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Evaluations, strategic planning and log-frames – donor-imposed straitjackets on local NGOs?



Driven by concerns to demonstrate 'value for money', bilateral donors and major Northern development agencies are becoming more selective in the types of organisations and activities they will fund and the types of account keeping they demand from recipients. New requirements are forcing small non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in developing countries to change the way they work. They might be becoming more efficient, but are they also losing their ability to respond to the needs of the communities they serve?

Research from the University of Natal examines the influence of donors on South African NGOs. It shows how the concept of the 'aid chain' can be used to track the flow of funds and also the transmission of ideas, standards and management practices. The research is linked to a wider DFID-funded study, co-ordinated by Tina Wallace at Oxford Brookes, examining the impact of UK funding streams on organisations and projects in the UK, Uganda and South Africa.

Interviews, field visits and programme documents from forty organisations working in South Africa highlighted new donor-recipient tensions and conflicts between donor's strategic concerns and local NGO priorities. The author reports that many NGO managers:

- suspect donors do not read reports as they receive little feedback from them
- regard many reporting requirements as needlessly time-consuming
- resent donor pressure to attend 'capacity-building' courses which may take little account of their existing organisational procedures or management experience
- feel obliged to use the logical framework approach (a management tool linking inputs to outputs to objectives) regardless of potential incompatibilities with participatory, experiential and people-centred development
- feel pressured to participate in networks and umbrella groups by donors who fail to realise that the members of such groups often lack any commonality of purpose and maintain their own ideological stances and political allegiances
- think some donors naively promote advocacy without understanding that local organisations may have competing policy objectives and that political processes may not be pluralistic, transparent and open to debate or reform.

They are also troubled by new financial procedures, particularly the trend towards 'retrospective' or 'invoice-based' financing. Since funds are only released upon approval of submitted invoices, only large organisations with sufficient capital to pay for projects up-front can access donor support.

'Core funding' is becoming a dirty word as donors say they are only willing to pay 'project' costs. NGO managers who have not acquired the writing skills to 'bury' core costs within project proposals complain that key functions are no longer funded. Organisational development, experimental pilot approaches and long-term impact analysis are being abandoned. Many see the rejection of core funding as indicative of a patronising Northern assumption that giving discretionary funding to a developing country NGO will automatically lead to wastage or corruption.

Financial uncertainty is forcing many South African NGOs outside the donor loop to diversify income sources. They are redefining their relationships to the state and the market, taking on government contract work, selling services to the private sector and charging user fees. Some have had to downsize and depend on short-term contract staff while others are experimenting with their legal status and turning into 'non-profit' companies.

Procedures designed to enhance control, accountability and effectiveness carry costs. The selective incorporation of some organisations and development interventions into the international aid industry whilst other issues and groups continue to be neglected is alarming not just to South Africans, but to all who are concerned about the democratisation of development.

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From Management Standards to Development Practice: A study of the South African Aid Chain

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INTRODUCTION

This paper examines selected aspects of the architecture of power constructed by the aid industry and explores how that architecture has affected civil society. The focus is on the practice of development by formal development organizations in South Africa. Practice has become a legitimate area for donor intervention and, as others have noted, donor conditionalities. Donors, at various points in the aid chain, have become more selective in the types of organizations and activities they will fund. Donors and intermediary organizations increasingly specify how recipients farther down the aid chain may employ monies and account for their use. Donors require, or genteelly recommend, the use of favored management tools, training programmes, and reporting formats. I argue that the way development is practiced by development organizations within the aid chain has independent consequences for the shape of civil society and formal NGOs within it.

The paper has four parts. As a largely empirical paper, I begin by framing the discussion with the debates over the value-content of development management and practice. As several other critics of aid have noted, development management approaches act as a vector for the transmittal of values and visions of development¹ and, as such, are a constitutive part of the architecture of global power and hegemony. At the same time, I argue, the management of development practice can be a site of contestation and resistance. A second focus of the paper is on the aid chain, which I employ as a conceptual, analytical and methodological tool to understand relationships between donors and recipients. I describe the research methodology in this second part of the paper and briefly explore, at a preliminary stage, mechanisms or styles of transmittal and resistance. Discussion then turns to case histories of organizational encounters, selected to highlight tensions and contradictions in the use of selected development management techniques and approaches. Finally, the paper concludes with some thoughts on the implications of the findings for an understanding of civil society in South Africa.

WHY LOOK AT STANDARDS FOR DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

A range of imposed conditions and standards often accompanies international funding to development projects in South Africa. While most academic attention focuses on explicit donor conditionalities imposed on

recipient States, the research on which this paper is based takes a different tack. The research addresses: (a) relations between donors and non-government organizations; (b) the extent to which specific development approaches and values are embedded in the various management tools and standards required by donors; and (c) the ways people - at various points along the funding chain - negotiate the management of development processes.

Critics of the aid industry note that the institutional donors and international NGOs have pursued an approach to development practice rife with problems, most centrally in its epistemological base. Project-based, externally-engineered, and technically expert-oriented approaches miss the complexity of development challenges, negate local knowledge and politics, and result in minimal, if any, positive changes for local beneficiaries.² Within the aid industry itself, there are increasing calls to enhance the effectiveness of aid.³ A spate of requirements related to practice - from the format of funding proposals and programmatic content to reporting, financial software packages, and specific staff training - has been one aspect of the reform of aid.

Attention to such reforms needs to explore the ways in which new requirements and standards reinforce the existing relations of power fostered by the aid industry. Donors are driven by concerns to demonstrate an economic bang for their buck - as the failures of aid to halt deepening impoverishment of much of the world's population has led to fears of both a dismantling of the aid industry and increased global conflict. Systems to enhance accountability are a prominent feature of emerging development management, and most often are designed to demonstrate outcomes to those providing the funding. At the same time, current aid doctrine recognizes the importance of local ownership and participation.⁴ Management practices must be accommodated to the tensions over control between those that allocate funds and those that spend and should benefit from it, a tension only partially resolved through an uneasy push for partnerships.

The translation of broad aims of participation, partnership and accountability, among the many espoused components of effective development, are - as is well known - increasingly codified into development practice. The latest iteration of improvements to the management of development includes the increased use of rational management tools, most centrally the logical framework or project planning

matrix and related monitoring (learning) and evaluation systems. Almost all the institutional donors now require use of some version of these tools. There are also shifts away supposedly from projects to locally-driven sector-wide programming, and calls for improved targeting, strategic interventions, and impact analysis.

The logical framework (also called a logframe, project planning matrix, LFA, or PPM) is a simple tool, a matrix that summarizes the key elements of a project or programme. A vertical logic links inputs to outputs, to objectives the project elements in a series of if-then logical steps: if inputs a are done, then activities b will be produced, if activities b-d are done, then objective a will be produced, etc. A horizontal logic links the project elements to indicators of project success, information (verification) sources, and assumptions; this logic frames a series of project management tasks related to project control, steering, monitoring, information gathering, and risk assessment. The logframe as a tool provides a concise overview of a project, its intervention strategy, its expected outcomes, and its requirements for assessment and information. The tool highlights areas of management responsibility and identifies both potential contributions and risks that may arise from the wider project environment.

Some observers argue that the logical framework is essentially a reductionist tool (which its proponents claim as a strength) that, in its use of linear Cartesian planning, straitjackets projects into a language and practice that is fundamentally at odds with participatory, locally-defined and locally-relevant development.⁵ Moreover, the complexity of development problems and the need for flexible and responsive interventions are elided by the need to fit projects and programmes into the boxes of the matrix; iterative learning rests uneasily with the control functions of monitoring achievement of milestones. For such critics, the use of logframes generates contradictions for organizations that are committed to people-centered or participatory development. Similar concerns arise with other management tools currently employed by international donors and NGOs.⁶

There are systematic efforts to resolve the potentially contradictory imperatives of enhanced effectiveness, accountability, participation, and partnership. Efforts to marry logical frameworks with participatory approaches are apparent, for instance in the series of project planning steps promoted by GTZ (ZOPP), NORAD, and SIDA, among others. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems, external audits and evaluations, and

scheduled reporting in specified formats are among the tools used to systematize accountability. Strategic planning exercises are likewise promoted as a means to identify strategic objectives under which all country offices and partners operate.

Among the outcomes of strategic planning (and related logframes) have been ever more stringent requirements on programme content. Some such conditions are straightforward: our priority is child rights therefore we will only fund projects and programmes directed at our objective . Other conditions fall under what I call codified value-driven standards for development practice. Typical value-driven standards relate to participation, or environmental, gender and equity impacts of a development intervention.

While the range of tools and criteria applied to funded projects and programmes are well known, little is known about how these tools and standards are applied by donors, employed by funding recipients, and entrenched at the level of beneficiaries . Specifically, how are international standards for development management codified, transferred and spread? How are they accommodated, contested, negotiated or rejected? What are their impacts on the composition of the South African NGO sector, the sustainability strategies of local development organizations, the design and implementation of projects and programmes, and the overall outcomes achieved?

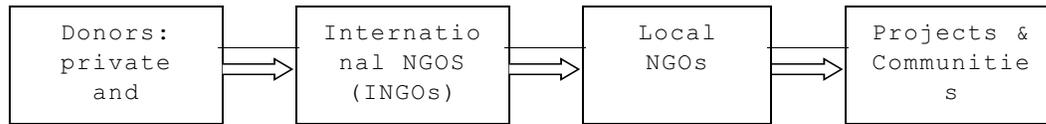
Development management approaches and conditions, through their transmittal of values and visions of development, are a constitutive part of the structure of power in the aid industry. As such, the spread of such techniques and their impact on organizations and processes need to be understood. As the same time, they are an arena in which contradictions between external and local definitions of development are increasingly apparent, and are addressed through negotiation, contestation and resistance.

THE TRANSMITTAL OF MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AND CONDITIONS

The analytical tool that is used to explore the transfer of development standards and tools from donors to recipients is the aid chain. Simply understood as the series of links through which aid flows on its way from donors to recipients, the aid chain for any single organisation may be highly complex.⁷ Government departments and private consultants may be involved at various points in the funding process. Individual organizations may be

enmeshed in various funding chains simultaneously, with several on-going projects or multiple funders for a single project. A simple aid chain is depicted below [see Figure 1].

Figure 1: A simple aid chain



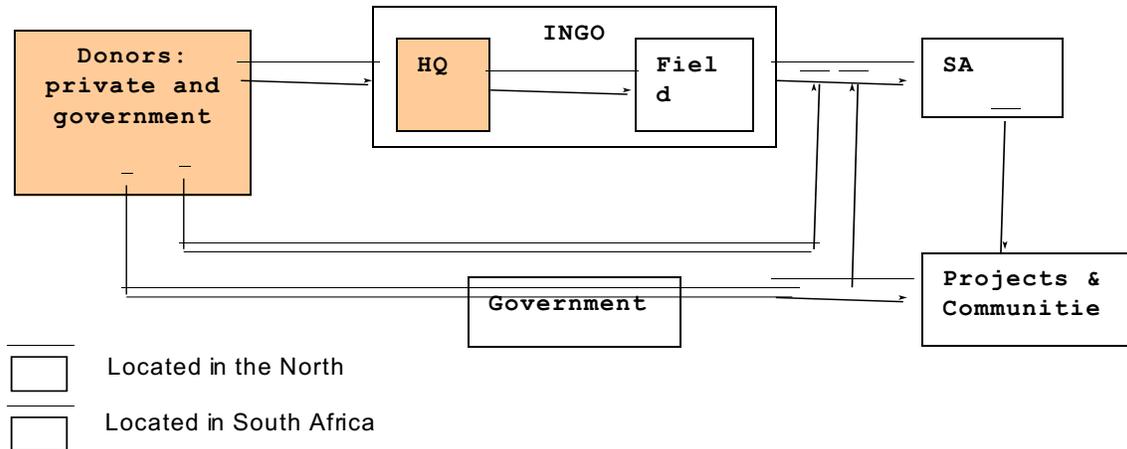
What flows down the aid chain is commonly understood to be funds. However, the flow of money is typically accompanied by the flow of various requirements and conditionalities intended to serve various donor interests, as described above. These requirements and conditionalities almost always flow *down* the chain. Indeed, only in very exceptional cases are relationships between donors and recipients structured in such a way that donors have any real accountability to their recipients.⁸

The aid chain can thus be used to explore the transfer of development tools and standards from funding sources to final recipients. Rather than assuming a unilateral transfer of ideas and practices downwards, the aid chain allows one to detail the complex systems in which development organizations are entangled, and to tease apart the various links. If the funding recipient is considered the unit of analysis, their place in vertical chains and horizontal networks can be specified.⁹ Analyzing the aid chain is a potentially useful way of interrogating different power dynamics within the international aid system.

The research approach adopted is one of exploring the various links in aid chains that originate in the U.K. and end in Africa. Put diagrammatically, this aid chain for South Africa would look something like the one depicted in Figure 2. At each point along the aid chain - from initial institutional funders through NGO intermediaries to final projects and beneficiaries in Africa - the aim is to investigate the use of management tools and development standards.¹⁰ A team in the U.K. is currently investigating the conditions and management practices associated with U.K. institutional donors and international NGOs (INGOs). Research teams in South Africa and Uganda are tracing the forward linkages of these international NGOs (INGOs), that is, the influence of donors and INGOs on the NGOs they fund

in Africa. This paper focuses on material drawn only from the South African organizational research.

Figure 2: A typical aid chain



Research was conducted with two institutional donors, 11 field offices of international NGOs, and an equal number of South African NGOs. Information is derived from interviews with directors and programme managers, reviews of internal documentation (e.g. proposals, contracts, interim reports, and evaluations), and selected visits to projects conducted in 2001. Because several respondents requested that specific comments not be attributable to their organizations, names are not mentioned in the text. A list of all those interviewed is contained at the end of the article (see Appendix 1).

Interviews and documentary reviews were conducted so as to interrogate both the use of various techniques and standards, and the extent to which standards were imposed on other actors along the aid chain. Styles of transmittal were recognised to vary, ranging from absolute conditions to negotiable terms to simple suggestions. Techniques and standards could be expressed explicitly or implied implicitly, and recipients could accept them wholesale, negotiate or reject them. Organizational histories, multiple interviews within single organizations, and interviews with key informants familiar with the organizations under study allowed for corroboration of information, and investigation of differing perspectives of those at various points along the aid chain.

ORGANIZATIONAL ENCOUNTERS: POWER & RESISTANCE IN DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT & PRACTICE

This section presents several organizational histories around development management in South Africa. Our research found that many bilateral donors and international NGOs have adopted rational planning techniques (logical frameworks, output or results oriented project planning, monitoring & evaluation systems, etc.) for both their internal operations and as requirements for organizations requesting funding. Likewise, many of these international organizations have adopted new standards for their development activities and the organizations they fund. They may require, at least on paper, that recipient organizations be attentive to impacts on the environment, gender, good governance, HIV/AIDs, conflict and equity. Many funders and international NGOs are also imposing new systems of financial management, such as retrospective, matching, and more project-specific funding.

Research into changes in the areas of finance, rational planning, and organizational development suggest, at one level, that organizations improve programme efficiency to the detriment of participation, focus on outputs although losing flexibility and responsiveness, and please donors at the expense of local people. Some examples to support this conclusion are presented below. At a deeper level, however, our initial research indicates that the contradictions can be resolved at different points along the aid chain and in ways that obscure direct causality between management techniques and the success (or weaknesses) of projects and programmes. Moreover, some organizations either through supportive, long-term and respectful relations with their South African partners or through the imposition of new codes of conduct and development standards appear to play an important role in reinforcing and promoting people-centered development.

Four organizational issues are described below.

RATIONAL PLANNING AND IRRATIONAL REPORTING

The research found that logframes were a widespread tool in development practice, from the South African NGOs upward along the aid chain. Managers at all levels described the logframe in terms similar to those of its advocates: as a useful way of encapsulating a project, checking on the

coherence of project design, and specifying objectives that could then be cross-checked against wider organizational aims and priorities. Logframes provide benchmarks and a structure for monitoring implementation and impacts. Criticisms of logframes related more to the style of management they promoted than to possible consequences for either programme content or participatory processes. Respondents noted, for instance, that the logframe is technicianist, sterile and has no soul.

Nonetheless, the gist of the comments, particularly from directors and other staff of South African NGOs, suggest that power relations are not as expected or theorized. Rather than being managed by logframes, some managers claimed that they managed the logframes. Directors stated that they packaged their projects in ways that matched donor funding priorities; as a director told us, the joke now is that if you want funding, & include sustainable livelihoods.

While many directors were distressed to find their programmes no longer fit in donors' strategic objectives, some were able to change the language and repackage programme elements to create a fit. In accordance with the requirements of some donors, directors used the logframe as a basis for progress reports. One director told us, however, that the reports were constructed in the office, off community-based monitoring processes and field staff inputs that were not tied to the fixed outputs of the logframe. Such comments indicate that tools like logframes—in at least some organizations—are contained to the office level, with recipient communities largely insulated from negative encroachments on participatory processes.

Contradictions associated with logframes emerged most visibly within the office and around reporting. Directors and managers uniformly described a trend towards increased reporting requirements. While our respondents in both INGOs and SA NGOs recognized the need for reporting to assure accountability and identify problem areas, SA NGO staff mentioned specific concerns. Directors noted that they received little feedback on reports and several mentioned that they suspected that their reports went unread. As one director remarked about his experiences with donors, they talk about the six monthly reports piling up unread.

Many directors also noted the irrationality of reporting requirements. One director estimated that reporting for different donors occupied 20 percent of senior staff and programme manager's time—this represented a significant

diversion of skilled staff's efforts, from important work to a task that her staff was ill equipped to perform well. This organization subsequently hired an additional person simply to handle all reporting and donor relations. Another director described how, with multiple funders for a single set of projects, he was obliged to prepare a different report for each one, complete with separate forms and time frames.

Not all SNGO directors accepted the irrationality of reporting, though most felt that they had few alternatives. One director met with his funders as a group and settled upon a single reporting format and schedule for all projects. This significantly cut down the amount of time spent preparing reports. At another organisation, staff initiated evaluation of donors, rather than it only being the other way around.

In summary, the potential improvements in management to be derived from logframes and related rational planning tools were, according to many respondents, often offset by the irrationality of their use in monitoring and reporting. Resolution of the resulting contradictions entailed working within the system and manipulating it, or confining it to the office, or reallocating staff to its management or in a few cases, confronting it through innovative and more collaborative relations with selected donors.

INSTITUTIONALIZED AND BOUNDED PARTICIPATION

A second area of tension relates to efforts by donors and INGOs to build participation into their programmes. Typically this takes one of several forms: participatory project identification and design; inputs by local beneficiaries into project implementation or decisions over the distribution of financial benefits, if generated; and, lastly, extensive participation throughout project cycle management. Looking at this last option, ostensibly the one most committed to participatory bottom-up development, our preliminary research indicates that SA NGOs encounter numerous barriers to the institutionalization of extensive participation. Respondents from several organizations noted that reliance on contracted work—a common strategy for economic survival in South Africa—usually precludes any meaningful commitment to participatory planning. Instead, project management tends to be driven by the timeframes, resources, and aims of the contracting agency. Participation is thus used selectively, in those projects less subject to the bottom line.

In one case, where participatory programme planning was the underlying policy framework, partner organizations and field staff required extensive training in the participatory methodologies. Despite this training, both internal and partner staff often exhibited (a) a weak ability to differentiate participatory skills from sectoral programme elements, and (b) a highly uneven capacity to bring the techniques and methodologies into communities.¹¹ Community members reportedly also show uneven interest in the participatory approaches promoted, finding the language and techniques difficult, and the programme outcomes uncertain.

Indeed, even when INGOs make commitments to participatory approaches, this participation is usually framed and bounded in important ways. A key issue is what happens when priority projects identified through participatory techniques do not fall within the intervention framework of the funding organization. In the case above, participation is intricately linked to a specified programme focus – NGO project managers and field staff cannot distinguish between them – to ensure that chosen projects will be compatible with INGO objectives. In another case, facilitators put requested projects that fell outside of the strategic objectives into the next project phase, a phase that never seemed to arrive.

Many of those involved in these projects, throughout the aid chain, reported a commitment to participation. Nonetheless, the rationalities of aid effectiveness and programmatic coherence for INGOs and their funders means that in all but a few instances appropriate areas for intervention and programming were blocked out, and others defined as off-limits. The formalization and institutionalization of participation was partial and generated fundamental conflicts between locally generated priorities and upstream strategic concerns.¹²

THE SEARCH FOR IMPACT

A third change in development management and standards was identified in the course of the research itself. Interviews with INGOs based in the U.K., as well as organizations in South Africa, revealed a decisive shift in strategies to enhance the impact of development interventions. Favored strategies of the INGOs include support to networks and umbrella organizations, and greater emphasis on policy influence and advocacy. Several funders preferred umbrella organization and sectoral networks as conduits for their funding both as a means to devolve management functions and

administrative costs downwards and to build local capacity at a sectoral level. Institutional donors, meanwhile, evinced a strategic preference to contribute to policy formulation (e.g. sector-wide programming, and more recently the poverty reduction strategy plans); greater impact could thus be coupled with, in their own terms, greater local ownership of resulting programmes. INGOs also increasingly include promotion of advocacy capacity in partner organizations in their own strategy plans.

SA NGO respondents stated that donor support to networks and umbrella organizations had led to sector-wide policy statements and inputs. Reporting was handled by these new links in the aid chain, with a potential reduction in the reporting entailed by individual NGOs. Respondents also mentioned the potential to learn from other actors in the sector as a positive attribute of the networks. However, a number of staff members, from different organizations, observed that these networks presumed a commonality of purpose that did not exist. Organizations within these networks had distinct political and ideological stances, programmatic and operational approaches, and community and government ties.

Two directors further recounted that, as members of a network, a funder requested that they all attend training in project management. Obligated to attend, they found the training pitched at new organizations that did not have accounting procedures in place, while they already had over ten years of experience, handled multiple large-scale projects, and had their administrative systems functioning well. A one respondent quipped, her staff capacity was not enhanced, but the donor was satisfied because training conducted could be checked off on a report.

The search for policy and advocacy impact is also problematic in its content. The difficulty is that advocacy is treated as a black box. Not specified or problematized openly are what is to be advocated, what policy is to be formulated, and through what political processes. Moreover, advocacy is presumed to operate in a pluralistic, stable society, one where the articulation of interests will generate policy debate and reform, not sectionalism or open conflict. More directly, for donors and upstream INGOS, a hands off policy towards advocacy may result in the articulation of claims and positions counter to their own. The politics of such advocacy and policy interventions sits uneasily with the uncritical promotion of these aims as simple scaling up of past INGO interventions.

The alternatives currently pursued are interesting. One seeming strategy of upstream organizations and donors is to intervene in the process through extensive training and capacity building (e.g. gender and human rights, the environment). Organizations with a history of volunteer placements have linked placement to advocacy promotion, while other INGOs have provided technical assistants or short-term experts to their South African counterparts. Other funders and INGOs have formed strategic partnerships between like-minded and sympathetic INGOs and SA NGOs (e.g. around HIV/AIDs, child rights, and development training). In each case, greater selectivity and inputs into the growth of local organizations are hoped to breed loyalty to a shared cause and vision of development.

FINANCIAL PACKAGING

As a last example of changing techniques and standards and their impact on different actors in the aid chain, the structuring of finance has distinct implications. Many donors and INGOs are adopting new patterns of finance to address their accountability and aid effectiveness concerns.¹³ Two measures are presented here: the widespread trend to pay project rather than core costs; and a more recent tendency towards retrospective or invoice-based finance.¹⁴

As an established practice, project-based funding most prejudices those organizations that are relatively small with inexperienced staff. Project managers who have not gained the skills to bury core costs within project-based proposals complain that key functions necessary to the organisation are not funded. However, even large organizations with experienced managers find that there are essential activities that are difficult to fund: organizational development, pilot and more experimental approaches, and longer-term impact analysis were among activities mentioned.

Donors' reluctance to provide core funding goes to the center of debates over partnerships. Donors typically attempt to couch their reluctance for core funding in terms of concerns about the sustainability of organizations, e.g. not wanting to be the only, or the major donor, to any particular organisation because of fears of generating over-reliance and dependency. SA NGO respondents argued, however, that the unwillingness to fund core costs can be interpreted as a powerful manifestation of a lack of trust by northern donors in organizations in the south, that giving discretionary money to a SA NGO will inevitably lead to wastage or corruption. Such a belief, of course,

is the very antithesis of the kind of relationships needed for authentic partnerships.

Retrospective funding is even more powerful in its differentiation among potential partners in the South. Since funds are only released upon approval of submitted invoices, only organizations with sufficient capital to back implementation can accept such terms. Smaller, poorly capitalized, and new organizations are immediately excluded. For those organizations capable of operating on an invoice basis, retrospective funding makes recipients directly dependent on the adequacy of bureaucratic procedures for timely disbursements – truly a precarious position.

A number of SA NGO and INGO staff stated their preferences for working with certain donors. Preferred funders tended to fall among the private aid foundations or those with whom the organisation had worked for substantial time. Some SA NGO directors said they refused funding from certain donors, or re-negotiated the terms. Moreover, staff of SA NGOs can have significantly different perceptions of the same donors. For instance, at some organizations, staff reported that working with USAID had been extremely difficult. As one director remarked: They manage to combine very demanding, rigorous requirements for reporting and for project proposals and budgeting with extraordinary inefficiency on their part. So they expect the partners to be absolutely perfect in every respect while they themselves are very far from perfect. In contrast, managers at some other organizations stated that despite bureaucratic procedures, USAID was extremely clear about requirements and this made it relatively easy to work with them.

Again, as with previous examples, procedures designed to enhance control, accountability, and effectiveness, potentially carry with them a high cost. Access to international funding is more restrictive, excluding smaller, less capitalized organizations, such as local grassroots organizations, community-based organizations, and small NGOs. For SA NGOs that accept the new terms, key functions may go unfunded, and exposure to risk may increase. An experienced NGO manager can manipulate funding flows to cover some core costs. But only through diversification of the organization's financial base, or through successful proposals to less restrictive funders, can organizations access discretionary funds.

CONCLUSIONS

In exploring the implications of our research into development management and standards in the South African aid chain, it is clear that donor and INGO practices have affected the organisation and structure of civil society at various levels.

At the overall level of South African civil society, the shift towards rational planning, strategic priorities, advocacy and policy, and more restrictive funding has resulted in a new set of boundaries that differentiate the formal NGO sector. Some NGOs are increasingly formalized, professionalized, and integrated into global aid chains. Though dependent on their benefactors, and subject to potential shifts in funding areas, these organizations appear increasingly capable of managing aid within the confines of the existing aid system. As Julie Hearn (2001:44) writes, the section of civil society which has actively engaged with the dominant national development project & is invariably amongst the most well-funded, is almost completely donor dependent, and tends to identify itself self-consciously via the new language of civil society .

There are also a number of smaller organizations, of varying histories, that continue to do well based on either sectoral specialization or strong alliances with sympathetic funders. These organizations merit more research. For the remainder of the formal NGOs, and for those that are less formal or more closely aligned to the community level, the international aid system provides scant financial resources; influence is instead through wider policy and research initiatives, and limited training programmes.

Shifts in the sectoral and geographic coverage of funded NGOs are also apparent. Directors of SA NGOs were clear that the programmatic focus of INGOs dictated their chances of receiving funding. Some sectors, not favored by current South African government policy, seem to have been equally neglected by international aid; adult literacy is a case in point. International support to HIV/AIDs research, prevention, advocacy and care organizations has, in contrast, bolstered organizations neglected by the State. There are thus two sides (at least) to the strategic focusing of the INGOs and institutional donors they may, if it falls within their priorities, help foster civil society organizations, and may equally leave SNGOs to their own recourse if the programmatic focus is not in line. As donor priorities shift, so too may the coverage and representation SNGOs provide.

At a macro-level as well, the attention to policy influence and advocacy are both intriguing and highly problematic. Premised, as these interventions are, on a vision of consensus-producing pluralistic policy debate, the rise of advocacy as a required outcome of selected INGOs activities carries with it the potential to create new spaces for previously silenced voices. New interests, perhaps better linked into a global or transnational network of allies, are a possible outcome. The rise of umbrella organizations and networks similarly generate the possibility of more powerful inputs on behalf of a better-organized sector. Yet the de-politicization of these processes, and the neglect of the way such organizations are situated within South African power relations, also creates substantial risks, both for the advocacy and impact project, and for its wider political outcomes.

The standards and practices associated with the aid chain also have effects at the meso-level of organizations themselves. It is at this level, of the organisation, that the research suggests the contradictions arising from new standards and techniques are most severe. The rise of umbrella organizations and networks creates a new level of accountability and organizational complexity to local SNGOs. Likewise, strategic planning requirements, logframes, and M&E systems entail a professionalization of organizations, and the acquisition of specialized knowledge. Systems to improve accountability to upstream funders and to demonstrate effectiveness are increasingly in place.

In parallel, greater financial uncertainty – whether arising from an inability to access State or international monies, or from the new restrictions on the use of international aid – means that multiple strategies to diversify and stabilize income sources have become imperative for many SNGOs. In some cases this has meant that SNGOs establish closer relationships to INGOs. In other cases, SNGOs have redefined their relationships to the State, market and community, taking on government contract work, providing services to the private sector or charging user fees to community clients. Some organizations have experimented with their legal status (becoming non-profit companies), while others have used labor as a variable cost, down-sizing and relying more heavily on short-term contracted staff when work loads increase.

The research also shows that there are substantial efforts to change the terrain of debate, and practice, when incompatibilities with developmental or organizational objectives arise. Attempts to resolve some conflicts (as with

irrational reporting), manipulate the system (programme content, reporting), work with allies (advocacy and finance), and confront the most pernicious aspects of development management standards were all observed.

While micro-level impacts of these conditions and practices are also apparent, information on this level is more limited. Contradictions related to participation versus strategic focus are resolved through practices, in at least one case, that obfuscate the problem, and frame participation within the preset boundaries of acceptable interventions. Tensions between participatory local level processes and the language and targets of the logframe were, again in one case, resolved by insulating the beneficiary communities from that logical reporting rationality. Additional research at the project level is likely to produce more information on the difficulties of working with value-driven standards, such as gender, HIV/AIDs and the environment. Yet even at this point, it is clear that effects at the macro- and meso- levels of civil society may have profound implications - the incorporation of selected organizations and development interventions into the logics of the aid industry and its contestation; and the continued exclusion and neglect of other organizations, groups, and issues.

FOOTNOTES

1. See, for example, the articles in Eade, 2000; also Chambers, 1997; Howes, 1992; Wallace et al, 1997; and Wallace, 1997.
2. There are many critiques, from a range of stances towards the aid industry. Chambers, 1997; Fowler, 1995; and Hirschman, 1967 are among the most prominent, but by no means the only, ones to observe the way project-based approaches fail.
3. Concern with aid effectiveness is reflected in the attention to monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment that has emerged over the last few decades. More recently, some economists have joined post-development and aid critics in questioning whether aid achieves its stated objectives (see Burnside & Dollar, 2000; Collier & Dollar, 2001; The World Bank, 1998).
4. Local participation may be pursued for multiple objectives. Rationales are conceptually divided between instrumentalist approaches that see local ownership and inputs as fostering commitment and making targeted outcomes more achievable, and those that see value in the process itself, as a means of fostering more empowered and civic-minded local processes (Mikkelsen, 1995; White, 1996). Local ownership and

participation can also be placed within the wider framework of the good governance agenda, seen by some critics as an effort by donors to shift responsibility for implementation, and any resulting failures, to funding recipients (Abrahamsen, 2000).

5. See Aune, 2000; Bell, 2000; Des Gaspar, 1998, 1999 and 2001; Howes, 1996; Smith, 2000; Wallace, et al, 1997; Wield, 2000.
6. See Wallace, 1999, Harrison, 1997, and Cornwall, 2001 on gender planning; Wallace et al, 1997 on strategic planning; and White, 1998, Cornwall, 2001, and Wallace, 1997 on participation.
7. See Biekart, 1999, pp. 112-131.
8. See Fowler, 2001 and Smith, 2001.
9. See Fowler, 2001 and Biekart, 2000.
10. Tina Wallace at Oxford Brookes University is managing the joint research project, entitled Negotiating development management . Patrick Malindwe of the Makerere Institute is conducting the Ugandan portion of the research. I am responsible for the South African component. Comparative results will be available in 2002.
11. The full material for this case will be available in Shelly Dill s forthcoming Master s dissertation, School of Development Studies, University of Natal, Durban.
12. There are other contradictions related to participation that could be included here. Most important among them are questions of who participates and how conflicting views are addressed.
13. Note that while many funders are moving towards tighter controls, others continue to operate with high levels of trust and minimal controls, particularly when working with strategic partners or long-term allies . Such recipients are highly complimentary about the freedom that their donors allow them, and the long-term support given to sustain often more experimental development approaches. Respondents from other NGOs note that such uncritical allocation of funds means that perhaps other, more effective, activities are not supported.
14. DFID is at the center of the shift towards retrospective funding.

Interviews conducted

1. AFRA, Sihle Mkhize, Director, 16/08/01; Musa Zakwe, Project manager, 17/10/01
2. ANCRA, Marcia Manong, Director, 01/10/01
3. AMREF, Liz Dartnal, Director, 16/05/01

4. BEG, Elmarie de Bruyn, Executive director, 10/05/01; Nina Saunders, Project co-ordinator, 17/09/01
5. CAFOD, Jackie Reeve, Country Programme Officer, 01/03/01
6. CARE, Penny Ward, Programme Coordinator, 16/02/01
7. Charities Aid Foundation (CAF), Eugene Saldanha, Director, 26/04/01
8. DFID, Bridget Dillon, Social Policy Advisor, 14/05/01
9. Diakonia Council of Churches, Paddy Kearney, Director, 15/08/01; Mike Vorster, Programme manager, 11/02/02
10. Diakonia Sweden, Leif Newman, Regional Representative (Southern Africa), 22/05/01
11. European Union, Alex O Rordian, Project manager, 14/05/01
12. Habitat for Humanity International, Tim Groom, Resource Developer, 26/04/01
13. HelpAge International, Thembi Mapetla, 25/04/01
14. Molteno Project, Paula Gains, National training director, 18/09/01
15. Mott Foundation, Moira Mbelu, Assistant Director
16. Non-Profit Partnership (with CAF), Eugene Saldanha, Director, 26/04/01
17. Olive, Davine Thaw, Director, 18/04/01
18. Oxfam UK, Nigel Taylor, SA Programme Director, 07/02/02
19. Philisisizwe Association for Development, Ben Zungu, Director, 06/02/02
20. Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa, Siphon Dayel, National director, 04/10/01
21. Save the Children UK, Charles Mandivenyi, Programme Manager, 14/02/01
22. Sedibeng, Reuben Mogano, Executive director, 14/05/01
23. Urban Sector Network, Susan Carey, Programmes Co-ordinator, 04/10/02
24. Voluntary Service Overseas, Gareth Richards, Country Programme Officer, 21/02/01
25. World Vision, Brian Solomon, Organisational Development Manager, 16/02/01

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