

Context,  
international cooperation



# Capacity Assessment of Non- Governmental Development Organisations: Beyond the logical framework approach

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*Fons van der Velden*

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## Key quotes

‘Development aid or development co-operation ... is *not* the soft sector with which professionals and scientists in this field are often associated. From the outset ‘development’ has been interwoven with major economic and political interests ... The predominant paradigm of ‘development’ still is, as in the colonial past, based on the belief in the supremacy of ‘Western’ man, ‘Western’ knowledge and technology, and of ‘Western’ civilisation as a whole’.<sup>1</sup>

‘Europeans display an exceptional inability to accept others as their equal, especially Africans. Once the principle of equality of both (value) systems is accepted, a dialogue can start. Currently there is no dialogue at all because Europe does not accept the idea of alliance that presupposes equality with other cultures’.<sup>2</sup>

‘Although the greater access to funding for their work undeniably helps such groups to be effective and have greater impact, few would deny that superior organisational capacities and successful execution of their programmes are the starting point. The finance come as a result’.<sup>3</sup>

‘Effective ... programmes must be based on a thorough understanding of the culture and context and the programmes adapted accordingly’.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Schrijvers, 1997: 39-40.

<sup>2</sup> Achebe, 1981: 371-372.

<sup>3</sup> Fowler, 2000: xii.

<sup>4</sup> James, 2002: 140.

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## Abbreviations

CBA	Cost-Benefit Analysis
Danida	Danish International Development Agency
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessment
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
LFA	Logical Framework Approach
M&E	Monitoring & Evaluation
NGDO	Non-Governmental Development Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RRA	Rural Rapid Appraisal
SMART	Smart, Measurable, Acceptable, Reliable, and Time-bound
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
ZOPP	Objectives-Oriented Project Planning

## **Abstract**

Over the last two or three decades, the role of Non-Governmental Development Organisations (NGDOs) in international cooperation has increased considerably both in terms of finances and policy contributions. NGDOs in North and South are nowadays generally recognised as important non-state actors. At the same time many NGDOs and the sector at large face a legitimacy crisis. The sector has not been able to deal with a number of interrelated issues in an adequate manner.

Within this broader framework, the relationship between NGDOs from North and South and the project appraisal methodologies of funding agencies have changed considerably. In the present state of affairs the emphasis is on planning, monitoring and evaluation, measurement of output and effect, and the relationships are characterised by control. Within this context the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) has emerged not only as a tool for planning, but increasingly as a tool for project screening as well.

This paper first describes the trends in project appraisal by funding agencies and elaborates on the historical context of the logical framework approach. Subsequently the logical framework approach is assessed on the basis of a review of literature and development practice and a more analytical view is given.

The review reveals the main advantages and disadvantages of the logical framework at the empirical level. Advantages of LFA refer to its logic; its possibility to provide a convenient overview of e.g. objectives, external context and information needs; the systematic analysis and monitoring through standardised procedures; its contribution to accountability, especially vis-à-vis back donors; and the facilitation of communication between e.g. the various stakeholders involved in a project or programme. The disadvantages mentioned include the orientation of LFA, it starts with problems and not opportunities; the insufficient attention for the organisational context and processes; the formal and limited rationality; the political neutrality, e.g. with regard to income distribution and access to resources; LFA as a typical Western instrument; the a-historical consensus approach; the oversimplification of LFA due to its very nature; and the lack of attention for unintended effects of the intervention.

At the analytical level the first issue dealt with is that inherent in LFA is the view that development and development interventions are linear processes. Other issues relate to the limited view of a complex reality; the focus of LFA on projects/programme and not organisations hinders organisational learning; single-loop and reactive learning; the absence of a political perspective; and the negative impact of the LFA method on the ownership of development interventions.

# Capacity assessment of non-governmental development organisations: beyond the logical framework approach

## 1. Introduction

In 1949 in his inauguration speech Harry S. Truman for the first time defined the south hemisphere as ‘underdeveloped areas’ and he announced a ‘bold new programme’. Modern development cooperation of multilateral, bilateral and private development organisations has taken shape ever since.

After the Second World War and, more importantly, the period of decolonisation, many traditional missionary and charity organisations, transformed themselves into organisations for international development aid, and later development cooperation.<sup>5</sup>

Over the last four to five decades, the appraisal by Northern agencies of requests for assistance has changed considerably. During the initial stage most of the organisations concentrated on, and gave priority to, the establishment of contacts and building a network of partner organisations.<sup>6</sup> Natural and historical ties, such as being members of the same international networks, e.g. the World Council of Churches, and or/churches or political movements, played an important role during this stage. Screening of requests for support was mainly done on the basis of strategic considerations and intuition, and in a rather ad hoc and often personalised manner.

During the mid-1970s up to the mid-1980s the emphasis shifted to funding of what can be called ‘aims and objectives’, and ‘intentions’ of partner organisations. Issues such as mission, vision, objectives, target community and target areas, gained importance in the decision-making process of funding agencies.

Following a number of critical studies by academicians and from within the organisations<sup>7</sup>, from the mid-1980s onwards the emphasis shifted from ‘good intentions’ to reputation and perceived results. Issues such as details of specific programmes and projects, results achieved and/or planned output and effect at project or programme level became important criteria in the project appraisal by resource-sharing agencies. In project cycle terms: the emphasis shifted from indicative planning, identification and appraisal, towards the implementation stage, with a stronger emphasis on monitoring and evaluation. In the relationship between partners from North and South the issue of control, ‘value for money’, gained importance during this period. Within agencies Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) became more important in institutional, policy and operational terms. It is in this particular historical period, that the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) methodology emerged as a tool for project planning, and subsequently for project appraisal.

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<sup>5</sup> For an historical overview of development cooperation in the Netherlands see Kuitenbrouwer, 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Some of these processes have been documented, see e.g. Willemsen (1996) about Memisa Medicus Mundi; Schulpen & Van der Velden (1992) about ICCO and Simmers, (1980) about Cordaid.

<sup>7</sup> The GOM impact study, published at the beginning of the 1990s, is a good manifestation of this trend. Steering Group Impact Co-financing Programme, 1991.

### Box 1: Trends in project appraisal by funding agencies

No	Main programme emphasis	Characteristics
1	Initial stage: establishing relationships	Starting or enhancing relationships between agencies from North and South
2	Intentions	Emphasis on assessment/analysis of aims and objectives and planned activities
3	Results	- Emphasis on output, effect - M&E - Control
4.	Learning	- Emphasis on institutional capacity and impact - Learning capacities - Trust

## 2. The emergence of the Logical Framework Approach

The logical framework was developed in the late 1960s by Consultants Practical Concepts Incorporated at the request of USAID. The method emerged from corporate and military planning contexts marked by 'strong central authority and control around a relatively clear set of goals' with a dominant single objective.<sup>8</sup> It was to propose a systematic method to link project design and evaluation. Throughout its existence, the logical framework has been subject to change. Initially, it was a tool for standardised presentation of projects. It was descriptive in nature and meant to facilitate appraisal of projects by development agencies. Later on in the 1970s, it became a tool for improved design of projects. In many cases bad design was seen as the cause for failure of projects and better design was therefore expected to lead to more successful projects. LFA then became more analytical in nature.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the scope of LFA was broadened again and LFA became a tool for improved design, implementation and management of projects. Certain participative and communication aspects were added to the process in order to overcome analytical and communicative shortcomings. Still, LFA was in many organisations used as a strict instrument and seen as a prescriptive and formal requirement.<sup>9</sup> In the 1990s, several donor agencies (GTZ, Danida, NORAD) shaped LFA into a more flexible tool by paying more attention to issues such as commitment, transparency, structure, participation and flexibility.

LFA can be categorised under the development paradigm of modernisation.<sup>10</sup> Other approaches within this paradigm, developed before LFA, are Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Social Impact Assessment (SIA) and Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA). Later on approaches were developed putting more emphasis on participation, such as Rural Rapid Appraisal (RRA), Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA). The objectives-oriented project planning (ZOPP), an offspring of LFA with participatory notions, was developed in Germany. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), allowing extended participation, was developed in the 1990s.

Over the years multilateral donor agencies (e.g. the European Union), and bilateral donors and private development organisations have used the logical framework approach and/or related instruments as a prerequisite, obligatory and fixed format for access to funding. It appears,

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<sup>8</sup> Gasper, 2000: 25.

<sup>9</sup> Danida, 1996: 45.

<sup>10</sup> Roche, 1999: 20.

however that the LFA method has only been used when demanded by external funding agencies. Moreover, from the mid-1980s onwards many donors have started to utilise the LFA method as an instrument for project appraisal, even in instances where the original funding application is not a product of an LFA planning exercise.

### **3. Main characteristics<sup>11</sup>**

#### *a. Principles*

The logical framework approach is a tool for managing development processes. It can be applied throughout the different stages of the project cycle. LFA can also be used as a guiding instrument for monitoring and evaluation. An important feature of LFA is that it is objective-oriented: its principles are derived from the ‘management by objectives’ tradition within management sciences.<sup>12</sup> It starts from one overall objective that must be shared by all stakeholders, and that guides the entire project and its monitoring and evaluation. The logical framework provides an opportunity to present different elements of projects in a structured and hierarchical way. A key principle is that the different project elements, from overall purpose to activities, are causally related, leading to a high internal logic.

Whereas the internal logic of projects is a major feature of the logical framework approach, it also provides an opportunity to take into account the linkages with the project environment and context through the formulation of assumptions in relation to every level of the project. A final principle of LFA is that it enables measurement of output by defining indicators for success. In short, LFA is to promote clarification of the purpose of projects, identify information requirements, define key elements, analyse the setting, facilitate communication between all parties, and identify how success/failure can be measured.

#### *b. Process*

The core of LFA is the logical framework or project matrix itself. Throughout the years, more attention has been paid to the preceding analysis of the situation, which can be split into the following four steps.

1. *Complex/participation analysis*. Following the formulation of an initial focus question, the situation from where the project should start is identified. Then all stakeholders are identified, categorised and their interests and views analysed.
2. *Problem analysis*. Based on the available information, the existing situation is analysed, the major problems are identified and causal relations between the problems formulated. These can be visualised by means of a problem tree.
3. *Objectives analysis*. This is one of the key steps within the logical framework approach. Different objectives at differential levels are formulated. This can be done by means of transforming the problem into a tree of objectives. At every level, problems are reworded into objectives. The relationships between the different levels of the objectives become means-ends relationships.
4. *Alternatives analysis*. On the basis of the branches of the objectives tree, different possible alternative means-ends relations that could form separate projects are identified. These are to be discussed and the most viable alternative is to be selected.

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<sup>11</sup> The following description is mainly based on the following LFA manuals: Danida, 1996; NORAD, 1996; Saldanha & Whittle (ADB), 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Couderé, 1994: 47.

After completion of the phase of analysis, the logical framework project matrix can be designed. There are different versions of the project matrix, consisting of four or five rows and three or four columns. An example of such a project matrix is given in Table 1.

**Table 1: Example of a project matrix**

<p><b>1. GOAL</b></p> <p>The higher-level objective towards which the project is expected to contribute</p> <p>(Mention target groups)</p>	<p><b>1. INDICATORS</b></p> <p>Measures (direct or indirect) to verify to what extent the goal is fulfilled</p> <p>(Means of verification should be specified)</p>	<p><b>1. ASSUMPTIONS</b></p> <p>Important events, conditions or decisions necessary for sustaining objectives in the long run</p>
<p><b>2. PURPOSE</b></p> <p>The effect which is expected to be achieved as the result of the project</p> <p>(Mention target groups)</p>	<p><b>2. INDICATORS</b></p> <p>Measures (direct or indirect) to verify to what extent the purpose is fulfilled</p> <p>(Means of verification should be specified)</p>	<p><b>2. ASSUMPTIONS</b></p> <p>Important events, conditions or decisions outside the control of the project which must prevail for the development objective to be attained</p>
<p><b>3. OUTPUTS</b></p> <p>The results that the project management should be able to guarantee</p> <p>(Mention target groups)</p>	<p><b>3. INDICATORS</b></p> <p>Measures (direct or indirect) which verify to what extent the outputs are produced</p> <p>(Means of verification should be specified)</p>	<p><b>3. ASSUMPTIONS</b></p> <p>Important events conditions or decisions outside the control of the project management, necessary for the achievement of the immediate objective</p>
<p><b>4. ACTIVITIES</b></p> <p>The activities that have to be undertaken by the project in order to produce the outputs</p>	<p><b>5. INPUTS</b></p> <p>Goods and services necessary to undertake the activities</p>	<p><b>4. ASSUMPTIONS</b></p> <p>Important events, conditions or decisions outside the control of the project management necessary for the production of the outputs</p>

Source: NORAD, 1996: 17.

The rows of the matrix present the main project elements: the overall objective or goal of the project, the purpose or immediate objective, the different outputs, the activities, and in some versions of the matrix, the inputs. These project elements or levels are linked with each other in a hierarchical way. This means that the activities should lead to planned outputs of the project, the output is necessary to achieve the immediate objective of the project, which in its turn should contribute to achievement of the overall goal. The logic between these different levels presents the vertical logic of the logical framework.

At every level of the project indicators are formulated to measure its success, e.g. to what extent has the goal/purpose been fulfilled, or to what extent the outputs have been produced. It is important that the indicators are defined in a SMART way: they should be Specific, Measurable, Acceptable, Reliable, and Time-bound. In the matrix the indicators are presented in the second row. Sometimes the project matrix also includes a row that indicates the means of verification of the indicators.

Within the logical framework approach it is acknowledged that there are factors in the context of the project that can affect the implementation of the project, but that cannot be affected by the project itself. These so-called assumptions are defined for every level of the project and find their place in the third row of the project matrix.

Although the size and exact substance of the matrix can differ, the general idea and mechanism of the matrix is always the same. It shows a vertical logic as described above for the first row of project elements in connection with the identified assumptions. The matrix also shows a horizontal logic. This logic can be found between the project elements, the verifiable indicators and, if included, the means of verification.

#### **4. Assessment of the logical framework approach: review of literature and development practice<sup>13</sup>**

During the last few years a number of documents that analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the logical framework approach have been published. The main issues at empirical level, can be summarised as follows:

##### *a. Advantages*

1. *Logical approach.* If applied wisely the LFA method can usefully encourage thinking about purpose, assumptions and data. Moreover, some of the tools for analysis, i.e. the problem tree, may assist in identifying focal problems, and cause and effect relationships. In some cases this may lead to an adequate problem analysis at project level.
2. *Formulation of indicators and assumptions.* The logical framework approach can provide a convenient overview of project objectives, encourages attention to possible higher-level justifications, external conditions and information needs of monitoring and evaluation with regard to the agreed and planned activities.
3. *Efficiency.* Efficiency is apparently high: systematic analysis and monitoring through standardised procedures:
  - rapid insight in complex situations: aims, relevance, key elements, problems;
  - greater flexibility through inclusion of a monitoring system;
  - high continuity in approach (while staff may change);
  - detailed attention for monitoring and evaluation (through indicators);
  - evaluation is part of the entire process, which enables feedback from evaluation to planning.

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<sup>13</sup> The following issues have emerged from interviews with various development practitioners who (have) work(ed) with LFA in especially Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia and a review of the literature about this subject (major sources are Couderé, 1994; Gasper, various publications; McLean, 1988; Pitt, 1998; Sizoo, 1994). *Contextuals No. 1, Capacity Assessment of Non-Governmental Development Organisations: Beyond the logical framework approach, October 2003*

4. *Accountability.* Within the logic of the approach LFA may facilitate a better accountability vis-à-vis especially back donors (upward accountability).
5. *Communication.* The logical framework approach may facilitate communication and mutual understanding of representatives of the various stakeholders involved.

*b. Disadvantages*

Both in the literature and the development practice a distinction is being made between the way the LFA method is used as a tool and problems inherent in the tool itself. Some argue in this context that ‘logframes appear inherently easy to misuse’<sup>14</sup>

The following issues appear to be inherent in the logical framework approach:

1. *Orientation.* By its very nature the logical framework approach starts with problems and not opportunities.
2. *Organisational context.* In a LFA exercise there is not sufficient attention for organisational context and for processes which have an impact on the realisation of the way aims are being reached.
3. *Rationality.* LFA is based on formal and limited rationality: internal cause and effect logic; leaving no room for external defined rationality; value blindness.
4. *Neutrality.* Policy neutrality versus such issues as income distribution, environment, employment, access to resources. Therefore, there is not much insight in priorities of problems and realistic objectives.
5. *Ethnocentric.* Several development practitioners and researchers have argued that LFA is a typical Western instrument: too much use of Western values and norms and concepts, concepts of time and space, and too little attention for reality in many other cultures.<sup>15</sup>
6. *A-historical consensus approach.* In LFA planning often takes place in an a-historical context. In a development practice it is bound to happen that stakeholders (partly) disagree when carrying out an analysis, defining priorities and planning project activities. As indicated earlier, LFA has emerged from situations with a single centre of authority while in the development sector there are many different actors. Within LFA ‘differences in views between stakeholders are treated lightly and concealed’.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, workshops organised to arrive upon a project design, tend to be dominated by the more powerful and confident.<sup>17</sup>
7. *Oversimplification, ‘lack frame’.* LFA is often too simple, with no attention being paid to important information. Furthermore, there is often no proper dimension of time. These aspects become especially problematic in case they are not identified. ‘Not everything important can be captured in a one-to-three page, four- or five-level

<sup>14</sup> See for instance Gasper, 2000: 18; see also Gasper, 1997.

<sup>15</sup> See especially Sizoo, 1994. Nakabayashi (2000) deals also from a Japanese perspective with this issue.

<sup>16</sup> Gasper, 2000: 26.

<sup>17</sup> Chambers, 1996: 17.

diagram'.<sup>18</sup>

8. *Limited focus*. The LFA method does not seem to be suitable for evaluation, because within the logical framework approach attention for unintended effects and routes is lacking; it therefore it is not contributing much to learning either.

The following issues are mainly related to the use of the logical framework approach.

1. *Planning team*. Quite often the planning team is put together on a ad hoc basis. As the quality of the analysis depends on the quality of the team, time-consuming systematic training and follow-up are necessary.
2. *'Lock-frame'*. LFA leads to rigidity due to standardised procedures and because data are not being kept up-to-date. The willingness to adapt to changing circumstances is limited.
3. *Participation*. LFA leaves little scope and attention for the potential of and attention to participation of target communities in the planning team. The overall limited scope for participation in general adversely effects sustainability. Moreover, the approach presupposes that all stakeholders share one single vision of the project.
4. *Type of data required*. The precise description of the project depends on using objectively verifiable data and indicators. These are generally easier to collect from official sources of data than from reference communities. Thus the project designers tend to focus on economic indicators rather than on people's experiences, and to ignore qualitative data in favour of qualitative data.<sup>19</sup>
5. *'Logic-less frame'*. LFA is often carried out or formulated on the request of external funders after a project has been designed. In such cases only an illusion of logic is provided, quite often not related to ground realities.

Within the framework of this publication focusing on capacity assessment by funding agencies, especially the latter issue is of crucial importance.

## 5. A more analytical view

Understanding of the nature of 'what LFA attempts, what it achieves and where it fails has been limited, compared with the remarkable spread in use'.<sup>20</sup> This is especially the case with the use of LFA as a screening instrument. It is somewhat ironical that, while the LFA method has been widely promoted as a tool for project planning and evaluation during the last thirty years, the method itself and its use have hardly been systematically studied.<sup>21</sup> At a more conceptual level the major shortcomings of the LFA method can be summarised as follows.

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<sup>18</sup> Gasper, 2000: 21.

<sup>19</sup> See: MacArthur, 1994.

<sup>20</sup> Gasper, 2000: 17.

<sup>21</sup> Gasper (2000: 20) argues furthermore that in few semi-formal evaluations, which have been carried out, have concentrated on the views of 'more senior officials in funding agencies' and not so much on those who are working with the tool and/or the end users.

a. *Development as a linear process*

Modern development cooperation is at paradigm, theoretical and policy levels deeply rooted in the modernisation theory and its present-day manifestations. Rostow's *Stages of economic growth*, has many contemporary equivalents: underdevelopment is seen as an historical process of deficit in capital, knowledge and/or technology. It is assumed that all countries and societies follow more or less the same process of development, leading to 'modernisation'.<sup>22</sup> The project mode of development – with quite often blueprints, assuming that it is possible to predetermine a set of cause and effect relationships which will lead to development – fits into this broader framework. A development intervention is seen as 'a linear process of causes and effects, using resources in a predetermined sequence of activities to produce the desired outcome'.<sup>23</sup> The logical framework approach is nowadays the most widely used instrument for designing this type of development.

However, at the conceptual level as well as at the normative level and the level of practical implementation, this dominant paradigm needs to be challenged and changed. At conceptual level, development is not a linear process moving in a single direction. The normative level is simple: 'development should be people-oriented; people come before things; and poor people come before the less poor'.<sup>24</sup> At empirical and implementation level, development should be more 'from below and within'.<sup>25</sup>

b. *Limited view of a complex reality*

As already mentioned, developmental actors operate in constantly changing environments and development and socio-political transformation are not linear processes moving in one single direction. Roche and others have highlighted the indicator dilemma of the LFA approach. Monitoring and evaluation takes place of only the planned, agreed upon and expected project activities ('the indicator dilemma', see Box II).<sup>26</sup> The routine monitoring orientation of the LFA method is too narrow for an effect evaluation: unforeseen routes and unintended effects are typically of great importance.<sup>27</sup> This situation is aggravated by the fact that, as Gasper and Roche argue rightly, real objectives are likely to be unstated.<sup>28</sup>

**Box II: The indicator dilemma**

	<b>Expected</b>	<b>Unexpected</b>
<b>Agreed</b>	Yes	No
<b>Not Agreed</b>	No	No

This issue is not only confined to the monitoring and evaluation of activities, but to the total LFA construct. In *The Fifth Discipline* Peter Senge presents a modern version of an old Sufi story.

'In a modern version of an old Sufi story, a passenger meets a drunk who crawls on his hands and knees underneath a streetlight. He offers to assist and discovers that the

<sup>22</sup> Rostow, 1960.

<sup>23</sup> Fowler, 1996: 145.

<sup>24</sup> Chambers, 1993: 1-14.

<sup>25</sup> Reference can be made to various publications of Gerrit Huizer based on his experience in Latin America, Africa and Asia. Among other publications: Huizer, 1992.

<sup>26</sup> Roche, 1999: Chapter 3.

<sup>27</sup> Gasper, 2000: 23.

<sup>28</sup> This raises also the issue of expected and agreed upon by whom?

drunk is looking for his keys. After several minutes, the passenger asks ‘where did you drop them?’ The drunk responds that he has lost them at his front door. ‘Why are you looking for them over here?’ the passenger asks. ‘Because’, the drunk replies, ‘there is no light at my front door’.<sup>29</sup>

In the planning, implementation and evaluation stage a programme implemented as per the LFA approach, and/or assessed on the basis of this methodology, 75 per cent of the actual reality may be missed. With reference to the Sufi story, this means searching where the light is, but where the real issues do not take place. Those factors should be taken into consideration that are important in view of the issues at stake, irrespective of the limitation and focus of the methodologies used and/or the organisation.<sup>30</sup>

*c. Project not organisational focus*

LFA is about projects and programmes and not about organisations and organisational issues. There is an in-built tendency to focus and report on projects and programmes at the expense of focusing on the behaviour of the organisation itself. It is ‘... as if the project is an external entity that is uncoupled from the organisation’s own deeper functioning’.<sup>31</sup> Nederveen Pieterse describes the underlying process as ‘developmentism’.<sup>32</sup>

For an adequate insight in the development process information about an organisation’s thinking and learning, doing, being and relating<sup>33</sup> are of much more vital importance.

*d. Limited single-loop and reactive learning*

The limited view of reality and the project focus lead to the collection and generation of a particular kind of information and knowledge, in which the internal state of an organisation itself does not receive sufficient attention. Such a situation hinders the translation of learning’s of past experience into knowledge and organisational implications for change.<sup>34</sup>

What happens is that only single-loop learning, asking one-dimensional questions or raising one-dimensional issues in order to elicit a one-dimensional answer, takes place.<sup>35</sup> Double-loop learning goes much deeper and has a wider scope: it asks questions not only about facts, but also about the reasons and motives behind those facts. It questions, for instance, also the development actors’ own assumptions and behaviour.<sup>36</sup> Argyris calls the absence of double-loop learning anti-learning; the failure to explore deeper issues disempowers. Senge has furthermore indicated that there are different levels of explanation in difficult and complex situations. These different levels can be summarised as follows (see Box III).

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<sup>29</sup> Senge, 1992: 62

<sup>30</sup> Senge, 1992: 68.

<sup>31</sup> Fowler, 2000: 138.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Schrijvers, 1993: 50.

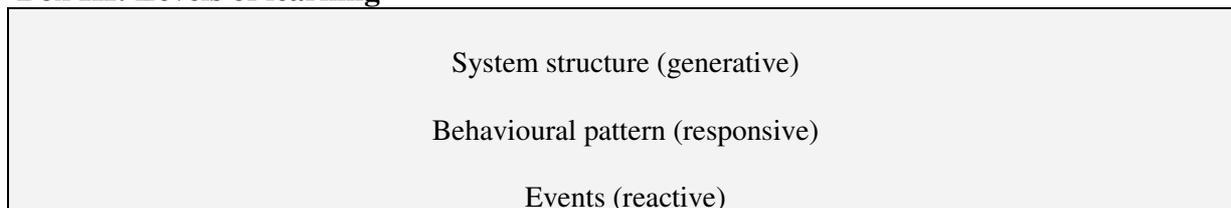
<sup>33</sup> I/C Consult, 2001: 5 and also Chapter VI and VIII.

<sup>34</sup> Fowler, 2000: Chapter 9.

<sup>35</sup> Argyris, 2001: 91.

<sup>36</sup> Double-loop learning encourages people to examine their own behavior, take personal responsibility for their own action and inaction, and surface the kind of potentially threatening or embarrassing information that can produce real change (Argyris, 2001: 87-88).

### Box III: Levels of learning



Source: Senge 1992: 54.

Analysis and explanation of events lead to reactive behaviour. Such a pattern is not uncommon in development organisations in North and South. The second level refers to the search for long-term trends (behavioural patterns) and implications. These types of explanation go one step further than the classical action - reaction chain. The third level, structural explanation, goes deeper and raises the issue: 'What leads to the behaviour patterns'. Senge argues that structural explanations are quite rare, but 'they are very effective'. This type of analysis is so important and effective because it focuses on underlying causes of behaviour in such a manner that behavioural patterns may be changed.<sup>37</sup>

Due to the 'limited view of a complex reality', the project focus and the rather simple cause - effect relationships, the LFA methodology focuses mainly on events and reactive learning. This is a serious limitation, once again in view of the quite often fast changing complex environment of development activities.

*e. Absence of a political perspective.*

Many authors have argued that 'Development aid or development co-operation ... is *not* the soft sector with which professionals and scientists in this field are often associated. From the outset 'development' has been interwoven with major economic and political interests ...'<sup>38</sup>; in short, development is about power distribution and deals with power relations at micro, meso and macro level. The a-historical character of the LFA, combined with its perceived 'neutral' approach and the inability to air differences and work through conflicts are manifestations of the apolitical and status quo-oriented character of LFA.

*f. Negative impact on ownership*

During the last two decades many multilateral, bilateral and private aid agencies have, directly or indirectly, made LFA as a tool for planning of developmental activities, a precondition for assistance. This development has several severe negative consequences. Some authors argue<sup>39</sup> that the aid relationship can only be used as an instrument to exert pressure when there is a violation of human rights 'due to the implementation of development projects with negative effects on the population' and violations 'which are used to protect the positions of power of the elite'.<sup>40</sup> The issue of conditionality should be seen within the context of the asymmetrical relationship between agencies from the North and South. Quite often, as in the case of LFA, Southern actors are asked or forced to adopt policies, instruments and procedures formulated by

<sup>37</sup> Senge, 1992: 54 -55.

<sup>38</sup> Schrijvers, 1993.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. Schulte Nordholt, 1992.

<sup>40</sup> Schulte Nordholt, 1992.

Northern agencies.<sup>41</sup> Taking into consideration the mandate and constituency of Northern NGOs, NGOs need to challenge the hypocrisy and inconsistency of Western governments in the conditions they impose on development cooperation, instead of providing legitimacy to this conditionality and/or joining this bandwagon.

‘There is a real danger that the Northern NGOs are being forced to ally themselves more with donor governments and separate themselves from their Southern partners because of the new policy agenda on governance and conditionality. This is especially the case for those NGOs that are dependent on government funding sources. There is a need for Northern NGOs to take more initiative and more risks in criticising the lack of overall coherence in the policies of Northern governments. Advocacy and lobbying of bilateral and multilateral donors should be more central to development activities of NGOs. However, the institutional constraints and realities faced by some NGOs make it difficult for them to be so proactive without threatening their practical, grassroots activities. In addition, NGOs need to carefully consult local NGOs when formulating their strategy of advocating for reduction or cancellation of international development assistance to certain governments.

There is a further need for Northern NGOs to engage with governments in lobbying multilateral organisations. International institutions, such as the World Bank, OECD, and the UN Security Council, are trying to force the governance agenda onto Southern governments, yet they themselves are undemocratic institutions with relatively low levels of accountability. Governments need to pressurise such organisations to become more accountable’.<sup>42</sup>

Apart from these ideological considerations there are more practical reasons why the LFA methodology may not be put as a precondition for support. If project organisations have to plan their activities as per the guidelines of (back) donors this is bound to have an alienating effect, and in the end the, often very intense, interference by donors may have as a result that ‘a project is redefined in the financing phase to such an extent that the changes in objectives, methods and execution phases drastically change the nature of the project as well’.<sup>43</sup> As a consequence, those responsible for the implementation may not recognise themselves in the project which has been forced upon them. It is obvious that this subsequently leads to difficulties in the implementation stage and, linked to that, monitoring and evaluation and learning activities.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Such issues are quite often actually not pursued in the North. The structural adjustment programmes are a case in point. These programmes, which were forced upon many developing countries in the 1980s, would never have been accepted by many governments in the North.

<sup>42</sup> Clayton, 1994: 123-124.

<sup>43</sup> Elizalde, 1993:168.

<sup>44</sup> A number of organisations in the South try to overcome these problems through the involvement of consultants who do actually the work for them, and – secondly – by de-linking internal systems from communication with funding agencies. This has a number of negative consequences such as a lot of double work and increased workload which have a negative impact on learning.

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