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EVIDENCE AND EVALUATION
WORLD VISION AUSTRALIA PRESENTATION

Introduction

Development effectiveness is a major issue preoccupying governments, think tanks and non-governmental organizations (NGO) working in international development across the globe. What does effectiveness mean? The Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) NGO Effectiveness Framework defines effectiveness as the promotion of "sustainable change that addresses the causes as well as the symptoms of poverty and marginalization." Thus the work of NGOs like World Vision is multi-faceted. In addition to obvious concerns for quality and evidence-based project designs with rigorous monitoring and evaluation systems, projects must at the same time include elements that build local capacity and ensure community level ownership and participation. Place these goals in the context of an increasingly complex global economy and the imperative to be flexible, innovative and continually learning, is clear.

How then, can effectiveness be demonstrated? How do NGOs gather evidence to show effectiveness on the multiple levels on which they operate and ensure that their activities are inclusive and achieve goals around capacity building and ownership. For World Vision, a faith based humanitarian and development agency that operates in some of the most difficult contexts in the world , the questions and challenges that arise when evaluating program effectiveness include: How do we address the limitations of approaches to measure impact? Can innovative technologies be used to improve the quality of data collected? What type of evidence is available to look at the impact of faith on development?

Three speakers from World Vision Australia will describe their experiences collecting evidence on the multiple facets of effectiveness.

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Setting up to measure impact in development programs – some reflections from the field

Dr Carolyn Kabore

This paper presents some reflections on measuring impact following implementation of a baseline survey in a World Vision project in Burundi, in East Africa. The key intention of baseline surveys in World Vision programming is to provide measurements against a range of project indicators at the start of a project in order to compare the situation before intervention with the situation afterwards. The project community acts as its own control - constituting a form of quasi-experimental design. The intended purpose of this design is to identify benefits attributable to the intervention, reflect on the effectiveness of the program approach for community development, and to distil the learnings to advance our internal evaluation thinking and practice.

Such an approach, it has to be acknowledged, is underpinned by several assumptions: i) that the project design is relevant to community needs, ii) that the intervention will lead to change and the selected indicators will detect this change, iii) the level of change is of a scale

that can be measured, and iv) the effects of the intervention can somehow be disentangled from the myriad of non-intervention factors that change a community over time. Thus there are known shortcomings in this mode of quasi-experimental design. However, when setting out to measure impact, short of employing fully randomised experimental designs – which are beyond the capacity (and interest) of many development organisations, are not possible on moral and practical grounds for many types of intervention, can be prohibitively expensive and time consuming, and arguably carry an equally worrying set of assumptions – it remains the most practical choice.

In addition to the inherent limitations of this approach, there are shortcomings and challenges around the use of broadscale surveys which often accompany baseline evaluations, particularly for programming in health, food security and agriculture. Implementing surveys in the field is (despite the rhetoric of rigour associated with quantitative work) a highly adaptive process which has to be carefully managed and almost always has implications for data quality. For example, the following constraints occurred in a baseline survey in Burundi in 2008:

- a major event was programmed at exactly the same time and location as the baseline, resulting in competition for staff resources and logistical support;
- key staff informants for the baseline event were unavailable;
- politics in the national office had recently boiled over, leaving management and ownership of the evaluation by local staff in disarray;
- the number of HH for the survey which ideally (i.e. using standard WV protocols for sample size and selection) was over 700 had to be reduced to 450 to keep within resources and timelines;
- despite intensive training and management of enumerators, there were inconsistencies in their approach to conducting the survey;
- no computer equipment or staff were available for data entry during the evaluation and quality of subsequent data entry was inconsistent.

Despite these challenges, with significant inputs of time for data verification after the event, a useful data set emerged and the baseline report was duly produced. Encountering such obstacles is unavoidable in evaluation work; this observation will certainly **not** come as news to experienced practitioners. Evaluators go into the field with the hope that they will be well supported in their task, and happily this sometimes even happens! However, they can equally find themselves facing a spectacular lack of organisation. Such is the nature of working in a development setting – fieldwork for quantitative surveys is a balancing act between achieving rigour and precision, and getting the job done with the resources at hand.

Add to this that the 'communities' we 'measure' using surveys in a development setting can be highly mobile, spread across diverse terrains, and exhibit great variability in family makeup from one household to the next. Yet, through the application of a quantitative survey tool we claim to know with (statistical) certainty, facts about the communities in which we work. But as Bryman (2004) suggests, *"…the [quantitative] measurement process possesses an artificial … sense of precision and accuracy…[and] ...the connection between measures developed ... [and] concepts they are supposed to be revealing is assumed, rather than*

real." In other words, there is a risk that we create a [data based] picture of reality at the organisational level which does not reflect the diverse realities of the communities we work with.

Realistically, quantitative data collection develops a picture which may be no more reliable than what can be pieced together using less intensive methods such as consultation of community groups (stakeholder interviews, focussed discussions, facilitated workshops). The advantage of the latter approaches is that they are usually cheaper, quicker and provide more scope for community participation and capacity building - thus supporting greater ownership by the community.

This is not to suggest that we can do away with quantitative approaches - this remains an appropriate choice where projects are setting up to measure impact. The intention is to highlight the fact that assumptions underlying the quasi-experimental design and significant limitations that can arise in the field make quantitative approaches vulnerable to quality issues. However, observations of this kind are usually absent in evaluation reports, and so funders remain largely unaware of the potential weaknesses. WV encourages consultants to reflect on methodology and on events that arise in the field in their reporting. We also advocate strongly for the use of both quantitative and qualitative data collection in all evaluations, whether they have a predominantly quantitative or qualitative methodological design.

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How can innovative technologies be used to improve the quality of data collected?
Dr Francois Tsafack and Anueja Gopalakrishnan

Many institutions including governments and NGOs such as World Vision Australia depend heavily on data collected from remote rural communities to demonstrate the effectiveness of their programs. To this end, the need to ensure the quality and integrity of the data cannot be understated. Currently World Vision conducts field research surveys in many parts of the world. Data collection is paper based and often requires a considerable amount of time, human and financial resources to complete. Researchers often experience a loss of completed questionnaires, enumerator's mistakes as well as data entry which make the task of data handling and analyses tedious.

Ensuring the integrity and quality of data is crucial in the endeavour to demonstrate the effectiveness of community development programs. The use of innovative technologies may help to improve data collection and analysis. World Vision Australia, in collaboration with RMIT, has been working on the development of an application called SMAP based on the OpenStreetMap core code, that could allow researchers to use mobile phones to collect information, immediately transfer it and ensure integrity of data, access data in real time, minimise human error, reduce cost and do away with hard copy questionnaires.

This project uses GPS facilities in areas where map data is sparse or inaccurate to provide a geographical information system that can capture, store, manage, analyse and visualize information that is linked to specific geographical locations. To date, two field trials have been conducted in Cambodia and Malawi with various degrees of success.

How does the system work

The evaluation coordinator accesses a bank of questions in a Question Management Server (QMS) and creates questionnaires. The newly created survey tool is then automatically saved and sent to a Survey Management Server (SMS). During the evaluation process, the evaluation team can access their specific survey on the SMS and make required changes. Mobile phones, with OpenStreetMap software loaded, are distributed to trained enumerators on deployment into the project area. At each data collection point (e.g. household) enumerators use the mobile phone to download a fresh copy of the survey from the SMS. This triggers the geospatial information of the data collection point to be automatically sent to the server. The enumerators then upload the completed survey to the server (SMS). If the uploading is successful, the survey can be deleted from the mobile phone or stored in its memory (a Nokia N95can contain up to 500 surveys). Data transferred to the server can be exported as an MS Excel spreadsheet. Ongoing development will allow the data to be exported in to statistical package formats such as SPSS, STATA, SAS, as well as relational database formats such as SQL. Maps will show where the different surveys were completed and may contain other project related information.

There are a number of existing systems that use mobile phones and/or Palm held devices for data collection[1]. The main difference between these systems and the proposed product is the level of survey creation and management, and data transfer. In other systems data is transferred using texting or SMS, which means that the amount of data that can be gathered and sent across is limited. Unlike the SMAP system they offer limited capability for field staff to remotely create new or customised surveys and upload surveys in file format after completion to a central repository for analysis.

Field trials success and challenges

Two field trials have already been conducted, one in Cambodia in May 09 during the baseline survey of a nutrition project, and the other in Malawi in June 09 during the evaluation survey of a HIV/AIDS project. The field team was supported from Melbourne by the SMAP3 team (students from RMIT) with the support of an IT Architect from IBM. The first and greatest challenge the team faced was developing an application that would allow the Nokia phone to read, input and interpret Khmer scripts using its existing keypad. After days of trials and failures, this hurdle was surmounted. This was the first time ever an application was developed that allowed end users to input Khmer scripts into a Nokia mobile phone. Next, enumerators were not able to download the survey form from the Survey Management Server (SMS) and upload the completed form together with geo-data back to the server. This was mostly due to bugs in the software that developers needed to fix. These difficulties are now resolved and field staff in Cambodia are now able to download and upload surveys from the villages. Plans are underway for the next survey to begin before the end of the year.

The accuracy and speed of data collection and the flexibility to update the data capture interface offer clear advantages of the new approach over traditional paper surveys, though the total cost of ownership is yet to be fully understood. The cost of commercial off the

[1] Source: http://mobileactive.org/wiki/Mobile Applications for Data Collection

shelf software, licenses, program upgrades, service support, network access and data transfer costs may constitute an obstacle to wider uptake of the technology. However, the intentional decision to use an Open-Source pathway in the development of the proposed solution will provide a considerable cost saving incentive to NGOs and other potential users.

Although a complete cost analysis to estimate the on-cost of the required IT infra-structure and support for the new system has not been undertaken, this technology is a breakthrough in the process of gathering evidence.

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Evaluation and the value of faith in development
Andrew Newmarch

> *"... just as social scientists and practitioners have recognised that gender, class, and ethnicity, while potentially conflictual, are integral components of people's identity and must be addressed in development attempts, so spirituality and religion, because of their centrality to the life of the poor, must be addressed." (Field officer)*

Faith, and particularly the Christian faith, is one of the defining characteristics of World Vision. World Vision is an international aid and development agency that, like many development agencies from the West, was begun by people with faith motivations. As World Vision's development practice has shifted from supporting orphanages in one country to complex humanitarian, development and advocacy activity and programs in over 90 countries, its understanding of the role of faith in development has changed over time.

The way in which faith informs our theory of development, is the topic of continuing discussions about policy and practice. In the past two years this has developed into more intentional investigation. A series of evaluations were conducted in Eastern European countries and the Middle East to examine how aspects of faith work in development, and to find out what trends in behaviour are emerging as a result of the faith base of our activity. More specifically, we are interested in exploring:

- How does faith affect WV as an agency in its internal workings
- How does faith affect how we conduct or program our interventions.

This is a new field of endeavour for WVA and it is proving challenging to evaluate. The evaluations will inform the development of further research that will be conducted in collaboration with universities. At this point we are still asking questions and trying to determine how to build an evidence base.

In a study published in 2005, Erica Bornstein argued that faith did make a difference in the development work of NGOs but that it was difficult to classify whether it was good or bad; indeed she categorised her assessment as 'complicated'. Our evaluations in Eastern European countries have confirmed much of her findings.

Findings from our evaluations suggest that faith was very important in establishing identity. Our findings in Lebanon, Bosnia and Albania were that faith had a significant unifying effect in bringing like-minded people together and produced a caring work environment. In each of these countries, religious blocks characterise people's place and identity; indeed, the

identification is meant to signify that they are not of any of the other groupings. It is no wonder that in an office of one religious identity, in this case Christian, there is a sense of unity. On the other hand, this level of uniformity, based on faith, leads to faith practice becoming an implicit performance related measure.

The identification issue is even more complex. In Lebanon, WV found that to work with refugee communities in the south required them to employ Muslims. Despite not being of the same faith basis, the Muslim employees found commonality in working with others who practised their faith. This was as much comfort to them as the fact of development activity.

Bornstein states that "faith provided a rubric ... through which employees of NGOs interpreted the logic of development itself." Her evidence showed that in faith based NGOs faith was the institutional driver and discourse that offered potential for change. In the evaluations in Eastern Europe we found a spectrum of positions. Amongst a small minority were those who were convinced that a Christian orientation would offer the best way for development to occur. At the other end of the spectrum was a group of people who acknowledged that faith had a place but did not believe that a Christian label to activity would be of benefit; indeed, it could be detrimental. In the context of multi-faith youth groupings in Beirut, for example, they were clear that having a faith was an advantage but that expressing a preference was a risk. Furthermore, in practice, what turned out to be a strength was the integration of different groups to advocate together on issues like peacebuilding.

In Bosnia, and this was generally applicable to other post Communist countries, interviews with community members and leaders revealed what one person called "institutional neurosis" and "learned helplessness", in other words a lack of hope.

Overall, a consistent message from our evaluations was that identity and worldview were two significant factors in driving the role of faith in development. Our next step is to commission further detailed research into these factors and issues like the relationship of 'helplessness' and hope and in turn, their relationship to faith, religion and development. This will mean linkages to academics who will design field research that will include placement of researchers in the field for months at a time to monitor development activities and the community responses in relation to the factors. It will be important to determine community reasons for their actions and the extent to which these key factors contribute to meaning in their lives.

There is an increasing literature addressing the role of faith eg the Birmingham University Religion and Development Research Program, the World Bank and INTRAC. We have only just begun to gather data. There are larger and more complex questions such as the role of faith in understanding poverty and the extent to which the intentionality with which any agency sets its objectives brings about change.