



Australian Government

AusAID

# Reflecting on Evaluation Methods for Development Aid

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A decorative border at the top of the slide features a repeating pattern of small, circular icons. These icons represent various themes such as education, health, and social development, consistent with the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) theme.

## Where do the issues come from?

- > The limitations of *poverty alleviation* as a development concept.
- > Broadening and expanding the parameters of the aid agenda – logframes, indicators and performance frameworks.
- > Are we getting the right things out of the MDGs?



## Perceptions of development and poverty

> Poverty is a contested phenomena –

“...it is both complex and ambiguous ... recently it has taken on the limited meaning of the practice of development agencies, especially in aiming at reducing poverty and the MDGs.” Thomas

“... since poverty depends on values and on alternative conceptions of ‘necessity’ there is no uniform or unique answer to its articulation.” Kanbur



## Limitations of existing practice

- > Set of global indicators ignores the ‘software’ of societies – relational elements; cultural and political drivers and constraints
- > Inherent managerialism causes inefficiency and the rise of what Natsios calls the ‘counter-bureaucracy’ – the compliance side of aid
- > The donor and the customer – who is accountable to whom?
- > The rise of the mega INGO and multilaterals



## **Inter/multi/trans-disciplinary approaches to evaluation and research**

- > Inter – direct interaction between disciplines – draw on multiple knowledges but situate research in defined academic space
- > Multi – teams work in their own discipline and fit together disparate parts
- > Trans – between and across different disciplines – multiple co-existent realities – integrated practice
- > Diverse ontological and epistemological approaches to evaluation and research



# Reflecting on evaluation – Complexity and Development Aid

> Ben Ramalingham (ODI)/ Chris Mowles (Hertfordshire)

“In our view, the value of complexity concepts are at a meta-level – they suggest new ways to think about problems and new questions that should be posed and answered, rather than specific concrete steps that should be taken as a result. This means that they may be more useful in addressing questions of ‘how’ international aid work should be undertaken.” (Ramalingham 2008)





# Critical Systems Thinking

- > Improvement; Critical awareness; Methodological pluralism
- > Adaptable, flexible and includes multiple perspectives
- > Builds on critical awareness of stakeholders
  - “the underlying premise of CST is that, to be ethical, practitioners must constantly question and adjust their actions and choices, particularly in relation to power dynamics” (Smith 2010).



# Discordant pluralism

- > Meta-theories, integration and multiple methodologies
- > Development aid as a constellation – aversions and attractions existing in the same space
- > Different views in different positions for different viewers that is changing and dynamic





## Trying something different - Phenomenography

- > Phenomenography – start with learning – profit by partnering, analysing and looking for the ‘unintended consequences’
- “The analysis starts with a search for meaning, or variation in meaning, across the interview transcripts and is then supplemented by a search for structural relationships between meanings.” Marton 1986





## Learning as a development aid objective

- > The social perspective on learning has the following principles. Learning is:
  - inherent in human nature;
  - the ability to negotiate new meanings;
  - creating emergent structures;
  - fundamentally experiential and social;
  - constituting trajectories of participation;
  - dealing with boundaries;
  - a matter of social energy and power;
  - a matter of engagement, imagination and alignment;
  - an interplay between the local and the global. (Wenger 1999)



## Where to now?

> Aid should no longer be conceived and evaluated as a resource transfer mechanism –

“... it should be a transmission belt for ideas, an instrument for building state capacity, and a platform for policy experimentation and dissemination based on good analytical work and sensitive advisory service.” Robert Picciotto