

# **Norwegian Development Network**

Resource and competence milieu for non-governmental development organisations

**Paper for**

**OECD/DAC workshop Partners in development evaluation – learning and accountability**

**Session 4: Collaboration and joint work between the various evaluation communities**

## **Enhancing Evaluation Capacity, the Example of a Norwegian Evaluation Network**

**Prepared by the Norwegian Development Network**

Turi Hammer, T-consult Development Research and Consulting

Oslo, February 15, 2003



## 1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to give an example of how one national NGO development community has organised their capacity building in the field of evaluation.

The paper sets out to:

- Present the background, plans and activities of the Evaluation Network of the Norwegian Development Network (NDN).
- Discuss challenges encountered.

The paper builds on:

- Evaluation Network plans and reports.
- Discussions with member organisations, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the NDN board.

## 2 Plans and results of the Evaluation Network

### 2.1 Background

The idea of an evaluation network for Norwegian NGOs stems from the 1997 OECD/DAC Report 1997:2: Searching for Impact and Methods. The study recommends that *'Donors encourage (and consider funding) further networking and information exchange among NGOs to share data on impact and evaluation methods.'* In its follow-up of the report, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs identified a strong interest for an evaluation network among Norwegian NGOs engaged in development co-operation. The Ministry approached the Norwegian Development Network (NDN), a research and competence milieu for Norwegian NGOs, to establish and run the network. A Project Document for a start-up period of three years was approved in 1999, and the network was launched in January 2000.

The overall objective of the network is to improve the quality of development assistance given by NGOs. The immediate objective is to increase the evaluation competence of the NGOs and to improve the systems for quality-assurance of projects and programmes of participating organisations and their partners in the South.

The Ministry provided ample funds, i.e. nearly Euro 300 000 for the three-year start-up period. Income from member organisations and other participants in network activities was budgeted at 40 000 Euro for the start-up period, i.e. a share of 12 per cent of the total turnover.

This unprecedented co-operation between the Ministry and NGOs should be seen in light of the following:

- Nearly one third of Norwegian development assistance is channeled through NGOs. This makes the development authorities particularly interested in encouraging and promoting accountability of NGOs and in assisting in raising the quality of their work.
- In the course of its five-year history, the NDN in 1999 had grown into becoming a widely respected capacity building milieu for its member organisations and other Norwegian development actors.

### 2.2 Strategies, planned activities, expected results and organisation

The Project Document states that the following strategic principles should guide network activities:

- The network should be open and serve NDN member organisations, other NGOs and relevant development milieus, as well as partner organisations in the South.
- In order to facilitate openness and participation from partners in the South and other international organisations and milieus, all information should be available in English.
- The network model was chosen to facilitate exchange of experiences between members and sharing of knowledge and connections with other national and international milieus.
- The users should develop the network, with due attention given to the members' wishes and needs.
- Focus should be on capacity building in the member organisations, including all types of evaluation work. The actual implementation of evaluations should, however, be the responsibility of the member organisations.

Priority should be given to capacity building in the following fields:

- Evaluation as a part of normal processes of organisational development, with an emphasis on the purpose of evaluations.
- Evaluation methods, in particular how to measure impacts.
- Conducting of evaluations.
- Use of monitoring and evaluation as managerial tools.
- Preparation of evaluation plans.

Other activities should include:

- Exchange of evaluation experiences.
- Development of a newsletter.
- Development of a homepage.

The expected results stated in the Project Document were:

- A network established, with communication channels for efficient dissemination of information, organisation of activities and communication between organisations and between them and other types of development milieus.
- A program organised and implemented for capacity building in evaluation work for Norwegian NGOs and their partners in the South. Complementary to this, financial support given to members and their partners to participate in capacity building activities arranged outside the network.
- Initiatives taken to activate the members to exchange experiences, internalise evaluation competence, co-operate in implementation of evaluations etc.

The NDN board, which is composed of representatives of member organisations, was to be responsible for the establishment and running of the network. A Technical Adviser was to be hired for the daily management of the network.

### 2.3 Results

In the three years since the network started, the following activities have been carried out:

<b>Seminars in Norway</b>	Seminars have been the dominant network activity ever since the network started. The number of seminars conducted in 2000 were six, nine in 2001 and nine in 2002. Seven seminars are planned for 2003. Most seminars have lasted for a half-day, some for two or three full days. The number of participants has varied from six to 41, with a mean of 20 persons. Participants come from member organisations, other NGOs, research, education and consultancy milieus, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norwegian Agency of Development Co-operation and other public authorities. (Title of seminars and types of speakers are listed in enclosure 1.)
<b>Seminars in the South</b>	One three-day seminar was conducted in 2001; two seminars are planned in Equador and Zambia in 2003. In addition, a series of small workshops are planned for 2003 as part of a youth leader exchange programme.
<b>Newsletter</b>	Newsletters have been issued and distributed to members and other development actors on a regular basis.
<b>Activity Support</b>	Support to capacity-building activities outside of the network has been granted to nine member organisations and to one partner in the South.
<b>Homepage</b>	A homepage was launched in 2002. The page contains plans, policy documents and seminar invitations and reports. Links to other evaluation resource milieus and national and international databases of resource persons and evaluation reports are to be launched in the first trimester of 2003.
<b>Working groups</b>	One working group on education was active for about a year.
<b>Registration of resource persons</b>	A database for resource persons with evaluation experience is to be launched in the first trimester of 2003. The base will be open to persons in member organisations and their partner organisations in the South. Other development actors including consultants may register by invitation from members or their partners.
<b>Registration of evaluations</b>	A database for evaluations of projects and programmes supported by member organisations is to be launched in the first trimester of 2003. Only evaluations of particular methodological interest will be included.

The network had a target of 20 member organisations, to be drawn from among NDN members, which at the time of planning in 1999 numbered 30 mainly small and medium-sized organisations. In 2003, the number of NDN members has increased to 52, including all the large Norwegian NGOs engaged in development co-operation, and nearly all the middle sized and small organisations. Presently, the Evaluation Network has 45 members; five of which are umbrella organisations for other organisations (see enclosure 2).

### **3 Challenges encountered and answered**

#### **3.1 Relevance**

It is a constant challenge to make network activities relevant to participants. The network tries to be relevant through:

- Deciding seminar topics in response to stated needs from members. At the end of each seminar, suggestions for further network development are noted and followed up. Channels are constantly open for suggestions through e-mail and other types of contact.
- Opening for active involvement by participants at all seminars.
- The board and Technical Adviser trying to keep up-dated on international evaluation trends.

#### **3.2 Quality**

Consideration to the responsibilities and workload of most potential participants presupposes good quality of supplementary activities like capacity building. The network seeks quality through:

- Extensive preparatory work with speakers prior to seminars.
- If speakers are not up to standard, try and amend during the seminars and to discuss the matter afterwards in the board and with the speakers in question.
- Checking satisfaction with seminars with at least some participants.
- Issuing evaluation forms to participants at seminars lasting more than a day. The information is compiled, analysed and presented to the board for discussion.

#### **3.3 Subject-matter development**

Ideally, each member organisation should perhaps be taken through a sequential programme over time, e.g. from basic introduction to evaluation purpose and methods, development of evaluation strategies, systems for monitoring and evaluation and systems for learning leading to action. The network has to some extent addressed this through:

- Focusing on purpose and methods in the first years of operation, and on the other stages later on.

However, the member organisations had very different evaluation backgrounds when the network started, and new members have constantly joined the network. The network tries to adjust to the differing needs by:

- Combining the principle of a linear subject-matter development with loops in foci, so that the less experienced organisations may have their needs met.

#### **3.4 Institutional learning**

Institutional learning is hampered by the fact that network participants are much on the move, e.g. away visiting partners or on long-term assignments abroad, or they are changing jobs within and between development organisations and institutions. Moreover, it may be difficult to have top leaders attending evaluation seminars and thus becoming more committed to institutional learning by means of evaluation. The network seeks to foster institutional learning by:

- Repeating introductory courses in evaluation for new staff.
- Preparing and disseminating widely, i.a. through the homepage, detailed reports from each seminar.
- With a view to generate commitment to institutional learning, starting to ask participants how they intend to make use of and share knowledge gained.

### **3.5 Support to activities outside the Evaluation Network**

The network has a budget line for extra-network activities, to be used by members and their partners in the South wishing to learn more about evaluation than the network can offer. The network tries to instigate such learning through:

- Repeatedly informing about the possibility for this so-called Activity support.
- Making members aware of relevant seminars and courses arranged by others.

The members have shown little interest in the support offered to extra-network activities. The reason may be that the information has not been disseminated clearly and often enough, that the sums involved have been too small to be of interest (budgeted at a mean of Euro 3 000 per organisation). The board hopes to learn more about this during a participatory self-evaluation scheduled for this year, focusing on relevance and usefulness and future directions of NDN activities.

### **3.6 Benefiting partners in the South**

The purpose of all development co-operation is of course to alleviate poverty and improve living conditions of poor and oppressed people. Capacity building as part of any kind of development co-operation is a fundamental principle guiding Norwegian NGOs. Thus, an underlying assumption of the 1999 Project Document is that capacity building of Norwegian NGOs will benefit their partners in the South as part of their normal project and programme interaction. Additional to this assumption, the Project Document has some special activities aimed directly at partners in the South, such as the possibility to apply for Activity support and to participate in seminars arranged for sets of partners in selected countries. NDN does as a principle not deal directly with partners in the South. It has therefore tried to reach such partners through its member organisations by:

- Repeatedly inviting members to check the need for capacity building through specially designed seminars.
- Repeatedly disseminating information about the possibility of partners applying for Activity support through the Norwegian network members.

The response has been minimal. So far only one seminar has been arranged in the South and one partner been given support to take part in a seminar arranged by others. The organisations argue that they prefer to share capacity generated through the network as part of their normal activity – they consider NDN to be an additional bureaucratic link in this connection. Their arguments have been given directly to the board and the Technical Adviser, and were also reported in a review of the network in 2001. The board has tended to agree with the members. The board has also been much concerned about relevance and usefulness – how could it from a distance ensure the need for proposed activities – and about sustainability – how could it follow-up if needed to help the people and organisations involved maximise impact.

The language of the network should be English, according to the 1999 Project Document. As a consequence of the mentioned concerns of the members and the board, the language

of the network has slipped into Norwegian. Only reports from seminars conducted in English are in English; reports from other seminars and in the newsletters and at the homepage are in Norwegian.

The Ministry has taken issue with this development. Pointing at the intention in the Project Document and the recommendation of the 2001 Review, it has suggested that the board make renewed efforts at instigating activities directly for Southern partners. The network seeks to comply with this suggestion by:

- Engaging two former board members on long-term assignment abroad to assess needs and arrange seminars for partners in Ecuador and Zambia in co-operation with a well-established partner in one case and a regional office of a member organisation in the other. The intention is that the local partner and office will be able to follow-up the activities if the participants so desire.
- Preparing teaching material in evaluation work which youth leaders participating in North/South exchange programmes can use in their host organisations.

### **3.7 Institutional sustainability**

The philosophy of NDN is that the network is the members. The network promotes institutional sustainability by:

- Activating members to generate interest in network participation. Representatives from member organisations are speakers at the majority of the seminars, as can be seen in Enclosure 1. Moreover, the members are asked to draw on their international networks to come and give seminars. Members are also asked to participate in working groups on selected topics.
- Treating small, medium-sized and large organisations in the same manner. Anyone having something they want to share is invited to do so after some quality-assurance has been done. Members who may be reluctant to come forward are carefully coached to overcome their shyness.
- Cultivating a spirit of openness and honesty among member organizations. We have much to learn from one another, should be willing to share our experiences and trust that sensitive information will not be misused.
- Seeking to integrate evaluation activities with the other activities of NDN. This implies stronger links between capacity building in evaluation and other areas of priority. Examples to date relate to emergency assistance, education and microfinance.
- In the long term aiming at having evaluation competence and evaluation work part of all NDN capacity-building activities. There may still be a need for basic introduction to evaluation for new staff and for more advanced seminars as the evaluation research and practice frontiers are pushed forward.

Attempts at having more or less independent working groups have been less successful. A group on evaluation of education was in operation for about a year, but only on the constant initiative by the Technical Adviser. Another group on evaluation of gender relations never started. Presuming a need for more general guidance of such groups, specific guidelines for working groups were recently developed, albeit without response from the members. There may, of course, be networking between organisations unknown to the board and the Technical Adviser. The apparent lack of independent networking may perhaps have to do with an immense number of offers for capacity-building activities in the development community, already tight time schedules or the instability in the

workforce in many organisations. More might be learned about this in the up-coming self-evaluation mentioned above.

### **3.8 Financial sustainability**

As stated in 2.1, the Ministry provided ample funds for the three-year start-up period of the Evaluation Network. After three years of operation, total costs amounted to only 60 per cent of the budget. The Ministry has kindly agreed that the network may keep the money allocated, and spend it at our own pace. Costs have been lower than budgeted mainly because:

- Use of external consultants has been less than expected - the members themselves have so much to offer.
- Fewer seminars than envisaged have been arranged in the South.
- Income in the form of membership fees has been higher than budgeted for. This is mainly because more organisations than foreseen have become members in the network.

The network has worked to achieve financial sustainability by:

- Raising participant fees to levels higher than budgeted for (Euro 6 for half-day seminars). While present prices are still relatively low for small member organisations and students (Euro 25 for half-day seminars), larger organisations pay somewhat more (Euro 50 for half-day seminars). It should be noted that members sending more than two persons to a seminar pay reduced participation fees. External participants pay Euro 100 for half-day seminars. The board intends to further increase participant's fees.
- Keeping in contact with external development milieus, i.a. with a view to increase number of external seminar participants.
- Increasing membership fees.
- Negotiating with the Ministry to be able to plow some of the income from membership and participant fees into the NDN as such, rather than to the Evaluation Network account. In 2002, such income amounted to 17 000 Euro.
- Promoting indirect support from members. In 2002, the member organisations contributed an estimated Euro 17 000 in the form free meeting rooms and the covering of costs such as transport and wages to board members and to seminar speakers, participants and organisers.

## Enclosure 1: Enhancing Evaluation Capacity, the Example of a Norwegian Evaluation Network

### List of seminars arranged or planned

#### Seminars in Norway (Internal=I: NDN members, External=E)

Year and topic	Speakers
<b>2000</b>	
Kick-off seminar	I
Basic introduction to evaluation	I+E
Preparation of evaluations	I
Results and impacts of development assistance through NGOs	E
Participatory evaluations	E
Evaluation and quality-ensurance of education	I
<b>2001</b>	
How to measure impacts of microfinance	I+E
Evaluation of education in emergency operations	I
Preparation of ToR of educational projects	I
Development of evaluation strategies	I
Measurement and impacts of microfinance	I+E
Assessment of gender dimensions	I+E
Learning for change	I
Review of the Evaluation Network	I
Evaluation of education for the Yanomami, Brazil	I+E
<b>2002</b>	
Establishment of working group on shelter for emergency assistance and development	I
Methodological challenges in evaluation of education	E
Presentation of EASY, an evaluation system for environmental reviews of development projects	I
Preparation of evaluations	E
Basic introduction to evaluations	E
Social exclusion analysis, programme design and evaluation	E
Organisational development and self-evaluations	I
Evaluation of shelter for emergency assistance	I+E
Thematic evaluations	I
<b>2003</b>	
Learning through participatory monitoring and evaluation	E
Measurement of long-term impacts	I
New evaluation trends – reports from OECD/DAC evaluation workshop March 03 and INTRAC's 5 <sup>th</sup> evaluation conference April 04	I
Basic introduction to evaluation	E
Project management and quality-improvement	I
Evaluation and capacity building in emergency and conflict situations	I
Gender-specific measurement of change	I

#### Seminars in the South

<b>2001</b>
Participatory evaluations in peace-building programmes – in Rwanda for 34 representatives of partners in seven countries in Central and East Africa.
<b>2003</b>
Basic introduction to evaluation for partners in Zambia
Basic introduction to evaluation for partners in Bolivia, Colombia, Equador and/or Peru
Basic introduction to evaluation for partners in a series of countries visited by youth leaders
<b>Enclosure 2 to paper: Enhancing Evaluation Capacity, the Example of a Norwegian Evaluation Network</b>
<b>Members in the Evaluation Network by size</b>
(Large= L: more than Euro 1,3 mill. in annual turnover development co-operation, Medium-sized=M: between Euro 660 000 and 1,3 mill and Small=S: less than Euro 660 000 in annual turnover)

<b>Adventist Development and Relief Agency Norway</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>ARC-aid</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>Atlas Alliance</b> (umbrella for 7 organisations for people with functional disability)	<b>M</b>	
<b>Blue Cross Norway</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>Caritas Norway</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>Children at Risk</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>Childrens' Future Norway</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>Delta Internasjonalt YMCA/YWCA</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>FOKUS</b> (forum for 61 organisations for women)	<b>M</b>	
<b>FORUT, Campaign for Development and Solidarity</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>Global Aid Network</b> (umbrella for 7 missionary societies)	<b>S</b>	
<b>Human Education International</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>Namibian Association of Norway</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>Norsk Form, Centre for Design, Architecture and the Built Environment</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>North East Development Fund</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>Norwegian Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>Norwegian Association of the Disabled</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>Norwegian Bahá'í Community</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>Norwegian Church Aid</b>	<b>L</b>	
<b>Norwegian Council for Children and Youth Organisations</b> (umbrella for 70 organisations)	<b>S</b>	
<b>Norwegian Development Fund</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>Norwegian Federation of Co-operative Housing Associations</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>Norwegian Guide and Scout Association</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>Norwegian Interdenominational Office for Development Co-operation</b> (umbrella for 16 missionary societies)	<b>L</b>	
<b>Norwegian Lutheran Mission</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>Norwegian Mission Alliance</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>Norwegian Nurses Association</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>Norwegian Olympic Committee and Confederation of Sports</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>Norwegian People's Aid</b>	<b>L</b>	
<b>Norwegian Psychological Association</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>Norwegian Refugee Council</b>	<b>L</b>	
<b>Norwegian Students' and Academicians' International Assistance Fund</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>Operation Day's Work</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>Plan Norway</b>	<b>L</b>	
<b>Rainforest Foundation Norway</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>Red Cross Norway</b>	<b>L</b>	
<b>Royal Norwegian Society for Development</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>Save the Children Norway</b>	<b>L</b>	
<b>SOS Children's Villages</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>Star of Hope</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>Stromme Foundation</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>The Quaker Society</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>Union of Education Norway</b>	<b>M</b>	
<b>World Wildlife Fund Norway</b>	<b>S</b>	
<b>Yme Foundation</b>	<b>S</b>	