activities and their corresponding results. And apparently people with these two different monitoring tasks do not meet, or meet systematically. The evaluators have a point and the issue is clear. However, the question is how efficiency is best approached.

The evaluation emphasised benchmarks calculated as cost per person: the project cost divided by the number of beneficiaries. This reflects the middle level of analyses mentioned earlier, which compares input with direct output. But it is much more important to compare the investment with what really matters, the outcomes. Indeed, it may be wise to invest more per person so as to achieve more effect. For instance, it is noted that a project in India failed to produce any substantial results because the investment had been spread too thin. The cost per person was low, but so was the result. And in some cases an organisation may have been founded to work with target groups that are difficult to reach, even if this implies higher costs.

Managing operations on the basis of cost per unit benchmarks seems to be possible and make sense only when activities have been standardised. For instance, it makes sense to compare projects or locations when they consist of the same ongoing training programmes for self-help groups, or when standardised vocational courses or activities to teach people how to read and write are supported directly. Contextual differences must still be taken into account. But with regard to more complex interventions, targeting important social changes, shifts of social norms, influencing public policies or improving working conditions, it is often of key importance to know which strategy to use at which moment and to alternate between strategies to create the maximum effect. These effects can be described and can be compared to the total investment, but there is not much to be gained from comparing the project with other situations or use benchmarks, because there is not enough similarity.

An approach that seems more fruitful in this type of situations is the one used for evaluating international lobbying and advocacy activities. A ‘theory of efficiency’ is at the core of this approach. It implies that organisations assess investments, direct results and the intended effect continuously. Decisions will often involve a choice between operating at a lower cost or achieving more effect. The organisation needs to have information about the cost of direct outputs and needs to continuously choose between reducing the cost per unit or increasing investment in order to achieve the intended effect. If organisations choose to work on the basis of a theory of efficiency, this will require much more analysis of and reflection on the financial data in relation to the results. With that, the main concern arising from the evaluation remains unabated.

Efficiency is a value judgement

The evaluation emphasises benchmarks calculated as 'cost per person': the project cost divided by the number of beneficiaries. The reflection in this chapter raises the question whether it is not much more important to compare investments with what really matters, the outcomes.

Many social critics and philosophers like to push the issue further. They think that the concept of efficiency needs to be redefined.

'Efficiency is no value-free concept,' says philosopher Michael Sandel. Efficiency is often presented as an objective and actual given, but this is misleading. Indeed, a person's idea of efficiency is extremely subjective as it depends on how this person values things in life. In many situations, efficiency is exclusively determined on the basis of economic factors. Other considerations that might be equally important, such as nature or environment, are left out. But is it correct to label the achievement of an objective efficient when minimal financial means and little time were required, but when the impact on the environment was negative?

It is precisely because measuring efficiency is difficult that measurable objectives are emphasised. Objectives that cannot be measured, often of a qualitative nature, become of secondary importance. This happens everywhere: in education, the percentage of successful graduates is key, while the healthcare sector focuses on short waiting lists. Critics of this way of assessing performance jokingly call this McDonaldization. It stands for a tendency towards evermore standardisation intended to achieve short-term results.

Sandel claims that when value is determined in this way, democracy will be eroded: issues that people should discuss with each other are left to mathematicians and economists, who are able to calculate which decisions are most efficient from an economic point of view. But the results of their calculations are not necessarily beneficial for society as a whole.

Sandel says that it is essential that we ask ourselves at every occasion what would happen if we add efficiency as one of the criteria for which measurements need to be done. Applied to the development sector, this implies the question whether the intervention will be modified and if that is a positive or a negative thing. For instance, Sandel claims that 'social relations' are a factor that should enter the equation. Imagine: an organisation might achieve its objectives quicker when it treats its partners in a very high-handed manner. Efficiency may be achieved in this way, but at the cost of human relations.

So efficiency is about what you think is important to you. It is not an objective assessment, but a value judgment. With this in mind, it is important that development organisations ask themselves: 'What concept of efficiency do our partners have, what do they value and what do they consider to be efficient?'

We ask this question to Marlon Phiri, director of the Reformed Open Community Schools, an NGO in Zimbabwe and partner organisation of the Dutch organisation Red een Kind ('Help a Child'). He is passionate about his vision.

The organisation directed by Phiri is working to provide education in communities where there are no public schools. In Zambia, 25 per cent of primary school pupils receive education in community schools run by parents themselves. These community schools are often understaffed and lack a wide variety of educational materials. Reformed Open Community Schools educates teachers and offers them training and coaching, and it invests in schools' infrastructure. It also lobbies the Ministry of Education for grants and an official position in the country's education policy.

Efficiency defined

We ask Phiri how his organisation looks at efficiency. 'For me, efficiency is using resources in an optimal way in order to achieve the best possible result,' answers Phiri. 'But when I work with donors I often notice that they assess our efficiency on the basis of how efficiently we have organised ourselves. For instance, they will look at the share of overhead costs in total expenditure. And when this share is high, their immediate conclusion is that little money reaches the target group and that the organisation is not efficient. But that is not necessarily true. When the donor takes the percentage of expenditure reaching the target group as the sole criterion for efficiency, he will fail to see the kind of capacity required to complete a project. For example, an organisation may be spending a lot on the target group, but the project may be poorly managed, the training programme may be of a poor quality, or the organisation may not be treating its partners well enough.'

Philosopher Sandel would surely agree with this claim by Phiri. Relationship management, which is much valued by the Reformed Open Community Schools, is difficult to measure and is left out of efficiency calculations.

Measuring efficiency

Donors want to see evidence that their investments have been managed efficiently. Sandel and Phiri advocate a much wider definition of efficiency. But when widened, how to measure it? Phiri offers some ideas. 'The measurement of efficiency must follow the way the project was designed,' he says. 'Imagine a project aiming to change the attitude towards women in rural communities. This requires a sizeable investment in people. The staff of my organisation need to train the community, they need to be present and spend time with people. So a large part of our organisation's income will be spent on our staff. In this case, the donor will say, "No, you are not efficient, you are spending too much money on your own employees." But these expenses are essential for achieving the objectives. A culture change, for instance, cannot be stimulated by investing in infrastructure.'

Therefore, according to Phiri, the way efficiency is to be measured will depend on the nature of an intervention or an activity. If the objective is to change the culture or to change a mentality, no standard formula for calculating efficiency can be formulated. In one situation an investment in time may be needed, while social relationships may be of the essence in another. Phiri's claim is actually similar to Sandel's: it is important to exchange ideas about what is valuable in a specific situation. The conclusions will then determine the formula for measuring efficiency.

The consequences of understanding efficiency incorrectly

According to Phiri, the requirement to perform well in terms of efficiency drives development organisations towards choosing goals that are easier to reach as chances are that such goals can be reached quicker. 'This reminds me of a situation in which I found myself recently,' says Phiri. 'I was talking with a donor about a project. They wanted a test to be performed. I suggested to set up one pilot project in a remote area and one in the vicinity of the city. This was rejected there and then; the test had to be performed in Lusaka, any other location would drive up the costs too much. And that is how it always goes. Consultants come flying in, they carry out a short study, and out they fly again. Really, you cannot imagine the amount of projects designed on the basis of tests in a city. The aid is efficient, but way off target. Efficiency is more than minimal cost per person receiving aid; what matters too is whether the impact caused is long-lasting. For impact to be long-lasting, it may be required to invest over a longer period of time, or invest more in a specific area. The effects may be more long-lasting than those of an efficient quick fix.'

A philosopher and a practical man: both prompt us to reflect on the idea of efficiency and the role that efficiency plays in evaluating development projects. Their message is that long-term impact and inclusion are not brought about if we let mathematical and economic formulas be our guides.

6 Doing joint evaluations

Preface

This evaluation may well have been the biggest joint evaluation ever conducted by development organisations. It involved 19 alliances comprised of over 60 organisations cumulatively spending approximately 1.9 billion euros in 73 countries over a period of five years. The evaluation itself encompassed 191 substudies conducted in eight countries by more than 200 academic researchers, and cost over 12 million euros. The objective was to be able to draw accurate conclusions regarding the themes discussed in the previous chapters, by using as many comparable methods, and measuring as many comparable results as possible.

From the very beginning, another objective was to learn about the methods used. This was discussed numerous times in articles and at conferences. The final report of the evaluation also presents a number of lessons with regard to the approach.

In this chapter, we will discuss more in-depth three items to do with the approach and execution of this evaluation. First of all, we will take a look at how independence and distance affected the evaluation. Secondly, we take a closer look at how the evaluating team dealt with numbers and stories, quantitative and qualitative approaches, and how these interact. Finally, we will consider what constitutes a good basis to determine if change has taken place; whether it is acceptable to use opinions and experiences of the people involved, or if the only things that count are cold, hard facts.

Independence

The evaluation was conducted as independently as possible. This way, the evaluation would be the most reliable, and people could be held to account. At the same time, one of the objectives of the evaluation was to be able to learn from it. This prompts the question whether the independence of this evaluation has had a negative impact on this second objective.

How the evaluation was conducted

The grant to conduct the evaluation was awarded under the explicit condition that the study was to be conducted as independently as possible. After all, the organisations should not give themselves marks for their own work. Independently conducted evaluations have been the norm for a long time. What was new, however, was that the invitation for tenders and the work process of the evaluation were also under independent management. This was provided by NWO-WOTRO, an organisation funding research on global issues. They, in turn, created an independent management group and advising bodies. This meant that there were many layers between the evaluators and the organisations to be evaluated. As such, the evaluators were much further removed from the organisations than in any previous study.

The evaluators usually chose one of two options when contacting the organisations they were evaluating. In some cases the evaluators would contact the organisation directly in order to obtain data, experiences and justifications, which were subsequently assessed. This was often the case in field studies, in particular studies concerned with strengthening organisational capacity. In other cases, however, the evaluators were convinced that there should be no contact at all. The final report repeatedly states that each attempt at contact had been an infringement on the independence and reliability of the study, and should have been prevented.

There seems to be a connection between different approaches research teams used and the different views they held on the role of learning. While various country teams made great efforts to increase the learning potential of the study – e.g. by arranging meetings with the organisations – the final report puts it plainly that an evaluation can never pursue the two objectives of giving account and providing learning potential at the same time. Instead, it focused on the first objective: accountability.

First reflections

The question we may pose ourselves is whether a more substantive relationship between evaluators and the evaluated organisations reduces the reliability of the study. Organisations may indeed try to wilfully influence the results of the study through such a relationship. In such a situation, it may be necessary to invoke your independence to protect your reliability. One could also argue, however, that balancing multiple different influences and sources of information is one of the core competencies of an evaluator. Creating too much distance and avoiding any type of contact will affect the quality and usefulness of such a study. This can to some extent be compared to judges, who are independent but nevertheless talk to all parties involved, or psychologists, who base part of their findings on substantive conversations with the patients they examine, but are still able to come to independent conclusions.

The debate whether it is possible to combine the two main objectives of evaluations, learning potential and accountability, is nothing new. The contrast between both objectives is clear: if you equate accountability with judging an organisation on its results, there will be an urge to show everything in a positive light making it more difficult to learn from the things that did not go very well. Besides, the objective of accountability often requires a different sort of test, because it is generally about measuring the impact. When trying to learn, the emphasis is on finding out how change is brought about. In this context, a sample survey may be made up of projects that highlight the most interesting situations. With this in mind, it only makes sense to insist upon a clear choice between either learning potential or accountability.

Yet, many believe that both objectives can be combined as long as accountability is not defined as an exercise in passing judgment on results alone. If we are open and clear about what went right and what went wrong, we can give account of what really happened. The learning potential is also greatly increased if well-documented data are available. One would think that one of the core objectives of an evaluation is to improve our understanding in order to be able to better implement projects in the future. But it is exactly this aspect of evaluations that is no longer self-evident. In the past few decades of evaluating science, it has become increasingly clear that the process of using the results of an evaluation to influence future activities has to actively be put into motion. This is something that the evaluators should bear responsibility for, during and after the evaluating process.

The distance between the organisations and the evaluation, resulting in the impeded learning potential, was partly caused by the fact that it concerned a joint evaluation of all organisations. Most organisations had relatively few partners and projects evaluated, and those that were evaluated did not always offer the best learning potential. Not only the evaluators viewed the study as the most efficient way to fulfil the specific requirements for accountability; the organisations did so too. The question remains how many of the lessons that can be drawn from the evaluation will, in spite of these hurdles, be recognised and used by all parties involved.

Mixed methods

How do you measure change? And how do you gain an insight into how this change was brought about? The evaluation encompassed a great diversity of subjects and projects. One of the main questions was what exactly had changed and whether these changes could be attributed to the organisations' efforts. The other question was how these changes had been brought about. In order to be able to answer both questions, the evaluation used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods: figures and stories. This prompts the question how these two approaches were used and how they relate to each other.

How the evaluation was conducted

Projects contributing to the millennium goals were asked to demonstrate changes by means of control groups. In such cases, quantitative methods are often used. At the same time, the projects were asked to list factors contributing to these changes. This mainly concerned substantive processes and mechanisms of change. To find these, qualitative methods are required. Studies focused on projects aimed at strengthening capacity and civic organisations mainly used qualitative methods. However, all data were still presented in numerical ratings in order to be able to calculate averages and differences.

For each country where the evaluation was conducted, a team of specialists was put together. Generally, quantitatively oriented researchers were selected to look into contributions made to the millennium goals and qualitatively oriented researchers were selected to look into capacity and civil society issues. The quantitative and qualitative approaches were rarely linked and so remained largely separate. In some countries, attempts were made to link the two approaches, in particular when it concerned organisations under evaluation for both their contributions to the millennium goals and their efforts to strengthen capacity. In these cases, the ratings for capacity and the marks for the projects were calculated and compared to find out if they were related.

Causality

- **Quantitative 'culture': cause and effect cannot be observed. Emphasis therefore on the average effect and comparisons with control groups.**
- **Qualitative 'culture': emphasis on logic – is a situation sufficient to bring about change, and is the situation also required in order to bring about change?**

The overview study in which all evaluations are summarised and analysed emphasises the quantitative analyses. But as projects, measured results, measuring methods and situations of projects and organisations were all so different, it was very difficult to combine all of the results. In practice, this quantitative analysis was only successful for the marks and for the ratings given to capacity that were formulated by the researchers themselves.

First reflections

The numerical approach and the story-based approach, i.e. quantitative or qualitative, are like two different cultures. As is the case with cultures, there are many differences between these two approaches, but also within them. And, as is the case with cultures, there are many prejudices and misunderstandings, leading to miscommunication. They are 'cultures' of which their proponents often hardly know one another because they do not go to the same conferences, are not well-versed in the opposing discipline and do not speak the same language. And like in all cultures, it often happens that people think that their own culture is the best, or even the only one that makes sense. Not only are the differences between these cultures manifest in how they conduct their measurements, they also show in how they approach causality (see text box at the end of the chapter).

The fact that in this evaluation these approaches were brought together so closely and that they had to cooperate with each other is fascinating. It does raise the question whether this has led to a better 'cultural understanding' and mutual understanding and appreciation. Whatever the case may be, the final report expresses appreciation of the detailed analyses of causality conducted by qualitative researchers. The evaluation may have demonstrated that combining the two approaches is not easy, but that doing so is as necessary as it ever was in order to provide an answer to various evaluation questions.

Perceptions or the truth

The evaluation tries to determine as objectively as possible if and which changes have taken place. In addition to this, individual observations are often used. Does the use of subjective observations and experiences add any value? Or does it pose a risk, because people may choose to withhold information or colour it in some way? And what about the evaluators' own subjectivity?

How the evaluation was conducted

The evaluation was organised and conducted as solidly and reliably as possible. All teams were directed by academic researchers who attempted to identify changes in an unequivocal way. However, this does not mean that all studies only measured objective facts. Sometimes, it concerned less tangible matters, such as strengthening the position of women, improving market access or strengthening capacity. But in these cases information had to be reliable as well. Researchers whose research concerned the capacity of organisations often made use of the knowledge of the organisations' staff. The final report stated that this information was less reliable due to the possibility that staff members might paint a touched-up version of reality. Therefore, this information was sometimes supplemented with sources outside the organisation.

Another thing that attracts attention is that in some projects, for instance those aimed at reducing poverty, there appears to be a difference between the objective results measured by the researchers and the stories and experiences told by people in group conversations. In a number of cases, the measurements do not show any positive results, while the group conversations are positive. When the researchers reflect upon this, they often come up with the explanation that the sample surveys conducted may have been too limited to measure results, or that effects of comparable interventions in other areas may have caused a lack of difference with control groups.

An evaluation, in contrast with a study, always gives a value judgment to the evaluated project, programme or organisation. The facts are determined and interpreted, but also compared and judged according to various criteria in order to come to a judgment. It is that final step where the line between objective and subjective, truth and opinion, becomes very fine indeed. In such a situation, it is essential to be transparent and show how the judgment was made. In the evaluation, value judgments were given in a number of different ways. Often, it is clear on which findings judgments are based. This is the case, for example, when the evaluators, after measuring the results and comparing those with a control group, conclude that a project achieved its objectives, or when they find that a project is relevant based on what people say in group conversations. Or when they conclude, after carefully analysing other factors, that Dutch organisations' contributions to partners' capacity are 'relatively limited'. Sometimes, however, the judgment given to a project or organisation is not very transparent at all, such as when the evaluation makes use of marks without clarifying what criteria were used. In those situations, it is not clear if the judgment was subjective or objective.

First reflections

Are only objective facts important for an evaluation, or do subjective opinions also count? In the context of some social changes, people's observations and experience are almost the only way to make the issue tangible. This is why it is more important to determine whose stories and opinions are used than whether they should be used at all. Are they mainly the stories of the organisation performing projects or, by contrast, the people who are supposed to benefit from the changes? In a commercial context this is often quite clear: customer feedback concerning the user experience often offers a good prediction of sales. The same can be done with regard to development projects, but it is much more difficult to get a clear view of the customers' feedback, especially if that customer is only barely involved in projects, or if the project targets disadvantaged groups who do not often speak up. Not to mention difficulties arising from socially desirable answers borne from a culture of respect, or strategic answers given in order to keep benefiting from the continuation of a project. However, this kind of complication can be solved. Perhaps listening to our customers in a systematic way and with regularity is one of the most important evaluating criteria.

Yet, there are well-founded drawbacks to using subjective information. After all, no one wants to base conclusions regarding an organisation or project on just a few people's opinions, especially if it cannot be ruled out that they may benefit from the results. One could say that handling this sort of situation is one of the core competencies of an evaluator. If different observations and experiences are systematically analysed and if socially desirable answers and answers inspired by personal interests are filtered out, the many individual subjective stories can be used to construct a great story that may serve as a solid base for conclusions.

Of course, things that can be measured should be measured. A project aimed at increasing the income of its target group should measure to the best of its ability what happens to that income. But even when measurements are completely reliable, subjectivity can never be completely ruled out. That starts with determining what exactly needs to be measured and how exactly this should be defined. This is often done by the organisation or the researcher. This may be one of the reasons why sometimes no results can be found in measurements of specific outcomes whereas they clearly appear in the stories that come up in group conversations. This raises the question whose reality is the decisive one.

Taking stock

Was the evaluation worth it? How will we put the lessons learned into practice? A double interview with Professor Jan Willem Gunning and Managing Director Bart Romijn of Partos.

Gunning shakes his head when asked whether the two have met before, and Romijn says, smiling: 'We were not allowed to; it would have compromised the independence of the evaluation.'

It is meant as a joke, but his remark does touch on a sensitive subject that will be discussed in detail later in the interview. We meet on the tenth floor of the main building of VU University on De Boelelaan in Amsterdam to take stock of the MFS2 evaluation. Jan Willem Gunning, an academic researcher and a professor, was the chairman of the synthesis team who were tasked with putting together all the substudies. Managing Director Bart Romijn of Partos is the chairman of the Joint Evaluation Trust, which directed the evaluation. Both were closely involved with this unique Dutch evaluation experience: a large operation that had its ups and downs, eventually leading to a series of reports of more than 11,000 pages and a vast amount of learning material to draw on.

But was it all worth it? 'Arguments in favour of an evaluation of this magnitude can be made,' Gunning says, 'as long as we learn from the results. If the Ministry of Development Cooperation is not going to use any of this learning material, this evaluation has been a waste of money. The evaluation as such was also quite useful because we concluded that the work done by Dutch development organisations is actually rather good. I think many people in the Netherlands who were ready to attack our development aid upon the publication of a negative report had not expected this outcome. I do think, however, that an evaluation like this should be conducted very differently in the future.'

'It does indeed depend on what we will be able to learn from this,' agrees Romijn. 'The evaluation has provided us with a vast amount of information that we can use. This applies to everyone: the Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Beleidsevaluatie, IOB) , the Ministry of Development Cooperation and our supporters. We are going in the right direction, but there are still improvements to be made. I feel that an evaluation of over ten million euros on a total budget of over two billion euros is justified. That is less than one per cent.'

The first topic of discussion is the independence of the evaluation. From the very beginning, it was clear that the credibility of the evaluation would benefit greatly from it being conducted as independently as possible. Looking back, many people in the development sector think that this independence has impeded the learning potential. A missed opportunity, according to some. Immediately, this topic leads to a heated debate between the two men, sometimes verging on becoming an angry argument. 'I think impartiality is essential,' Gunning says. 'We are not very experienced with that sort of thing in the Netherlands. If you want an independent evaluation, you need to put up fences between the different parties. Once the terms of reference have been agreed on, you need to let the researchers do their job, and let them determine the sample surveys, tests and methods. That independence was not sufficiently clear to the organisations which were evaluated, and we had to pay close attention to remain completely impartial. Obviously, you also need to work together: you have to visit the projects of these organisations and request documents. But that needs to be the kind of cooperation that does not collide with the required independence. We had to sound the alarm a few times and made critical comments. We really need to do that differently next time: we have to be much, much more independent.'

Romijn does not completely agree. 'Of course researchers need to be autonomous and draw their own conclusions,' he says. We completely agree about that. But we are not counting blades of grass. What we are talking about here is research into actors working in specific contexts with extremely complex processes such as building capacity and strengthening civil society in a country. It is just as important for an evaluator to have knowledge of this context. For this reason, it is essential to cooperate with development organisations, otherwise your perception of the situation becomes too simple. It is also essential for the learning process to work together with the organisations you are researching, for the learning process is interwoven with the evaluation itself. If you do not work together, this will result in a report that can never lead to an optimal learning process. I think the learning process would have benefited greatly from a better interaction between the researchers and the organisations they studied.'

Gunning shakes his head: 'You are mixing up two things. I agree that a researcher should be aware of the context. But looking at the learning process of an organisation and looking back to determine whether or not something has worked are two very different things. Most organisations create their learning process by means of internal evaluations. The main objective of such evaluations is not to determine whether their projects were successful but to learn lessons for the organisation. This was not the case in our evaluation. I am a great proponent of conducting both kinds of evaluations, but they should not be mixed. In the type of evaluation we conducted you are not to talk with the people involved about what may be learned. Your primary objective is to determine whether or not something worked.'

Romijn: 'It is a pity that Wendy Asbeek, the new managing director of IOB, is not here. She is also of the opinion that the learning component should be integrated into evaluations in order to make the evaluation more valuable. Accountability alone is not enough.'

Gunning: 'I am happy she feels that way, but you cannot do both in one evaluation. If the goal of a project is to reduce poverty, the only question that the evaluator should answer is whether poverty has declined and if that has been brought about by the intervention of that development project. This requires a different sort of study than when you are primarily researching the learning process of your own organisation. There are entire libraries of evaluation literature that say exactly the same thing.'

Romijn: 'All the libraries in the world cannot prevent the shifting insights in this field and...'

Gunning interrupts: 'No, not with regard to the point I just made. There are no shifting insights in this field in evaluation literature. Otherwise, the whole discipline would become a great mess.'

Romijn responds heatedly: 'Really, Jan Willem, evaluations purely based on accountability are outdated, no matter how many books have been written about it. Then those books are outdated, too. You have to account for exceedingly complex activities performed in a period of just a few years. If you do not include the learning aspect in this process, you do not come up to the mark.'

Gunning: 'Look at us fighting, while we should agree. It surprises me to hear you say that looking back to see whether something has worked is an outdated concept.'

Romijn: 'Now you are taking what I said out of context.'

Gunning: 'I do not have time for this. I have made my point four times.'

We go on to talk about how the evaluation was set up. Both men agree that, in hindsight, there were some fundamental mistakes in the organisation of the evaluation. For instance, IOB imposed a research grid when the organisations had already started MFS2 projects and developed their own research grids. Also, the baseline study was conducted when activities were already underway, and the follow-up measurement took place just two years later. Not to mention the fact that the ratings that had to be given to projects at the beginning and the end of a two-year period were sometimes given by different teams. We all remember from our time in secondary school or college that different teachers tend to give different marks for papers or oral exams.

Romijn thinks that a research period of only two years is much too short and argues strongly in favour of involving researchers in a long-term study. 'Evaluations are often limited to project or programme level, while organisations have often been active for decades. Unfortunately, we fail to draw lessons from such long-term periods. What are the trends, the effects of interventions, the changed modalities? Partos members do not have the capacity to do that kind of research. There is an enormous gap to be filled. All we have now are limited snapshots. It is the long term where the real learning potential is. I see a real opportunity for cooperation between academics and researchers there.'

Gunning nods. 'We will not have to argue about that.'

We have discussed learning, but now we look at the lessons to be learned from the evaluation. What changes does Gunning see after the publication of his report? 'I think the organisations are very aware of the learning potential of the evaluation,' he responds. 'The ministry is a different matter. Their notions on organising evaluations are still in their infancy. Only very few people really deal with evaluations. IOB has a large turnover of staff and there is too little professional reflection on evaluating. IOB is one of the many positions in the ministry where you can work for a while. People come in and need to start from scratch when it comes to build knowledge about evaluations. If you look at other countries, such as France and England, you see that they have made much more progress. They create units that build and keep expertise.'

Romijn shakes his head. 'I do not agree. I think the people at IOB think matters through very carefully and I myself am involved with a reference group on civic organisations. The IOB has also played an important part in advancing our notion of how to measure capacity building with a 5C situation analysis. At the ministry, a lot of things are going on in my opinion. The Social Development Directorate (Directie Sociale Ontwikkeling, DSO) has incorporated, in its new policy, the lessons drawn from the evaluation. They now work under less pressure from regulations and have adopted a more relaxed research grid. In my view, real progress has been made at the ministry and that they have started thinking more intelligently about what they want to achieve with evaluations.'

And how about his own supporters? 'They are also very interested in learning from this evaluation,' Romijn says. 'We have organised ten meetings based on the source material and findings. Additionally, there have been five webinars that were open to people from other countries. I do see some difference in participation when it comes to different levels within organisations. We see a lot of knowledge workers and evaluators, but not nearly enough managers. We can still improve in that area.'

What about the evaluators? Do they take the responsibility of promoting their findings to a wider audience? 'Wait a second,' Gunning responds. 'It is interesting how you phrased that question. The word 'responsibility' makes me go up the wall. Obviously, I will not put the report in a drawer and that's that, this study is far too important for that. However, it is not the researcher's responsibility. It is the customers who have that responsibility.'

Romijn has a slightly different opinion. 'I like to compare this to accounting. An accountant checks the books to see if everything happened according to the rules. Nowadays, though, the accountant will increasingly often issue a management statement and make recommendations. In the new developments in the accounting sector, this management statement is becoming increasingly important.'

Gunning: 'Unacceptable. We are not accountants.'

Romijn doesn't flinch: 'I think that the client should be able to ask the evaluator from the beginning how he thinks the results of his evaluation will be internalised,' he carries on. 'Good terms of reference should not just describe the methods used, but also how the organisation can use the results of the evaluation. Furthermore, I believe that an evaluator should be proud of his work and be so invested in it that he will do anything to prevent it from ending up at the bottom of the pile. That, to me, is an ethical responsibility. It should be a part of the evaluator's ethics to make sure the evaluation is internalised in the organisation. For instance, he can give a presentation for the organisation's management and employees, preferably not only after finishing the report, but also during his research. Allow him to regularly share his findings and build that into the evaluating process.'

Gunning shakes his head. 'Evaluators are not the right people for that job. They are often quite technically-minded people who lack the skills to communicate this sort of thing. They are not the type of people who can find the right tone in a boardroom. I do believe that this needs to be done, but I am not sure that this should be done by the researchers themselves. I believe the comparison to accountants is even quite dangerous. An accountant should be hired to determine whether the figures and the procedures leading to those figures are correct. I am strongly against this person also becoming some sort of adviser to the executive board. This has already resulted in disaster in the business sector because matters were approved that should not have been. This happened because they came too close to the executive board and lost their independence.'

And now it is time for the last question: did the report come too late? Teacher Jan Willem Gunning rates the MFS2 programme a solid seven out of ten, while principal Ploumen has already decided to keep the students down a class or expel them altogether. Both men burst out laughing. The atmosphere has become more relaxed again. 'I like the analogy, but it simply is not accurate,' Romijn says. 'If you view it as the last real NGO grant window, it might be accurate. But there are still plenty of possibilities to secure grants. NGOs can still apply for thematic financing with regard to emergency relief, food, gender, water and much, much more. It is the mission that counts: the efforts of civic organisations to combat poverty. What can we learn from that, how can we improve? That sort of insight can never come too late.'

Gunning nods. 'I think you should constantly keep evaluating and publish smaller reports on specific subjects rather than this idiotic process of waiting two years and suddenly coming up with this great big evaluation. With regular publications of small reports, you can base opinions on that and the political process will become a bit less hurried. Now, all MFS2 activities were all thrown together, resulting in a huge evaluation. And regarding the timing: imagine the report had been published before Minister Ploumen had made her decision on whether or not to continue the co-financing programme. That would have put a lot of pressure on the evaluation. What would have been the role of Parliament, for instance? It would probably have become a pointless discussion. I am actually quite glad about how the timing turned out.'

Final comment

At the end of 2010, a group of people whose work it is to measure results came together. They used to meet regularly to talk about the latest developments in their area of expertise. This time, they discussed the requirements for the new MFS grant framework that would take effect starting the following year. These requirements had been tightened significantly in a very late iteration of the draft. For example, everyone had to analyse civic organisations according to a method used by CIVICUS. ‘We will all end up making the same evaluations of the same civic organisations... That will not sit well with them.’ And would they manage to set up all these large-scale evaluations with control groups that covered at least 75 per cent of the projects? It was proposed that some aspects of these evaluations would be handled jointly, such as studying the civic organisations. Together, they would be able to select the countries where those studies would take place. A long process of negotiations ensued.

Fast forward five years later. A structure is in place, all important parties agree and budgets have been drawn up. The evaluations were conducted in eight different countries by more than two hundred academic researchers and resulted in ten final reports encompassing over 11,000 pages. The question rises whether the joint organisation of this ambitious evaluation was worth it.

An important reason to set up this joint operation was to meet the grant requirements as efficiently as possible. From that point of view, the evaluation has been successful. The nineteen alliances that contributed all met the requirements without any great effort. The costs were less than 0.7 per cent of all grants awarded, which is relatively little. The joint effort did not cost the organisations much time either. After all, most of the work had been outsourced. All that remained was attending the occasional meeting of all participating alliances and delegating staff members to the board of the foundation established for the purpose of the joint evaluation and to the internal reference group. The partner organisations that were subject to evaluation, of course, had to invest larger amounts of time in providing information and logistical and practical support.

At the same time, this limited time investment is one of the biggest downsides of the success of this evaluation. Only relatively few partners and projects of the participating alliances had been selected for the sample surveys. These may have been representative of the MFS grant in general, but not for each separate participating alliance. Due to the way the projects were sampled, the selection did not always offer the most interesting learning potential. This meant that the evaluation did not stimulate learning, change and use of the newly gained insights as much as it normally would have. Furthermore, most organisations went on to organise their own evaluations to gain better insight into the entirety of their own work and to learn from their own questions. They were able to do this without having to comply with the specific requirements of the grant programme. After all, those requirements had already been met by the joint evaluation.

The evaluation was significantly limited in a number of ways, which are also discussed in the final report by the evaluators themselves. The largest limitation was that the interval between the two measurements was not big enough: only two years. What's more, these measurements were conducted without taking into account the beginning or end dates of the projects. And so it sometimes occurred that a first measurement was carried out while the project had been active for a number of years, or that the second measurement took place while the project still had several years to go. For many development processes, two years is too short to observe many changes anyway.

The learning potential may have been limited during the evaluation, but this changed considerably after its publication. Many of the involved organisations screened the reports for lessons that could be relevant for them or their partners. Additionally, for some of the more expansive themes discussed in the evaluation, activities were organised to increase their potential for learning. For instance, webinars were conducted in an online environment to discuss mutual capacity building, diminishing support for civic organisations and working in fragile states. Besides that, a day-long event was organised to provide room for debate and workshops based on the results of the evaluation. This well-attended event inspired many people to reflect together on themes such as partner relationships and dealing with efficiency issues.

All things considered, the evaluation has led to a myriad of insights, some of which are discussed in this book. Despite all its limitations, this evaluation has contributed to the development of evaluating methods and to a growing realisation of the importance of conducting good and thorough evaluations. In hindsight, everyone can think of something they believe should have been done differently. However, this joint evaluation was definitely worth the cost and effort.

Attachment

Alliances that took part in the MFS2 Evaluation (Joint Evaluation Trust)

- Child Rights Alliance
  lead agency: Plan Nederland
  Free Voice, Child Helpline International, ECPAT NL, Defence for Children International, International Child Development Initiative, Women Win
- Conn@ct Now
  lead agency: War Child
  Child Helpline International
- Connect4Change
  lead agency: IICD
  ICCO, Cordaid, Edukans, AKVO
- Dutch Consortium for Rehabilitation
  lead agency: ZOA Vluchtelingenzorg
  CARE Nederland, Save the Children, Healthnet TPO
- Ecosystem Alliance
  lead agency: IUCN NL
  Both ENDS, Wetlands International
- Fair, Green and Global Alliance
  lead agency: Both ENDS
  NiZA, Clean Clothes Campaign, Milieudefensie/FoEI, SOMO, Transnational Institute
- Freedom from fear
  lead agency: IKV Pax Christi
  Press Now, ECCP, Amnesty International Nederland
- ICCO Alliance
  lead agency: ICCO
  Edukans, Kerk in Actie, Prisma, Share People, Yente, Zeister Zendingsgenootschap,
- IMPACT
  lead agency: Oxfam Novib
  Fairfood International, SOMO, Hirda, 1%Club, Butterfly Works

- Kind en Ontwikkeling
  lead agency: Terre des Hommes
  Liliane Fonds, Kinderpostzegels
- Partners for Resilience
  lead agency: Nederlanse Rode Kruis
  CARE Nederland, Cordaid, Wetlands International, Red Cross / Red Crescent Climate Center
- People Unlimited
  lead agency: HIVOS
  Press Now, Mama Cash, IUCN NL
- Press Freedom 2.0
  lead agency: Free Voice
  Mensen met een Missie, World Press Photo, European Journalism Center, European Partnership for Democracy (EPD)
- Samen voor Verandering – Communities of Change
  lead agency: Cordaid
  IKV Pax Christi, Both ENDS, Impunity Watch, Wemos, Mensen met een Missie, Nederlands Rode Kruis
- Sexual&Reproductive Health&Rights Alliance
  lead agency: Rutgers WPF
  Rutgers Nisso Group, Amref, Simavi, CHOICE, Dance4Life
- Togehter4Change
  lead agency: International Child Support
  Wilde Ganzen, SOS Kinderdorpen, Wereldkinderen
- United Entrepreneurship Coalition
  lead agency: Spark
  BID Network
- WASH Alliance
  lead agency: Simavi
  Amref, ICCO, Wetlands International, AKVO, RAIN, WASTE
- Woord en Daad & Red een Kind Alliance
  lead agency: Woord en Daad
  Red een Kind

Room for Development
Reflections on the results of the MFS Evaluation

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This book aims to discuss some interesting topics on the occasion of the evaluation. The topics were derived from the country studies and the synthesis report, and not from the study into international lobbying and advocacy. The topics were selected by the authors. Their selection does not necessarily reflect all key findings of the evaluation and the book should therefore not be read as a comprehensive summary of the evaluation. With regard to the topics discussed, the book reflects the findings and conclusions of the evaluation, but the wording is the sole responsibility of the authors. Their reflections as included in this book are entirely the authors' views and do not necessarily agree with the views of Partos nor those of the organisations evaluated.

PARTOS

SGE Stichting Gezamenlijke Evaluaties

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