

# **Towards Organisational Performance Assessment: experiences of strengthening learning, accountability and understanding social change**

*Dan Charlish, Ros David, Marta Foresti, Lesley-Anne Knight and Margaret Newens<sup>1</sup>*

## **Synopsis**

This paper analyses the experience of the British Overseas Aid Group (BOAG) in its quest to assess organisational performance. During the last three years, each of the BOAG agencies has made progress in this regard. There is much to learn and to share.

Strong participatory assessment with partners and beneficiaries is at the core of each of our monitoring and evaluation systems. Yet other means of listening to a wide range of stakeholders and seeking independent assessments are also required in order to ensure robust external challenge, scrutiny and accountability. This paper seeks to illustrate the methods and means developed by the five BOAG agencies. A combination of methodologies and actions are suggested as a way forward.

The paper explains the need for large, complex organisations to develop means of "intelligent accountability". It seeks to show how the BOAG agencies try to balance the strong values of working in partnership with Southern partners and beneficiaries while developing robust systems for understanding social change and impact: systems which stand up to external, professional scrutiny. In particular, this paper illustrates:

- Methodological approaches for understanding the dimensions of social change
- Monitoring systems, which increase learning, downward accountability and transparency.
- Methods of increasing stakeholder involvement and external scrutiny.
- Initial work on the assessment of advocacy and campaigning.

While the paper provides examples of good practice, it suggests the need for more 'joined up' thinking in developing organisational wide systems. There is some way to go. We need to improve the rigour of our assessments and our accountability while at the same time working towards reducing unnecessary bureaucracy.

## **Section 1. Introduction**

### **Challenges facing INGO performance assessment in the twenty first century**

Many international NGOs (INGOs), including members of BOAG, are undergoing significant change. For the five BOAG agencies, growing importance has been given to understanding and enhancing the impact of our work. The emphasis on impact needs to be seen in the wider context of understanding how we can work better to eradicate poverty, and work to improve the lives of poor people in all the countries where we work, based on core values such as empowerment and accountability.

Each of the BOAG agencies faces a challenging task of assessing organisational performance given the vast scale of their programmes. For example, the BOAG agencies' programmes span both development and humanitarian work. Programmes are often implemented by partner agencies and many other forces and institutions (beyond our programme interventions) will affect the outcomes and impact of our work. In addition, increasingly our approach is to work in alliance with others to bring about policy change at strategic levels. Issues of attribution, the importance of acknowledging partners contributions

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<sup>1</sup> The authors are from the five member agencies of the British Overseas Aid Group: Christian Aid, Action Aid, Save the Children UK, CAFOD and Oxfam GB

and issues around balancing downward and upward accountability all influence internal systems.

Organisational review and planning processes have led each of us to define more clearly what we seek to achieve, prioritise what we focus on, and seek greater coherence between, and impact from, our activities at community level and beyond. Equally, new funding relationships with donors also bring new challenges for assessing performance and assessing the effectiveness of partnership agreements<sup>2</sup>.

It is not the intention of this paper to explore the inherent challenges in assessing social change. These are well known. Also well documented are the inherent issues around attribution where multiple forces and actors, operating at different levels, are at play<sup>iii</sup>. Instead this paper will explore two distinct ways in which INGOs can contribute to improving evaluation practice in social development:

- First, our mandates and core values mean that we should seek to make the voices of poor people central to our evaluation practice and the learning we bring to debates on social development.
- Secondly, we can share our experiences and learning, as complex INGOs, of attempting to assess change. The literature warns of the many dangers of setting up bureaucratic systems for measuring results in this new era of accountability. The perverse incentives that monitoring against targets can bring<sup>iv</sup>. The heavy demands internal monitoring systems can make on staff time (who often suffer from poor ownership and lack of support for learning). The literature also warns of the dangers of giving less attention to external evaluation and stakeholder assessments<sup>v</sup>. Furthermore it increasingly draws attention to the negative impact that pressures from INGOs place on southern NGO partners<sup>vi</sup>.

## Section 2. Experiences and Lessons

### The need for a combination of methodologies and tools

The experience of BOAG agencies over recent years is that the introduction of organisational performance frameworks has helped us to increase the attention given to impact assessment. At different paces and in different ways, the BOAG agencies have moved towards developing performance assessment frameworks to monitor social change against organisational objectives<sup>3</sup>. These objectives now form the “top-line” against which most BOAG agencies are seeking to draw together organisation-wide performance assessments of programme work. These organisational performance frameworks need to maintain enough flexibility to accommodate the diversity and complexities which characterise all development and humanitarian work, especially in large agencies such as those in BOAG. We need to be constantly on the lookout for changes to the environment and contexts at different levels at which we work and adapt accordingly.

Whilst recognising that no single methodology will deliver an adequate organisational performance assessment of INGO programme work, there needs to be consistency in our approaches – too many changes too quickly can overburden front-line staff and partners. Different initiatives taken by the BOAG agencies in recent years, however, are helping us learn how to incorporate the following tools and approaches into our overall assessment processes:

- Tools which help us *understand and capture social change at organisational level* despite the variety of contexts in which we work and strategies applied.
- Approaches which try to balance *upward and downward accountability and trust*, listen to the voices of poor people and enhance learning and performance through honest and

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<sup>2</sup> All the five BOAG agencies now have strategic Partnership Programme Agreements (PPAs) with DFID.

<sup>3</sup> ActionAid has a framework for monitoring change against its global strategy “*Fighting Poverty Together*”; CAFOD has developed an Appraisal, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework (CAMEL) measuring strategic organisational outcomes, Oxfam GB uses Annual Impact Reporting (AIR) and Save the Children have implemented Global Impact Monitoring.

critical assessments by partners and agency staff. Crucial for building this trust is a willingness to share power and adapt to differing partnership needs.

- Approaches which *use the expertise of “outsiders” and engage with a wide range of stakeholders*, in order to validate and challenge internal perspectives and contribute to drawing conclusions and lessons across programmes and contexts.
- Experiences in assessing participatory policy processes, advocacy and campaigning at different levels.

A comprehensive overview of each of the BOAG agencies' performance assessment approaches is beyond the possibility of this brief paper. Instead below, we seek to illustrate a diverse range of methodological tools, fundamental to each agency's approach.

## **a) Understanding and capturing social change**

Within the context of monitoring organisational performance, Oxfam GB and Save the Children-UK are both experimenting with methods to better understand social change. They are both defining a small number of “*dimensions of change*” and *principles* to assist analysis across contexts and objectives. The principles and dimensions of change chosen represent key elements of what the agency believes is important in bringing about change for poor people and the principles and values it espouses. Such “dimensions of change” approaches, and the related tools and processes for implementation, have provided each agency with a framework for understanding, discussing and assessing to what extent the agency's work is contributing to bringing about meaningful social change or has the potential to do so. Assessments judge not only what has been achieved and for whom, but crucially unintended and negative impacts which are inherent in development and humanitarian interventions and critical issues for meaningful accountability and learning processes. Analyses also seek to explore how change has been brought about, what Oxfam GB or Save the Children-UK and their partners have contributed alongside others, and what can be learnt from successes and failures.

Box 1 illustrates the main features of Oxfam GB's and Save the Children-UK's “dimensions of change” frameworks.

### Box 1

#### Principles and “dimensions of change” for understanding and capturing social change

Through its different approaches for assessing programme performance, impact and learning, Oxfam GB seeks answers to seven questions:

- What **significant changes have occurred in the lives of poor women, men and children**?
- How far has **greater equality** been achieved between women and men and other groups?
- What **changes in policies, practices, ideas and beliefs** have happened?
- Have those we hope will benefit and those who support us been appropriately **involved** at all stages and **empowered** through the process?
- Are the changes which have been achieved likely to be **sustained**?
- How **cost effective** has the intervention been?
- To what degree have we **learned** from this experience and **shared** this learning?

Drawing on programme plans across the regions, a few broad statements of outcomes have also been identified under each of Oxfam GB's, rights-based, strategic change objectives, providing another means of synthesising progress whilst recognising diversity of local contexts. Thus, under the strategic change objective about sustainable livelihoods, an outcome statement about poor producers gaining greater access to local markets will be specified differently in each programme context but the coherence in overall purpose can still be seen.

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Save the Children-UK's Global Impact Monitoring Framework is based on five similar dimensions of change, which are applied to assess the impact of work at different levels (e.g. country and regional) and across different areas of work (e.g. health, trade etc). Each dimension of change is related to the core principles of the Convention of the Rights of the Child ensuring that these are reflected in the way in which we assess the performance and impact of Save the Children work. The five dimensions of change are:

- **Changes in the lives of children and young people**  
Which **rights** are being better fulfilled? Which rights are no longer being violated?
- **Changes in policies and practice affecting children and young people's rights**  
Duty bearers more **accountable** for the fulfilment, protection and respect of children's and young people's rights. Policies are developed and implemented.
- **Changes in children's and young people's participation and active citizenship**  
Children and young people have access to information and decision making. And are able to **demand their rights**.
- **Changes in equity and non-discrimination of children and young people**  
-in policies, programmes, services and communities. Are the most marginalised children reached?
- **Changes in civil society and communities capacity to support children's rights**  
Do networks, coalitions and movements add value to the work of their participants? Their work mobilises greater forces for change in children's and young people's lives?

While both agencies are seeking to use these sets of questions across different impact assessment activities, experience to date is mainly from the two agencies' global impact monitoring and review processes. In Save the Children-UK, the Global Impact Monitoring process involves Impact Review meetings with external stakeholders, which take place at regular intervals within country programmes. These aim to discuss and analyse Save the Children's work in a participatory way, with a view to learning from both positive and negative experiences in order to improve future work. A key feature of the process is its inclusivity with particular regard to partners, children and young people directly involved in Save the Children-UK's work. Oxfam GB has not introduced country review meetings with stakeholders as a standard part of its Annual Impact Reporting process. Rather, ongoing participatory programme management processes are the basis for seeking information and views from partners, beneficiaries and other stakeholders, and these provide the evidence on which staff make judgements about what changes have occurred, why and what can be learnt from this. Local analyses then help progress and difficulties to be described and key themes, principles and dimensions of change to be debated at regional level and globally.

The experiences of both agencies in using these frameworks have, on the whole, been positive. The dimensions have been found easy to understand and participatory assessments with stakeholders have produced critical and rich information, debate and analysis. However, it takes time for new systems to embed and evolve in large organisations, for consistency of understanding to develop around core concepts, for the key questions each agency is asking to become integrated into ongoing programme management, and for the evidence-base from which conclusions are drawn to build. Both agencies can already see how the introduction of these “dimensions of change” frameworks is strengthening learning with others about significant changes occurring and our ability to draw conclusions at different levels of the organisation about programme performance and impact.

## **b) Balancing upward and downward accountability and building trust**

The challenge for BOAG agencies in understanding social change lies in striking the balance between upward and downward accountability and recognising the imbalance of power between donors and Southern partners. Partnership, including working through networks and alliances, characterises the identity, ethos and culture of BOAG organisations. We have all been taking a critical look at how we as northern agencies engage with southern partners, listen to the voices of poor people and respect their assessments of change and the pace of that change.

This is timely for a number of reasons. Increasingly, we campaign internationally as well as supporting partners engaging in participatory policy development and monitoring in the south. We need to be vigilant about our legitimacy and accountability in this work. Although the experience that NGOs have of reaching out to marginalised groups and listening to their voices is widely recognised, questions are being asked about the claims of civil society organisations, especially development NGOs, to represent or channel these voices, unadulterated, into fora or debates.<sup>vii</sup> Secondly, funding is usually a core aspect of our relationship with southern partners. We need to acknowledge the impact this can have on relationships and the balance of power. Thirdly, given the challenges just mentioned, we need to look at the quality of our partnerships with southern stakeholders as we seek to make our performance and impact assessment processes more relevant and explicit.

In Box 2 we look at ActionAid's experiences in introducing its Accountability, Learning and Planning System. Central to this system is a commitment to greater transparency and openness and listening to the assessments of others, especially poor people's.

Christian Aid and CAFOD, both faith-based organisations, have been exploring how trust and mutual accountability for performance within partnership is based on an understanding and sharing of common values. Observations of the relationships between Northern donors and Southern NGOs indicate that partners expect mutuality and trust to underlie their relationships with Northern aid organisations. Their experiences, however, are that these values are grounded more in the rhetoric of Northern NGOs than in their practice of partnership. Some southern NGOs' disillusionment about partnership with Northern NGOs and the imbalance of power threatens productive relationships between the two, which are vital for delivering on the task of bringing about social change, alleviating and eradicating poverty and injustice in poor communities in the South. Box 3 introduces CAFOD's partnership approach and how it is trying to implement its explicit values of development partnership as a tool for enabling evaluation, learning and growth.

**Box 2****Balancing upward and downward accountability**

During the last three years ActionAid's internal monitoring and reporting systems have undergone fundamental review. By the end of the 1990s, ActionAid – like many large NGOs – had become steeped in internal bureaucracy. Despite a huge amount of staff effort on planning, monitoring and reporting, the organisation knew little about the lasting impact its work has brought about in people's lives. Change was required.

In the year 2000 a new internal system was developed. 'ALPS' – the ActionAid Accountability, Learning and Planning System broke new ground. ALPS marked a significant change for ActionAid for a number of reasons. It required ActionAid and its partners to ensure that poor and marginal groups are central in their own development process. It opened the space for community groups and partners to have great participation in, and ownership over, programmes. It emphasised learning with greater stakeholder involvement at all levels. Most radically, it encouraged greater transparency and openness – moving ActionAid to a time when community groups with whom it works are actively involved in planning, budgeting and assessing the value of interventions.

Two radical elements of ALPS have been highly successful. The first is the introduction of annual Participatory Review and Reflection Processes (PRRPs). These processes involve external stakeholders at all levels – local, national, regional and international (including donors) - in assessing and critically feeding back on ActionAid's work. The second has been the efforts to increase financial transparency with partners and communities. During annual PRRPs, ActionAid teams are increasingly sharing the costs of work, budget allocation decisions and discussing the impact of work with partners, donors, community groups and poor people. Where most work has been done, these processes have been highly rewarding.

Within Burundi, ActionAid's PRRP incorporated budget and expenditure analysis aimed at soliciting views on financial resource allocation and the cost effectiveness of different expenditures. In Kenya, ActionAid's team shared detailed budgets and financial information on ActionAid's work in visual forms using pie charts and graphs in Swahili. The process of increasing transparency and accountability to partners and community groups has yielded very positive results. One partner NGO in Kenya remarked: *"...in a unique way the developing initiative using ALPS principles has brought together community members, community based organisations, government line ministries, politicians, other NGOs like ActionAid and traditional community structures. During the review and reflection process there was direct accountability by MEDS in public..."* (Mohammed Noor, Project Co-ordinator for MEDS – an ActionAid partner in Northern Kenya).

Other country programmes have had similar feedback. Within Burundi, the PRRP has attracted compliments from many directions including DFID and UNDP. Within Burundi, the fact that ActionAid Burundi allowed itself to be appraised (and criticised) by beneficiaries and partners at all levels, continues to be admired as a rare occurrence.

### Box 3

#### **Making explicit values in partnership as a tool for enabling evaluation, learning and growth**

For a non-operational, faith-based organisation like CAFOD, partnership is explicitly named as a core value, and is the central methodology in delivering development aid and fundamental to organisational objectives and strategies. Partnership is the approach to development which most strongly legitimises our activities as a Northern NGO and which most clearly enables mutual accountability and trust.

In our experience, trust and mutual accountability for performance within partnership relationships are based on an understanding and sharing of common values. Crucial for building this trust is a willingness to share power and adapt to differing partnership needs. Important learning points for CAFOD have been the need for transparency in communicating systems for accountability, monitoring and evaluation, not rushing the pace and considering the impact on partners and poor people. Values and standards of partnership are often challenged when partners feel under scrutiny, especially when, as Southern NGOs, they have a different approach to measuring effectiveness and impact from Northern partners.

*'Try to put across all the information which is available instead of making it private property'*

*Josphat Mulyungi – Kenya*

*'Partnership [is] a process and it's long-term...like a journey...you might go through bumps, but you are going together through those bumps...It's a genuine two-way process.'* Margaret Simbi – Zimbabwe

We need to make our values explicit if mutual accountability and trust are to be the foundation of effective partnerships. Some of these core values of developmental partnerships are defined by CAFOD as follows:

- **Openness and accountability:** about who we are and what we are about, our affiliations and obligations and how these may affect the other party; accountability to institutional donors, constituents, supporters and all stakeholders.
- **Mutuality:** responsibility for achieving the goal of alleviating/eradicating injustice and poverty in communities should be seen as mutual. This includes joint planning and decision making.
- **Equality:** the resources that both parties bring into the partnership may be different in content but should be seen as being of *equivalent* value as both are vital for the achievement of the common goal.
- **Participation, patience and long term commitment:** development is a learning process so adequate provision must be made for partners to learn at a pace and style that is convenient for them. Transformation is also a long process which requires a sustained partnership if real change is to take place.
- **Flexibility and stability:** Flexibility is needed to ensure an effective response to partners about problems, solutions, resources and the outcomes of participatory processes and changes in the environment. Stability needs to be given through programme structures and procedures.

Working in partnerships based on mutuality and trust should make possible the implementation of different systems and methodologies for measuring organisational performance and demonstrating intelligent accountability.

The voice of our partners in the South, through our listening and their story-telling, can speak as loudly as mechanically gathered quantitative data.

### c) Stakeholder engagement and external scrutiny

Whilst committing ourselves to building trust and openness in our relations with partners and poor people, and emphasising participatory review and impact assessment processes as a core evaluation methodology, we recognise the need for complementary methodologies

which can cross-check findings and add other perspectives. Here we look at ActionAid's and Oxfam GB's processes for seeking a range of stakeholder assessments through participation in meetings and through surveys. These seek to provide opportunities for partners to stand aside from contractual and funding considerations in relationship to individual programmes, to feel free to comment honestly and engage more broadly in understanding and assessing INGO contributions. With other stakeholders likewise, these processes seek to promote broad feedback and engagement in agency reviews and assessments.

Traditionally, programme evaluations involving external consultants have been used to bring specialist expertise, as well as independent views and objectivity, into agency learning and accountability mechanisms. The experience of many individual agencies, however, as well as across the sector more generally, has been that we have been poor at learning from and sharing learning from these exercises. Evaluators have often felt hampered too by

lack of clarity in objectives and lack of adequate monitoring information to explain the development of a programme. Initiatives now being taken by the BOAG agencies should enable us to make more effective use of external expertise. In particular, external evaluators have an important contribution to make to our organisation-wide assessments. Already, the BOAG agencies commission regular thematic evaluations that look across programmes. The strengthening of our local participatory planning and review processes are enriching the base of information from which evaluators can draw for meta-analysis. With clearer agency frameworks of strategic programme objectives and the articulation of principles and dimensions of change, we can invite external scrutiny and critique, especially that of our donors, in organisation-wide assessments. This transparency to external scrutiny should strengthen our performance assessment and learning by offering new analysis, insights and challenges to internal perspectives.

#### Box 4

##### Stakeholder surveys and engagement

Each year ActionAid adopts a particular focus in seeking stakeholder engagement in assessing the value and impact of its work. During 2002, external donors, partners and networks were invited to assess the overall performance of ActionAid's work against its original objectives. In 2002 also, DFID's Director General of Programmes was amongst three partners to participate in a Trustee reflection on ActionAid's global progress report. During 2003, a donor survey will feed into the overall organisational assessment process.

For a number of years Oxfam GB has held an Assembly – a meeting of about three days when a range of stakeholders, both internal and external, come together to debate and offer views on key policy issues for Oxfam GB. Senior managers and Trustees attend the Assembly to listen to what stakeholders are saying and engage in dialogue. Stakeholder Surveys have also been introduced, reaching out to many more people than it is possible to include in the Assembly. The Surveys prioritise partners and, where possible, beneficiaries as the primary stakeholder group as well as other individual stakeholders eg volunteers, individual donors, individual campaigners and staff. This prioritisation reflects the fact that, for other stakeholders, eg institutional donors, other accountability mechanisms exist within the relationship. An independent organisation manages the survey and responses are anonymous to encourage honest feedback and allow managers and Trustees to hear the views of stakeholders without the involvement of internal intermediaries. As well as general questions about Oxfam GB's performance, the Surveys can explore expectations and intentions regarding different stakeholder relationships, eg that with volunteers has been explored. Findings have also influenced top-level organisational efforts, eg around cost-effectiveness, and changing perceptions can then be tracked over time. The Stakeholder Survey reports are posted on Oxfam GB's web-site, together with a response from the Director and Chair of Trustees. In future, there will be a two-year cycle, with Stakeholder Surveys and the Assemblies held in alternate years and analysis from the Surveys informing the Assemblies. This will help build complementarity between the two processes with Survey findings feeding into the Assembly and the possibility of identifying commonalities and differences between issues raised and views expressed.

#### **d) Experience in assessing advocacy and campaigning**

The BOAG agencies' understanding of poverty and its causes requires us to undertake development work at different levels - at the local (grass-roots), regional, national and international levels. Whilst the identity, legitimacy and culture of BOAG organisations is influenced profoundly by our partnership ethos and engagement in the South to alleviate poverty, we increasingly put resources into work at the international level, to influence governments and institutions, which shape the international political economy, including processes of accumulation and distribution and access to markets. We do this, in part, through our advocacy and campaigning, which includes our dialogue and consultation with excluded groups in policy-making processes. Measuring our organisational performance and effectiveness in this advocacy work and evaluating the results of our campaigning strategies is a major challenge for our agencies.

In our international campaigning on debt issues and justice in trade relations, for example, we act together with allies, networks and partners in both the "south" and "north". In these situations, where the ultimate impact of our campaigning on the lives of poor people will be mediated by diverse actors and will often only be measurable in the long term, we need to capture our own effectiveness against the objectives and anticipated outcomes we set for our actions. In more local policy-influencing work too, civil society organisations need ways of exploring the complexity of social change processes and the power of different actors.

One approach used for organisation-wide learning was a survey of advocacy work with partners, conducted by Christian Aid in 2001. The methodology used for analysis provided useful learning at different levels of the organisation about successful advocacy work and the effectiveness, from the partners' perspective, of the role played by Christian Aid in supporting this work. Box 5 looks at the methodology.

**Box 5****An organisation-wide survey of advocacy work**

In 2001, Christian Aid conducted a survey of its advocacy work with 111 overseas partners across 43 countries. The survey included collecting stories from partners about what they considered were their most successful advocacy impacts under four possible criteria: policy change impact, policy implementation impact; lives and livelihoods impact; and capacity-building impact for the partner and those they work with. From the 111 partners, 300 short stories were collected about advocacy impact from around the world. A wealth of useful information was contained within this mass of qualitative data - the challenge was to meaningfully aggregate this data at the organisational level and give weight to these stories. A method of analysis called 'Significant Change Theory', developed by Rick Davies, was utilised.<sup>viii</sup>

Each story was filtered up through a hierarchy from the partner, to Christian Aid programme staff, to Heads of Team and finally to the International Director. At each level choices were made on the most successful impact story from a selection given and reasons provided for the choice at each level. Whilst at each level some stories do not progress, others move up the hierarchy eventually resulting in four selected case study examples, one for each type of impact, which emerge as examples of best practice. These were a Tanzanian partner lobbying on land reform, an Indian partner conducting advocacy on the destruction of fishing communities due to large scale shrimp farming, a partner from the Democratic Republic of Congo lobbying on HIV and another from Mali successfully lobbying on debt.

This process of analysis is, of course, highly subjective. The methodology allows a picture to be built of the same types of impact considered from different viewpoints; it ensures a range of stakeholders are consulted, and that data is sufficiently cross-referenced. It facilitates some general lesson learning at each level in the process. In this survey, it was felt that by incorporating comments and perspectives from both partners and members of staff, the process painted a useful picture of the type of work that both feel are successful and why. In the questionnaires, partners also scored various types of Christian Aid involvement and the impact of this involvement on the success of their advocacy work. The results give an encouraging indication about the value partners attach to partnership activities beyond the provision of funding, with more than 50% of partners saying that capacity-building, research and information provision and networking and communication activities made a partial, significant or essential contribution to their advocacy work.

Other monitoring and evaluation initiatives by the BOAG agencies have sought to help us learn about, and account for, our influence alongside others in large campaigns and advocacy programmes. In Box 6 we look at an interview approach.

**Box 6****Interviews with people close to the policy-making process**

An early use of this technique was to evaluate an inter-agency campaign by nine British NGOs, including the BOAG agencies, to prevent cuts in the official aid budget. The evaluation focused on how key decision-makers and decision-formers (government ministers, Members of Parliament, chairs of Select Committees, civil servants and parliamentary advisers, journalists, opposition spokespersons and academics) who were targeted in the campaign rated the actions of the various NGOs, their effectiveness in influencing the levers of power, their accuracy and their timing. External consultants conducted the evaluation, interviewing those close to the policy-making process either face-to-face or by telephone. Interviews were conducted on a non-attributable basis. In this evaluation, and in others done since, the methodology has been found useful in teasing out the strengths and influence of different actors in an advocacy process and the strategies that different targets welcome or find counter-productive. Of course, the particular roles of some respondents in the policy-making process can influence their interpretation of events and regard has to be paid to this in the analysis. Further discussion of this methodology can be found in Roche, C (1999).<sup>ix</sup>

Box 7 describes ActionAid's action research to find new methods and tools for assessing the value of "participatory policy work" with partners. Initiatives such as ActionAid's are needed to promote understanding of how new requirements for government transparency and accountability, for instance in relation to Poverty Reduction Strategy Processes, are working in practice. Important evaluation questions arise about the quality of processes set up for

participation, how marginalised groups are engaged and the accountability of the different actors involved, including donors and INGOs. Civil society actors are deeply involved in these processes and we need to take a critical look at our own actions and accountability as well as identifying how governments can be held to account for their delivery of policy.

**Box 7**

**Developing appropriate methodologies for valuing Participatory Policy work**

ActionAid, and ActionAid's partners, are increasingly refocusing their work on building civil society, strengthening social capital and supporting excluded groups to know and access their rights: work that ActionAid defines as "participatory policy work". As the work changes, ActionAid is committed to changing the methods and tools for assessing the value of this work. It recognises that linear, 'project style' monitoring and evaluation tools are not appropriate for work that is rapidly reacting to changing external environments and which may have vigorous opposition.

Action Aid is currently carrying out intensive action research in Ghana, Uganda, Brazil and Nepal. The aim is to develop understanding of gender sensitive, culturally appropriate methods for assessing the value of this Participatory Policy work – methodologies which, in themselves, reinforce transparent, co-operative ways of working and will strengthen external agencies' roles in helping to create space for marginal groups to have a voice in decision-making fora.

## **Conclusion: Towards intelligent accountability**

In conclusion as large, complex organisations, we seek to develop more “intelligent accountability”. As Onora O’Neill suggests, this requires a new approach to performance assessment. An approach, which recognises what is important to monitor and gives up the ‘fantasy of total control’. Intelligent accountability recognises “...that since much that has to be accounted for is not easily measured, it cannot be boiled down to a set of stock performance indicators.....Those who are called to account should give an account of what they have done and their successes or failures to others who have sufficient time and experience to assess the evidence and report on it.”<sup>x</sup>

As this paper has endeavoured to illustrate, we need to combine a range of methodologies. Strong participatory assessment with partners and beneficiaries is at the core of each of our monitoring and evaluation systems. Yet other means of listening to a wide range of stakeholders and seeking independent assessments are also required in order to ensure robust challenge, external scrutiny and accountability. Whilst we use a range of methodologies already, they need to be more “joined up”, to improve the rigour of our assessments and build a more coherent understanding of organisational wide performance assessment. The definition of strategic programme objectives, principles and dimensions of change, which we judge to be important, have been found useful in providing a broad framework for bringing together organisation-wide assessments while recognising contextual diversity.

The quality of our relationships with stakeholders, especially partners, will influence our assessments. We all face huge challenges in building trust, not over-burdening partners with demands for their time and being clear about mutual responsibilities so that we share the successes and failures of our work together.

Equally challenging is the innovative work required to explore processes of social change and the role of different actors. This includes openness about exploring our own roles and being very clear of our organisational identities as partners and donors. There is clearly much more work to be done in exploring issues of legitimacy and accountability around advocacy and campaigning work.

The challenges we recognise in our own monitoring and evaluation systems are challenges faced by all those engaged in seeking to overcome poverty. With new, more strategic partnership relationships developing between constituencies, there are opportunities to look afresh at ways of encouraging mutual learning to enhance effectiveness and collaboration. Together we strive for the goal of overcoming poverty. Together we need to find new solutions for assessing social development and understanding our contribution to change processes.

## **Annex A. The British Overseas Aid Group (BOAG) and its Member Agencies**

### **BOAG**

Established in 1980, the British Overseas Aid Group (BOAG) is an informal alliance for discussion and joint action among well-established major UK international aid organisations. Its current members are ActionAid, CAFOD, Christian Aid, Oxfam GB and Save the Children.

The members share an overall broad purpose as well as a common set of values, which they apply to similar kinds of international work. The main rationale for BOAG's existence is for the larger UK development NGOs to speak with one voice in promoting the interests of the world's poor and to combine efforts when appropriate in our advocacy and campaigning work in the North.

Directors of the BOAG member organisations meet regularly. To undertake specific agreed joint action when appropriate (e.g. the joint BOAG project on Development Education funded by DFID). This action is taking primarily through BOAG working groups: the Evaluation Group, the Policy Group including ethical purchase/pensions and the Development Education Group.

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**ActionAid** is a unique partnership of people who are fighting for a better world - a world without poverty. ActionAid UK was founded in 1972. Its expenditure during 2001 was £71.9 million. (Euros 115 million). ActionAid UK works closely with its sister Alliance organizations in France, Ireland, Spain and Greece.

ActionAid UK works in over 35 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, alongside more than nine million of the world's poorest people. We recognise that poor people are entitled to life's essentials, such as food, water, healthcare and education. By working in partnership with local organisations, ActionAid UK is able to achieve the greatest possible impact and ensure knowledge and skills remain within communities.

**CAFOD** has been fighting third world poverty since 1962. We believe that all human beings have a right to dignity and respect and that the world's resources are a gift to be shared by all men and women, whatever their race, nationality or religion.

CAFOD is the English and Welsh arm of Caritas Internationalis, a worldwide network of 154 Catholic relief and development organisations. With the help of our network of Regional Organisers throughout England and Wales, CAFOD works in partnership in over 62 countries.

CAFOD's income in 2001/02 was 26.5 million (Euros 42 million) We raise money in England and Wales to finance long-term development work in some seventy countries, including education and skills training, health care, safe water and agricultural and small business development. We work in emergencies, including natural disasters and war. CAFOD campaigns on behalf of the world's poor and carries out extensive analysis of the causes of underdevelopment. In England and Wales, CAFOD promotes educational programmes that raise awareness of the causes of third world poverty and promote change.

**Christian Aid** is the official relief and development agency of 40 'Sponsoring Churches' in the UK and Ireland. Today it works in partnership with about 550 partner organisations in 45 of the world's poorest countries, undertaking both long term development programmes and emergency relief response where the need is greatest.

Working with those of all faiths and none, Christian Aid works with partners and communities to both improve the quality of their own lives whilst also seeking to combat the root-causes of poverty through advocacy and campaigning.

Christian Aid is related to Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) and the

ecumenical instruments in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. It is also part of the European body of ecumenical development agencies known as APRODEV, and is a key member of the ecumenical emergency response mechanism ACT International. Christian Aid also maintains close links with the World Council of Churches. Christian Aid's annual income for 2001/02 was £58 million (Euros 92.8 million).

**Oxfam GB** is a development, relief, and campaigning organisation dedicated to finding lasting solutions to poverty and suffering around the world. We believe that every human being is entitled to a life of dignity and opportunity; and we work with poor communities, partner agencies, volunteers, and supporters to help this become a reality. Oxfam GB's net income in 2001/02 for charitable purposes was £115m. (Euros 184 million)

Oxfam GB is affiliated to Oxfam International, a confederation of twelve organizations working in more than 100 countries. Affiliates of Oxfam International are all focusing on a number of aims on which we know we can have significant impact. They are that every individual should have the right to a livelihood; good-quality education, affordable health care; protection from disasters and violence; the right to have a say in his or her own future; and equality of opportunity. These aims form the basis of all Oxfam's work and are translated into our work on the ground.

### **Save the Children**

Save the Children is the UK's leading international children's charity working to create a better world for children: a world that respects and values each child, that listens to and learns from children, and where all children have hope and opportunity.

Save the Children has been working for children's rights since it was established in 1919. Save the Children's founder, Eglantyne Jebb, drafted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, which formed the basis of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed and ratified by almost every country in the world.

In 2001/02 Save the Children worked in 69 countries focusing on health; education; child labour; HIV/AIDS; food security and nutrition; social protection, welfare and inclusion; and responding to emergencies. The organisation's total expenditure was £116.6 million. (Euros 187 million)

Save the Children is a member of the International Save the Children Alliance, which aims to be a truly global movement for children, with members in 30 countries and operational programmes in more than 100 countries worldwide.

- <sup>i</sup> Oakley, P, Pratt B and Clayton A (1998) Outcomes and Impact: Understanding social development. INTRAC, UK
- <sup>ii</sup> Roche, C (1999) Impact Assessment for Development Agencies: Learning to Value Change, Oxfam GB with Novib, UK.
- <sup>iii</sup> Chapman, J, and Amboka W (2001) Monitoring and Evaluating Advocacy: A Scoping Study, ActionAid, UK.
- <sup>iv</sup> O’Neill, O (2002) BBC Reith Lectures 2002 – A Question of Trust. Lecture 3: Called to Account, [www.bbc.co.uk/radio4](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4).
- <sup>v</sup> DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation, Results Based Management in the Development Co-operation Agencies: A Review of Experience.
- <sup>vi</sup> Wallace, Tina (2002) Contribution to BOAG seminar “Breaking new ground? BOAG agencies’ experience of developing systems for assessing organisational performance”, 10 December 2002.
- <sup>vii</sup> Brock, McGee and Ssewakiryanga (2002) Poverty knowledge and policy processes: a case study of Ugandan national poverty reduction policy, IDS, UK.
- <sup>viii</sup> Davies, R. See <http://www.swan.ac.uk/cds/rd1.htm> for the original paper “An evolutionary approach to facilitating organisational learning: an experiment by the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh” and for the Most Significant Changes e-group for ongoing debate about the methodology.
- <sup>ix</sup> Roche, C (1999) *ibid*.
- <sup>x</sup> O’Neill, O (2002) *ibid*.