



CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the conclusions of the analysis of the evaluation processes provided to participating CBOs. An overview of the main findings is given, integrated with the key recommendations they have inspired. These are presented in terms of theoretical, methodological and practical insights. The study has also helped to elaborate several of the contradictions that face development aid and evaluation. These questions are at least as valuable to thinking forward into emerging development practice, as recommendations or answers. The research question is then reviewed and I reflect on the extent to which the study meets its objectives and on its limitations. The chapter then offers suggestions for areas in which further research would be valuable. A brief overview of the potential significance of the study to the overall goals of the development sector is provided before the closing remarks for the thesis.

6.2 Summary of findings and associated recommendations

6.2.1. Theoretical contribution

Theories around complex dynamic systems (Senge, 2006, p. 72; Ramalingam & Jones, 2008; Rogers, 2009), emergence (Beeson & Davis, 2000; Seel, 2006; Wheatley & Frieze, 2006) and grounded research (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser, 1999; Dey, 2004; Heath & Cowley, 2004; Charmaz, 2006) have provided the framework for this study. The contribution of this research to these theoretical foundations lies mainly in observing and describing their application in a context of CBOs, communities and development, and not in elaborating them.

CBOs and development rest in a web of relationships. These are complex, dynamic, unpredictable and emergent. Variable such as human nature, circumstance, opportunity and attitude combine in unexpected and unprecedented ways in organisations. Systems theory, with its complexity, emergence and realism, is key to understanding and accurately observing in this context.

At the same time, although largely through inference, questionable theories such as linear logic as a framework for development (Gasper, 2000) have been demonstrated to be inadequate and misleading in explaining reality.

6.2.1.1. *Complex dynamic theory*

It would certainly be making too much of a relatively small data set and a single study to attempt to embellish on Senge's work (2006), but some of the insights in this context may serve to illustrate its value. Complex, looping, dynamic systems are integral to social development, community organisations and power hierarchies. Complicated systems, such as over-engineered evaluation designs, are indeed in conflict with complex systems (Rogers, 2009). Senge's thinking (2006), which was largely informed in the business world, has been shown to apply in many respects to non-profit, social systems within and between organisations, and between organisations and their stakeholders. Senge's views on self-perpetuating feedback and negative spirals (2006, p. 59) underpin the observations that external systems which impose authority are in opposition to self-realisation, despite stated intentions to the contrary.

This study has also observed the implications of theories of non-linearity in complex systems (Dey, 2004) in support of the growing unease with cause and effect logic (McAdam *et al.*, 2008). Flows of logic, multiple pathways and intertwined theories of change that emanated from these results clearly demonstrate the immaturity of linear logic in social systems.

We can expect complex systems to adapt and self-organise, and for relationships in those systems to be co-evolutionary. Evaluation in this context must observe connections, relationships and re-coagulating forms in organisations. Accepting and working within complex systems requires that we embrace uncertainty. By using multiple fringes of learning, we find the direction where most energy and potential lie. We create the paths by walking them. By communicating and working together, systems and people find ways to compliment each other.

6.2.1.2. *Emergence*

Complex systems are unpredictable. Emergence depends on more variables than can be seen or managed. How then, can change or development be influenced? Or would that be an exercise in futility? How, equally, can emergent systems contribute to learning, if there are no rules that can be applied, perhaps even in the future of the same organisation?

However unsettling this is, this research has demonstrated how acknowledging the delicate interplay of unknowns in relationships among organisations allows us greater modesty and responsiveness than if we complacently imagine simplicity and predictability.

To the extent that emergent systems are unpredictable and uncontrollable, evaluation can only describe what has transpired with the shrewdness of hindsight. In the process we gain clarity on the situation and its interactions. As organisations and evaluators, our own interventions in that situation become better informed experiments.

6.2.1.3. Grounded theory

The ongoing debates around grounded theory and its application as either a responsive set of principles (Glaser, 1999; Dey, 2004; Charmaz, 2006) or as a structured analytical process for rigorous theory development (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), connect to the heart of this research. My conclusions support the importance of holding principles and purpose when defining methodology. They highlight the dangers of dictating processes, whether of evaluation or of grounded analysis. Grounded *theory* in the Glaser school is therefore demonstrated and supported in this study.

Grounded *methods* of the Strauss school, although easily integrated into iterative, action research, are relegated to the realm of 'methodology' and cannot claim the more elevated status of 'theory'.

6.2.2. Meta-evaluation: Methodological contribution

The study used an action research analytical process, based in principles of grounded theory. While the two disciplines are ordinarily linked, this research illustrates some examples of their application in practice for method development.

6.2.2.1. Action research

The explicit use of description, reflection, learning and planning is drawn from a non-academic setting in the organisation development sector (Taylor, et al., 1997). This has been applied here in a rigorously academic context. This conceptual framework provides a simple, pragmatic and trustworthy research approach that warrants acknowledgement by the social science community and qualitative research standards. It also demonstrates the importance of using simple, open processes to understand complex systems.

6.2.2.2. Iterative, cumulative coding

Iterative, cumulative analysis using this action research model provides an interesting deviation in the contested field of grounded research protocols (Dey, 2004). Rather than applying open, axial and selective coding to a replicated data set, replication and coding follow the timeline of the research.

Each iteration follows a process of:

- **Indicative analysis** (“I wonder if we can say that”) feeds into;
- **Confirming and contesting analysis**³⁷ (“If, when, under which conditions is this the case?”), both within process iterations and through reflection with mentors and participants. Finally, these emerging conjectures are crystallised into
- **Concluding analysis** (“I would suggest that”).

Triangulation and cross-testing are integrated through an iterative reflection and action design. By the time conclusions have settled, the researcher is satisfied that these can be put forward for further elaboration, testing, confirmation and contesting by the scientific community.

Iterative methods illustrate how there is no truth, no final conclusion and no end point. Every suggestion is a work in progress, an idea which science might hold until its usefulness is usurped. Every conclusion is essentially a question.

While I have applied certain phrases in the sense of methodological contribution, such as iterative, cumulative and indicative, confirming, contesting and concluding analysis, the intention is adamantly not to recommend more terms and more definitions. The phrases simply illustrate a process of learning through growing a theory using time, experience, thinking and rethinking, and reflective suggestions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Institutionalise meta-evaluation.** Meta-evaluation currently receives minimal attention. This may well have contributed to the firm establishment of weak, illogical and undermining evaluation conventions. Meta-evaluation should accompany all evaluation. It should include participant and evaluator reflection on the evaluation approach itself, its process usefulness, as well as the trustworthiness and value of its findings for all concerned.
- **Action research in methods development.** The use of iterative, cumulative methodology design, in the practical application of exploratory research has been demonstrated. It would be in conflict with the principles of emergence and grounding to suggest that this should be applied as a rigid process. The application of principles of reflection, emergence and iteration, however, have been demonstrated to

³⁷ Creswell, 2007:127.

effectively produce methods, and are recommended as valuable for meta-methodology.

- **Cumulative coding.** Much of scientific method depends on sample and replication. The methods applied here define replication as iteration, and allow each cycle to provide a foundation (either to confirm or contest) the next. Triangulation and rigour are built into a process where learning is a research journey, rather than a dataset destination.

6.2.3. Developmental evaluation for CBOs: Practical contribution

As a critical change piece towards designing more developmental evaluation methods, practical contribution lies at the heart of this study. Evaluation has taken refuge in a Tower of Babel in reaction to some of the challenges of development. It has constructed an artificial, monolithic worldview in a new language. The best we can do is to provide principles and some ideas for practice that have relevance to reality outside the tower. Evaluation needs to learn to accept imperfections rather than attempting to force reality to fit artificially constructed clever engineering.

The contested debate is multi-fronted with various interests and perspectives. The contribution here does not attempt to find truth, which I regard as an illusion. It is about confronting complacent attitudes to practice habits, unchecked assumptions and conventional, ritualised inter-organisational behaviour. It simply asks that the development evaluation industry, and all its stakeholders, engage with the debate.

The core practical conclusions revolve around answering the research question. These are elaborated in the section below as a set of loose themes, contrasting grounded and conventional evaluation:

- Visual and verbal communication and evaluation; versus preconditions of literacy.
- Grounded, intangible, complex criteria for success; versus external, non-grounded, predicted criteria.
- Greater recognition of internal accountability in evaluation; versus denial and rejection of participant benefit.

- Responsive, emergent, facilitated processes for self-evaluation where method is the servant of purpose; versus externally engineered and imposed evaluation, where method prevails over purpose.
- Appreciative self-evaluation; versus accusatory evaluation.
- Participatory leadership, ownership, management, relevance and usefulness for organisations; versus external evaluation.
- Capacity building that draws on rationalised formal training in support of organisation development; versus capacity building defined as applying formulaic standards

6.2.3.1. Organisation-centred, visual and verbal communication and evaluation formats

If the purpose of evaluation is for CBOs to communicate, then an effective format would rationally be that in which the CBO most effectively expresses itself.

Written communication was shown to be virtually ineffective in accurately and comprehensively conveying ideas, facts or descriptions from one person to another in a context of low literacy. As such, it is not communication. If this matters, then the development industry needs to rise to meet the challenge of finding formats that do communicate. This research strongly recommends replacing written media, with visual and verbal communication. Metaphor, stories and images have been shown to be sophisticated and detailed, and to offer immediate benefit to organisations in a process for reflection and learning.

For optimal, thorough, comprehensive communication, funder representatives should understand the first languages of most of their CBO clients and engage using personal, verbal communication. Increased employment of South African by foreign agencies would be a step toward this. Even if the language of communication remains English, then at least personal, direct, verbal communication is reasonable to suggest. The role of intermediaries, with the appropriate linguistic abilities, would support this capacity among funding agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Personal, verbal communication.** Funder - CBO relationships (including evaluation) should be managed using personal, verbal communication, preferably in the first language of most CBO members.



- **Intermediaries.** Trusted, responsible, participation-skilled intermediaries providing both the qualities and the time for this engagement should be built up within the institutional fabric.
- **Much less writing.** Written proposals, reporting and communication should be rationalised to an absolute minimum, with equally credible verbal options in place for even this minimum.
- **Imagery and stories.** Metaphor, stories and images convey complexity highly effectively. Learning the 'language' of these formats would greatly enhance inter-organisational understanding.

6.2.3.2. Appropriate M&E technology

A cutting edge of developmental M&E is therefore that of developing tools and technologies to support verbal and visual communication.

Beyond technology, communication culture needs to become more embracing. In a developmental vision, alternative formats such as DVD recordings, annotated diagrams or photo narratives would be received with enthusiasm and seriousness by external partners, including funding agencies.

RECOMMENDATION

- **Technology to support visual and verbal.** Investment in appropriate, affordable, accessible technology to support verbal and visual communication is a current, critical leading edge in evaluation progress.

6.2.3.3. Intangible, complex, systemic thinking

The purpose of evaluation is not to measure. It is to manage. The criteria for the sort of information that supports management do not include tangibility or measurability, although these may be tempting parameters from the measurer's perspective. Management decisions require accurate reflections of reality, with sufficient complexity and detail. Tangibility and measurability have no rational link with clearly and coherently representing a situation. Complex social systems are not better understood through reductionist data, especially if reduction only selects out a convenient and rather arbitrary set of indicators on the basis of their accessibility.

RECOMMENDATION

- **Accept complexity.** To be effective, evaluation needs to embrace the intangible, unmeasurable and complex. It needs to be able to hear stories, draw inferences, and

conceive reasoned, rationalised conclusions. We must stop expecting proof, certainty and simplicity.

6.2.3.4. *Alternatives to predictive planning and evaluation*

The crystal ball gazing of predicting linear outcomes and indicators is seldom realistic or valid. In practice, impacts are inevitably wider, more complex and possibly completely different from those that could have been imagined by even the most astute planner.

Predictive, linear systems persist despite the lack of logic in their 'logic model'. Development is contradictory, unpredictable and emergent (Kaplan, 2002; Soal, 2004). Inertia, crisis, revolution and consolidation are more typical of development processes than predictability or attributable cause and effect (Quinn Patton, 2002). The very concept of an indicator is incomprehensible in a local setting. How will I know that I have had an impact on my client? They might live, or they might die with dignity. They might smile more, or they might be more assertive. Their family might accept them, or they might move to another town. They might take their medication, or have personal reasons not to. They might have access to the clinic, but might require other social services more urgently.

Prediction and indicators have a slightly bizarre hold on development reasoning. An organisation which does not predict accurately may be considered a failure by its funding agency, and deemed unworthy of further support on the basis of the variance between its achievements and its predictions. The capacity to predict well is rewarded more enthusiastically than the capacity to serve community interests.

Since there is little logical link between ability to predict the future and the impact of CBO relationships, many successes are lost from learning, and many questionable and arbitrarily selected results are masqueraded as achievements. Predefining indicators in the context of local community development is as meaningful as trying to catch a selected drop of water from a sieve.

A core finding of this research has been that it is possible, rational and meaningful to isolate criteria for effectiveness *after* an intervention. This reordering of criteria-setting has benefits to evaluation accuracy, usefulness, relevance and application in organisational development.

Although deceptively simple, this conclusion requires quite profound reorganisation of thinking around evaluation, and a substantial shift in the mindsets of development convention. Strategic planning and evaluation methods based on prediction and

indicators need to be redesigned. Theory of change is a preferable entry point for planning. Evaluation should be grounded in reality rather than based on prediction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Theory of change** (multiple pathways) should replace logical frameworks (linear thinking) during planning.
- **Replace prediction with grounding.** Evaluation culture needs a complete reversal from convention. Imperfect, intuitive, opportunistic, complex, reflective and grounded evaluation should replace rigid, 'unbiased', data efficient, standardised, rigorous, predictive evaluation. Evaluators need to reclaim their humanity and intuition by learning how to see, understanding and telling a story, and being trusted to do so.
- **Most social, institutional and developmental evaluation should follow a grounded model. Evaluating from prediction should be dropped wherever the evaluation subject is complex and dynamic.** I would suggest that this conclusion applies beyond CBOs. Theory of change and grounded evaluation, as a replacement (not a corollary) to logical frameworks, prediction-based evaluation and indicators, would be more appropriate in most of the contexts I have observed all the way up to national and international development planning and evaluation. Even quantifiable situations in social and development settings, where statistics can and should be monitored, are likely to have far more management meaning if primarily supported by grounded narrative evaluation.

6.2.3.5. Responsive, pragmatic, organisation relevant evaluation

Developmental, participatory evaluation at community organisation level is not research. It is social development communication. It need not be rigidly methodological, unbiased, systematically representative or data efficient. Rules and rigour have far less relevance than pragmatism and intuition. Loose responsiveness is essential. Evaluation should be aiming away from perfect evidence and complete justification for action, and towards trust, intuition and emergence. Evaluators need to be relaxed, intuitive, opportunistic, awake to learning as it emerges, and ready to interrogate their own unfolding conclusions and underlying assumptions. Evaluation is far more of a treasure hunt, than an inventory exercise.

The attitudes necessary to achieve this are impossible in a context of predictive, structured, positivist, externally-owned evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Graciousness.** Attitudes of humility, sincere curiosity and self-awareness are needed among the facilitators and commissioners of evaluation.

6.2.3.6. *Purpose prevails over method*

While effective, accurate and meaningful insights are more achievable using narrative methods, an awareness of purpose over method still remains critical. Our role is not to execute a method. We are responsible for facilitating understanding and listening to a situation. Most importantly, our role is to create conditions where participants and organisations can understand and explore their own situation afresh. The touchstone for a high quality evaluation is the extent to which we can make sound management decisions based on a fair understanding of the situation.

RECOMMENDATION

- **Method serves developmental purpose.** Alternative methods remain at risk of simply adding a slightly different style of bureaucracy within old paradigms and attitudes. New approaches to evaluation can only make a difference to the extent that we can describe, and then shift, our fundamental assumptions.

6.2.3.7. *Be appreciative*

The use of appreciative approaches in evaluation would probably be accepted as reasonable by most practitioners. What is more striking, however, than the value of appreciation, is the damage that *accusatory* approaches inflict on relationships and on the quality of evaluation data. Unintentional accusation, especially in a context of funding decisions, external motivations and power imbalance, poses a threat to the value and standard of any evaluation, however appreciative its intentions. Facilitators need to be sensitive to the reactions that are being elicited, and to the patterns of behaviour and assumption that are inherent in diverse and power influenced relationships.

Critical thinking needs to be facilitated through evaluation processes in a form where organisations themselves take all responsibility for criticism and corrective planning. The facilitator's role is to hold this critique with neutrality, and to allow the organisation its own limits to the intensity and assertiveness of its self-interrogation. Evaluators must earn trust and be trustworthy, regarding the way in which honest self-critique is used and communicated.

RECOMMENDATION

- **Be appreciative.** Appreciative inquiry should define every evaluation, where failure and success are both interpreted as learning.
- **Do not be accusatory.** More importantly, facilitators of evaluation need to be sensitive to accusatory inquiry. Accusation elicits defensiveness. Defensiveness destroys learning and yields nonsense data.

6.2.3.8. *Facilitation, more than evaluation*

An evaluator may either see him or herself as *evaluator*, standing in judgement; or in the more neutral position, as *facilitator* of self-evaluation. This research suggests that the former style is not conducive to development, organisational learning or useful, trustworthy data. External facilitators need to be respectful and patient, trusting that understanding will emerge, and that the depth of insight of locally experienced practitioners has far more relevance and reliability than their own opinions on content.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Facilitators of self-evaluation, not external evaluators.** Sharing and building *content* is the task of organisation members. Holding *process* is the task of the facilitator.

6.2.3.9. *Participation*

Participatory evaluation and, ultimately, organisation-managed evaluation are critical to evaluation being effective in guiding management, being reasonably accurate in its data and interpretations, and being a source of inspiration rather than denigration. The ownership, leadership and active participation of organisation members in the commissioning, design, execution and use of evaluation are absolutely essential to evaluation being justified and valuable. Real trust, risk and respect must start somewhere.

To take participation beyond the lip-service of the many donor agencies that espouse participatory development, these external agents need to release the reins over method and learning, and be sincerely open to organisation-led processes. Trust, patience and flexibility will invariably be required. Outside supporters need to show restraint and wisdom in the careful catalytic inputs they provide, in terms of both the amounts and nature of financial support and the systems and capacity they import.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Funders align to organisations' systems.** "The only evaluation worth doing is self-evaluation" (Sue Soal, Peer Review Questionnaire). Where funders are sincere in their bid to be partners, they should be prepared to accept organisationally relevant self evaluation as meeting their accountability needs
- **National level bureaucrats - become international leaders.** The in-country staff of international funding agencies need to become advocates and educators in their own organisations, and to their own sources of accountability, rather than bureaucrats who borrow and lever power from remote and lofty autocrats in their home governments.

6.2.3.10. Evaluation and organisation development

The relationship between evaluation and organisation development may be seen from two polarised standpoints. i) The conventional ethic of an external, independent, objective and judgemental evaluation implies that evaluation has neither responsibility nor role in organisation development. ii) In contrast, utilisation-based, critical change evaluation would integrate every interaction with the mutual growth and learning of all concerned. This study suggests that the first, external evaluation, is neither conducive to the goals of development espoused by the industry, nor accurate in terms of data and objectivity. The second, developmental evaluation, may be messier, but allows growth and learning to emerge from a shared experience, and a gradual crystallisation of insight as the essence of evaluation learning.

Evaluation is learning. Learning is a journey for all those involved. It is not a destination, and is never complete. Ethical, principled evaluation simply asks that this learning be focused on observed reality, by those closest to its source and to its application. To the extent that such discovery-based, exploratory learning is integral to organisation development, so too is evaluation. Ethical evaluators recognise this integration, and take responsibility for their interference in an organisation's learning. Developmental principles tell us that every interaction must have constructive value, and that evaluation too is responsible for development impact.

RECOMMENDATION

- **Evaluation has responsibility for organisational learning.** Evaluation processes should contribute immediately to organisational development and community benefit. Evaluation has no right to interfere, unless it makes its own relevant contribution.

6.2.3.11. *Internal accountability*

CBO strategy, including design, management and evaluation, should acknowledge the personal development of organisation members as a legitimate and valuable immediate social contribution. Strategic management should formally support career paths for volunteers as workplace interns or apprentices into the formal economy. In part this would justify volunteerism. It also aligns with the grounded observation of this study that inward accountability has outcomes which have tangible and immediate socio-economic value. In this instance, by seeing it and planning for it, we can better manage it.

RECOMMENDATION

- **Internal achievements count.** Active management for the life goals of volunteers should be an encouraged, acknowledged and fundable outcome for a CBO.

6.2.3.12. *Capacity building*

Externally-defined, standardised criteria for organisational capacity and training courses with formulaic content, including those for M&E, need to be carefully rationalised and reduced to an absolute minimum.

This is unlikely to be a popular suggestion. The business models of capacity building agencies depend on multiplying training courses and marketing for greater demand. In addition, dispensing training is low-hanging fruit for funding agencies, and a useful, easily achieved output to those holding them to account. Furthermore, like most of us, CBO members enjoy attending training courses. Most stakeholders therefore have an interest in keeping and increasing formal training programmes.

However well appreciated they are, there is little to support the effectiveness of formulaic, standardised, off-site training courses for meeting the management needs of CBOs. I offer two main reasons. Firstly, the content priorities addressed in these training curricula (e.g. governance and M&E) are designed a long way from CBO practice and are seldom the most immediate constraints facing an organisation. Secondly, the style of management that is promoted as organisational standards is also generated from organisational models that are very different from CBOs (e.g. linear planning, focus on core business, productivity, efficiency). These courses cannot easily contribute to real growth, from real foundations.

Different styles of engagement and different definitions of CBO capacity are needed. These should follow models of emergent realism and organisation-led growth fronts.

They should be based on problem solving, reflection and the organisation's vision for self-realisation. This self-directed capacity journey could then be supported by the availability of content-rich training to fill needs as they are identified by organisations.

It is the promotion of standardised training as automatically and inherently valuable, that is one of the reasons for its limited institutionalisation.

RECOMMENDATION

- **Less formal training, with more CBO-defined curricula.** Training must meet a real experienced need in an organisation to be incorporated effectively into an enhanced practice. Training facilities and organisation leadership need to co-design their approach to capacity building with this in mind.

6.2.3.13. Ethics

The results of the research provided richer insights to the practice of organisational ethics, especially with regard to integrating organisation development with evaluation, and the matter of process use. More generally, the recommendations are all essentially rooted in ethical practice, as well as effective practice, as the underlying purpose of the study.

Lessons from individual interviews in the conduct of community-based public interviews also emerged as a major finding. These produce recommendations on the risks, precautions and challenges of public research, to which qualitative, narrative, participatory evaluator would need to give clear attention.

6.3 Conundrums and unanswered questions

Posing unanswerable, circular, challenging questions might not be ingratiating to the M&E profession or the development industry, but ignoring these conundrums is what leads to stagnation. This research has stimulated thinking and discussion around several of development's great irritants:

- **Subjectivity:** Objectivity, predictability, standardisation and simplification were the answers to subjectivity. They have not helped. Reflections on challenges and perceptions around subjectivity in evaluation need to be refreshed.
- **The power of money:** The realities of mismatched supply and demand, creating forces that contradict visions of equitable, power balanced societies.

- The power of power, habit and social conditioning: is power imbalance a resource for an interminable development industry, or are there opportunities for transformation?

6.3.1. Subjectivity

Subjectivity and its close cousin, trust, are unmeasurable, instinctive, relationship-based qualities between people. We would assume, intuitively, that good process and strong organisations, which are clear about the needs of their community, should automatically confer good outcomes. We might acknowledge that this assumption is probably true most of the time. This is the assumption, however, against which conventional evaluation has reacted:

Just because we do good work well, how do we know we make a difference?

Are we sure we are doing the *right* work well?

These legitimate questions have driven conventional evaluation into a corner of self-contradiction and methodological tangle. There have been justifiable concerns confronting the assumption that good people probably do mostly good things.

Having experienced the force of subjectivity myself, observed the feeling with which organisations desire funding relationships, and seen the anxiety of funders' employees to do their job well, it is clear to me that the sources of subjectivity in evaluation are many and vehement. The urge to create standardised, objectively verifiable, independently measured criteria for success is understandable. These have been explored. They have run their course, and failed.

The lesson from this failure has been that subjectivity cannot be resolved by attempting to remove it. Even if it were achievable, so-called objectivity has as many flaws as subjectivity in terms of its impact on organisations and its effectiveness in determining 'truth'. Relationships are ultimately formed between people, and are therefore basically subjective.

How then can evaluation manage the three-way tensions between i) external interests; ii) facilitator subjectivity; and iii) organisation interests? The results of this research suggest that the solution lies in including subjectivity as data. By revealing the beliefs, myths and concerns of each party, we begin to understand our real respective purposes and cultures. Evaluation that hears the stories of each stakeholder, and encourages self-evaluation first, including introspection on the important values embedded in these stories, might have more chance of gaining a shared understanding, even if it doesn't

find common ground. The discipline this asks for is that time, reflection, patience and emergence must infiltrate the business-like, unreflective culture of efficient, rapid output performance.

RECOMMENDATION

- **Rethink subjectivity.** Objectivity and standardisation have been tested as an answer to the challenges of subjectivity. They have failed. We need to rethink subjectivity.
- **Acknowledge and reflect on our own subjectivity.** Subjectivity may largely be resolved by being more thoughtful, trusting, honest, transparent, reflective and tolerant. We need to accept that we are indeed subjective, but that we can see and respect the values that frame our subjective reactions.

6.3.2. Exploitation or volunteerism

While small grants make operational sense in funding CBOs, the main costs of organisations in the service industries are their human resources. Funding CBOs without funding salaries assumes the contribution of unpaid volunteers. The tacit expectation is that people will work for the good of society, in so-called partnerships with comfortably salaried outsiders, while their own essential survival needs are left unmet. The concept smacks of exploitation, and is fraught with double standards.

On the other hand, CBOs that professionalise essentially become private sector service providers (Uphoff, 1995). Unless they explicitly cast themselves as activists and raise funds for their role in this capacity, their role as knights has to be subjugated to their task as fund raiser for salaries. They are fully converted sheep.

Becoming a sheep entails various compromises. With professionalisation CBOs lose some mutual trust in their community, and with it, they may lose unresented access into these communities. They may gain pressure of expectations, conflict of interest, internal conflicts between volunteers and professionals, and a plethora of other organisational challenges. The CBO's purpose can no longer be set unambiguously in local knowledge and intuition. It must seek out common interests with the external priorities of funding partners in terms of content, process, systems and relationships. While these may be different, they are not necessarily incorrect. They are not, however, primarily representative of local perspectives. The challenge lies in organisations continuing to hold sufficient autonomy of thought, ability for discernment and assertiveness to engage as equals in relationships, despite the forces of power and wealth imbalance.

In another layer of contradiction, for every professionalised CBO, many other voluntary, community organisations are likely to emerge. This creates tensions in the sense of the power, rights and belonging of each. The professionalisation of one CBO does nothing to resolve the challenges of exploitation, volunteerism and unprofessionalism across a community.

This intractable challenge requires an in-depth organisational behavioural research piece in its own right. Further, bolder exploration around organisational models and funding relationships that take account of volunteerism and professionalisation, and the impact of both on CBOs themselves, and on their development outcomes, is recommended based on this research.

A return to sustainability models based on local economic development and small industry in parallel with community development might well be the answer. Once popular, this model has been largely replaced in the HIV and AIDS industry. Most organisations look towards easier income generation through contracting for stipends and donor grants. This reduces their autonomy and creates unsustainable dependency. While valuable and potentially fair, stipends have created a market niche filled with sheep (although menially remunerated and exploitative compared with a reasonable service fee). They are appreciated, certainly, and their work meets a critical need, but they do not resemble development or transformation.

Growth, professionalisation and financial expansion are assumed to be desirable for organisations. This needs to be questioned. It buys into the private sector ethic that larger and formal are better. In terms of development outcomes, they may not be. The value of 'small and informal' needs to be captured as having high quality in its own right by evaluators in this context. This is an area where evaluation needs to have particular awareness, whatever the financial and professional position of an organisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Work with volunteerism.** Volunteerism is an emergent, accepted reality of society. Volunteer participants choose to cooperate in this way, and have their own hopes for various benefits. We need to accept this and work constructively in a context of volunteerism. CBO evaluation needs to include internal accountability to these volunteers.
- **Watch professionalisation.** Evaluation also needs to be sensitive to the positive and negative impacts of professionalisation (e.g. stipends and salaries) on both organisations and communities.

6.3.3. Funding relationships

Donor agencies vary tremendously in culture, approach, ethics and beliefs. They range from archetypal development villains, to sincerely thoughtful agencies prepared to learn and grow to address the difficult contradictions implied in their role in the industry. Whether villainous in their systems and organisational attitudes, or not, funding agencies are generally staffed by well-meaning individuals, for whom development is a career in which they have commitment and integrity. The observations presented here are therefore not generalisations. Some are behaviours and patterns against the flow of which more enlightened donors have expressly reacted.

6.3.3.1. *More, smaller, easier funding relationships*

Mechanisms need to be designed in order that financial support becomes less onerous, and more catalytic. These might draw on the emerging architecture of CBOs, networks and grant-making intermediaries. Very small sums are more appropriate for CBOs, than larger grants and their associated commitments for scaled productivity. Amounts as small as R1000³² worth of taxi vouchers may be all that a CBO needs to reach its immediate goal. And no-one can ‘throw their weight around’ for R1000.

Finance is only a small component of the resources a CBO needs. CBOs’ power is held in their access to community, their ability to provide services, potential for local influence and local relationships. With small grants, these would automatically take precedence over the power of money.

Funding relationships should help to motivate the knights in these organisations to address the causes beneath local needs and socially sustainable solutions ... Where *should* those costs of transport be coming from? CBOs need to have the opportunities to relate to outsiders, including funders, by simply talking with each other as passionate practitioners. These conversations will encourage organisations to reflect on their situation, while motivating them as serious professionals in their field.

RECOMMENDATION

- **Small amounts with commensurate trust and autonomy.** Large funding grants, beyond the original planned intentions of an organisation, serve little purpose apart from the convenience of the funding agency for fewer, larger relationships. Mechanisms for small grants, depending on leverage and partnerships that keep CBO

³² Approximately €100

culture thrifty and resourceful, are better suited to community development outcomes.

6.3.3.2. Funding review and learning evaluation

Some of the controversy in this study has stemmed from the aid industry conflating marketing for funds with learning for management. Evaluation, although a multi-faceted discipline, has had to compromise between these mutually exclusive roles. Separation of these two purposes, and clarity on the rules of the game for each, would enable greater emphasis on learning for management which is otherwise overwhelmed by financial incentive.

Several principles emerge which would enhance the quality of relationships, the standards of learning and organisational growth, and development outcomes. Marketing should be acknowledged as such: as the opportunity to convince an agency of one's legitimacy and potential for contribution.

Even then, marketing culture and effective salesmanship must compliment the nature of CBOs. A convincing CBO should reflect the contradictions and unpredictability of community development, the importance of slow, emergent growth, the potential destructiveness of donor directives to power, and the qualities of shared learning, thinking and analysis in true partnerships. Marketing or fund-raising systems which encourage extremes of market spin leave organisations tense and uncomfortable in their own integrity. There should be no incentive for an average organisation to exaggerate its capabilities.

Most evaluation is motivated in some way by demands for funding accountability. Evaluation for organisational learning is generally neglected. Most evaluation, therefore, tends to fall under a marketing definition. Little wonder then, that development has learnt so little, and achieved so modestly.

A culture of learning and skills in self-evaluation and reflection is not easily cultivated in organisations, or even in us as individuals. Imagine a scenario in which CBOs were not obliged to show the full findings of their evaluation to their funder. Based in learning, evaluation could become constructive, confidential and continuous. It could sometimes be facilitated as an integral element of capacity building. This definition for evaluation would need the support of flexible, imaginative and responsive agencies prepared to experiment alongside their CBO clients.

An evolving common path becomes possible if our shared purpose is development effectiveness, and the role of each stakeholder is respected as having equal decision-making power. If, however, the path of each stakeholder (funder and recipient) is carved out in their respective boardrooms, and the common path determined by the weight of their respective power, then we have no chance of moving at all.

RECOMMENDATION

- **Evaluation for learning.** *Marketing is marketing. Learning is learning.* Evaluation should not attempt a combination of the two. Capacity building should be integrated with organisational learning, and learning organisation self-evaluation should grow to be the core of normal evaluation practice.
- **A learning community of practice.** More than learning organisations, we need to see a learning community of development practitioners. Stakeholder (funders, CBOs, intermediaries and other partners) should have as much sincere interest in learning from each other and applying their learning to its practice, as they do in promoting their own viewpoints and fulfilling their perceived needs.

6.3.3.3. *A culture of engagement*

In a rather chicken and egg situation, funding agencies tend to take the lead in a vacuum of initiative from expectant CBOs. Some agencies may be relieved if CBOs were to step forward proactively, and define their needs, preferences and terms. In many ways CBOs that are attempting to comply and be acceptable, are not effectively or sincerely engaging in relationship - they are not reaching out to would-be partners from a position of their own power and integrity. They cannot connect properly if they are trying to say the right things. This makes a funding agency's task difficult, especially since they tend to lack the patience to follow a gradual process of relationship building.

Leadership, self-knowledge, reflection and assertiveness are qualities that may become contagious, once their credibility is seen by both funders and CBOs.

The challenge is that organisations may not know themselves, or what they need. Instead of facilitating a process of reflection, external agencies tend to helpfully *tell them* who they are and what they need. And CBOs learn to wait to be told. This externally driven 'self-awareness' cannot help but defeat any potential for real reflection, and therefore for real engagement.

CBOs themselves need to invest far more selectively in relationships with diverse donors. Difficult as it is once the funding game is on, they need to be prepared to assert

themselves, and to turn down relationships that are not in the interests of their own organisational and community vision.

Funding agencies will require patience if the impasse is to be resolved. Placing facilitated reflection resources at the disposal of CBOs, and injecting a culture of self-awareness through CBO networks, would take time to reap assertive proactivity. It is certainly quicker just to tell them who they are and what they need.

- **CBOs: learn to know, engage and assert.** A culture of asserting their own needs and values, and negotiating their own conditions for entering into funding contracts, needs to be inspired through CBO networks, as the legitimate exercise of power.
- **Funders: learn to listen, wait and respond.** We cannot hear what someone has to say, unless we have the patience to wait for them to speak.

6.3.3.4. The power of money

While these and similar adjustments might contribute to greater development effectiveness from within the model, the uncontested power of money still ultimately determines organisational behaviour. No other resource carries this universally accepted assumption of authority. Communication, power distribution and sincerity cannot survive in a context of funders' and recipients' shared belief in dependency on money, and their mutual acceptance of funders' authority.

However well-meaning a funder might be in determining the most appropriate terms for the relationship, the very fact that the authority for those terms rests with them, shapes the power dynamic in the relationship. Both the funder, in its expectation for gratitude and compliance, and the recipient, in its acknowledgement of dependency and patronage, feed the disparity between rich and poor. The deep assumptions of each party in this relationship are rooted in centuries of social moulding. The wealthy, whether benign or not, hold the power. The poor, whether defiant or complacent, do not.

Funding is desired, and yet it carries with it competition, incentive and control. It is a game, with rules and winning strategies. There will never be funds for every applicant. Decisions have to be made. As players in the game, as well as referees and primary rule writers, funding agencies themselves need to focus on their intent for effective development, rather than on how well-played the game is from their perspective.

Power and money, as cause, process and effect for development, catch us in a web of contradiction and hypocrisy. The answer? I don't know. Perhaps immense and

ungraspable, like a global systems revolution. Perhaps simpler, like community basket funding and local level management. Perhaps we need to be looking at the conflict in terms of our own relationship with power, money, class and social status, and to begin to remove the taboos against these conversations and to be bold enough for 'dirty talk'.

What we do know, is that there is an ulcer in the belly of development, and ignoring it will not resolve it.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Live with the question.** We need to confront the contradiction that development funding reinforces disparities of wealth and poverty, the power of the wealthy, and the frailty of dependency. Public debate and collective thinking, speaking out, interrogating the challenges and living with the questions will take us towards the emergent formulation of an answer.

6.3.4. Power as a development resource

Power needs to be taken to exist. Power given (or empowerment) is not power at all. While it might create opportunities, change behaviour and instigate new activities, lasting change needs power to create opportunities and choose actions without external enablement. Few externally inspired development initiatives, and very few of development's planning and evaluation ideas, endure beyond the external energy that created them.

CBOs may well do different things during 'empowerment', but they do not become different beings. Trying to inspire this profound change from the outside follows the laws of force in physics. We try to create channels of power downward to CBOs, which overwhelm the channels through which power might have been drawn from within.

Development must be about catalysing the taking of power, without pretending to have the power to give it. As practitioners we need to be aware of the delicacy of power and the risks of unsustainability in power perceptions.

RECOMMENDATION

- **Think and talk about power.** Power is a perception. Global culture needs to shift towards sincere belief in equitable power distribution and awareness of old power habits and attitudes. Perhaps, like money, we need to be bold enough to speak honesty and frankly about power, however unflattering this might be.

6.3.5. Development and colonialism: dare we ask?

During the recession of 2008/2009 many international funding agencies were in search of caveats to their global citizenship. There were questions about the impact of development, particularly in Africa, over the last 50 years. During these discussions I heard "After all these years of giving you our tax payers' money, you are as undeveloped as ever"³³. Attitudes seem to be as firmly entrenched in 'us' and 'them' as ever. Tax-payers, who by definition have wealth; versus tax-users, who probably don't. And all the while the north quietly and sanctimoniously ignores its own responsibility for global distribution.

How far have the paradigms of development evolved since the colonial era? Colonists provided schools, medicines, foreign languages and religion while their governments scoured natural resources. In an unnerving parallel, development provides capacity building programmes, complex technology, foreign language and written communication, and the religion of the power of money, while fundamental inequality in society remains entrenched (Table 14).

What made colonialism most abhorrent? We might say it was the imposition of external power over self-determination. Does the development discourse dare to imagine history repeating itself? Do we confront ourselves as we purvey the power of financial conditionalities over the self-direction of community

Table 14. *Comparing colonialism with development*

Well-meaning colonialism:	Well-meaning development:
<i>schools</i>	• <i>externally designed capacity building</i>
<i>language</i>	• <i>written, English communication</i>
<i>western religion</i>	• <i>the proper worship of the power of money</i>
	all conveyed in evaluation

organisations? Colonialism was founded in global greed; well-meaning, but misguided, expatriate energy; ignorance of each other's values and culture; and reasonable local acquiescence. What should we be doing differently now with much the same four ingredients?

³³ NGO Conference, 2008, CSIR, Pretoria

RECOMMENDATION

- Locally, nationally and globally, the development industry, large and unwieldy as it is, needs to be shocked into stopping, talking and thinking, and become prepared to be revolutionary in its reflection³⁴.

6.4 *Returning to the research question: achievements and limitations of the study*

6.4.1. Problem statement and research objectives

The problem statement posited that *"Conventional, predictive evaluation systems used by funding agencies for HIV and AIDS CBOs are too simplistic, rigid, linear and one-dimensional to accurately assess the contributions of these projects in communities, or to facilitate evaluation processes that contribute positively to organisational development"*.

The study rationale was intended to identify viable evaluation process elements and principles for assessing the outcomes of CBO efforts in building a community-based response to the impact of HIV, which:

- i) Support CBO self-determination and development as organisations;
- ii) Encourage responsive project planning and organisational learning;
- iii) Respond to the accountability needs of funding agencies?

6.4.2. Thesis outline

Literature on development evaluation and CBOs contextualised the study. Methodological literature on grounded theory, systems thinking and action research served to link the literature review with the methods chapter.

Evaluation ideas were tested around stories, participation, metaphor and reflection, intended to support self-determination and learning. The crux of the methodology, however, was the action research meta-evaluation of these evaluation designs. The intention was to be voyeur over the processes as I was facilitating them with the organisations. These observations had two main aims: firstly to design better methods; secondly, to describe some principles of evaluation in a context of the development industry and CBO settings. These themes form the discussion chapter.

³⁴ The Paris and Accra meetings and declarations, and the sequence of meetings which surround them, have been global level attempts to stop, think and talk. They have fallen short, however, of being revolutionary, essentially punting more of the same.

Various practical guidelines to applying alternative methods emerged in the discussion. The study demonstrated at quite a general level that grounded evaluation and analysis can provide a high standard of detailed, subtle, informative and enlightening learning. The results of grounded, visual, participatory evaluation were starkly contrasted with what would ordinarily have been predicted with linear logic. The uniqueness of each case was testimony to the limitations of standardised methods and expectations.

More important than methods, were the emerging principles of developmental evaluation in support of self-realisation and learning. These principles apply broadly to the triangle of development, funding and evaluation. The discussion therefore uses evaluation as an entry point, but highlights the inter-organisational and community implications of power distortion, external authority, and imposed, rather than emergent systems.

The discussion culminates in a characterisation of the CBO sector, in terms of its activism, service, internal and contractual roles, under the respective metaphors of knights, saints, snakes and sheep. The relationship of funding and evaluation to each of these roles is described.

I would regard this characterisation, as well as the recommendations and intractable questions above, as the core contribution of this study. If we have a metaphor for transforming an industry, and a few more entry points to contribute to the contemporary work of many others, we have both the language and the ideas for a revolution. As a critical change practitioner, in an industry that I see as self-serving, stagnant, bureaucratic and uninspired, I am in favour of revolution.

6.4.3. Limitations and unmet potential

The third condition in the research objectives, that of responding to the accountability needs of funding agencies, was less satisfyingly addressed. Much of the discussion on conundrums and contradictions emerges from grappling with this issue. The key conclusion here is that the attitudes of funding agencies and CBOs to accountability need to shift. We need to see greater assumption of power and authority among front-line development practitioners. It seems to be broadly accepted that decisions and directives of wealthy, employed, professional, office-based people, carry more authority than the suggestions and preferences of those who are poor, unemployed, voluntary and community-based. This is so inculcated in the minds of both, that neither is really knows what those suggestions and preferences might be. To truly shift this attitude would require reaching into the depths of the global distribution of power and

wealth, and centuries of conditioning around class and ambition. This leads us to difficult circular discussions which this research can only air, in the hope that by contributing to collective consciousness and confronting complacency, something better might gradually, chaotically emerge.

This study would have been stronger with the addition of donor agency focus groups, although the peer questionnaires were much appreciated in this regard. In thinking through new approaches, it would have been powerful to engage more with those likely to be in opposition, as well as those who were converted or neutral.

Another limitation here has been a tested counter-factual. People thrived on metaphor and stories, and there were indications from their attitudes and responses that strongly bore out my impressions from experience and the literature on conventional approaches. Different and more detailed, informative insight would have been received from conducting conventional evaluation, using checklists, forms, templates and interviews in addition to these grounded methods.

6.5 Suggestions for further research

As a research study for which raising questions was inherent to the approach, various research opportunities have arisen.

6.5.1. Further theoretical research

- **Emergence theory.** Complex dynamic systems theory and grounded theory employed in this study are already well published, and widely debated. Theories of emergence, however, are less accessibly packaged for the organisational behaviour field. Emergence finds its roots in chaos theory, which has been the subject of a great deal of abstract and conceptual work. Although critical to managing organisation complexity, thinking and writing on managing and describing emergence and the application of these theories in social and organisation settings, seem to me to offer great potential for cutting edge theoretical work.

6.5.2. Methodological research

- **Iterative, cumulative action research design and analysis.** Academic action research and the use of iteration and accumulation in analysis would be usefully elaborated by a methodologist. I am an organisation development practitioner with an interest in processes in that setting. Meta-evaluation and meta-methodology were only the approaches to this study, not its purpose. They produced some interesting variations on the themes of action research and grounding in exploring

organisational processes. Placed at the centre of a research piece, there is potential for reflection on the principles and practice of action research in methods development, at the risk of meta-meta-methodology.

- **Meta-evaluation** was identified as a key neglected field in development practice. This has been to the detriment of development and learning. Careful thought to guiding methodology, without constructing rigid, non-emergent, formulaic methods that overwhelm their own purpose, would greatly contribute to this field.

6.5.3. Suggestions for practical research

- **Developmental aid funding** needs to be the focus of far more research. This study on evaluation was inextricably linked with funding relationships. The purpose of this study, however, was not to give in-depth thought to funding modalities, systems effects and the advantages and disadvantages to development outcomes of financial relationships. What would motivate funding agencies to adjust their conditions for funding relationships? What are the factors that enable them to evolve and change? How does their much vaunted commitment to development results, come to translate into culture and systems which are in direct conflict with development results? This would be top priority research in the industry.
- **Global economic influence in development.** Why has nothing changed? Why do the poor get poorer? Are there flashes of optimism anywhere for Africa? How does Africa compare with other developing settings? How might we ride the global currents, rather than be drowned in them? Surely a lifetime of research.
- **Organisational dynamics in other CBO and NGO sectors.** This research was conducted with CBOs offering HIV and AIDS services. It is a sector which has been particularly well-funded, formalised and recognised by the state response to the HIV crisis in South Africa. A disproportionately large number of CBOs have been generated, many with at least government stipends as income. They are often formed as a means of accessing these stipends. Comparisons between the inception, operations, values, vision, loyalty and effectiveness of such CBOs, with those in less lucrative sectors, would provide a deeper understanding of the forces that mould organisations, and of the positive and negative impacts of financial engagement.
- **The civil-private sector: new models for social fabric.** The abundance of local organisations with constituted rights and responsibilities and a capacity to form networks and collectives, is unprecedented in our society (Swidler, 2006). How best do development and politics celebrate and encourage these new, emerging forms of

governance? Organisational research on the systems and social impacts of burgeoning civil society across Africa, and CBOs in particular, would highlight some of the opportunities for new models of political and social engagement.

- **Most Significant Change.** The use of Most Significant Change approaches in evaluation (Dart, etc) has vast potential in the context of social development. A stream of research on its application in different settings, on different subjective matters, and with different adaptations of the process would be valuable. This would provide the alternative development sector with the impetus it needs to bring narrative, community-centred, locally-owned evaluation processes into mainstream practice.
- **ICT (Information Communication Technology) and culture change to support visual and verbal communication.** A key conclusion of this study has been that all other communication in low literacy settings, including evaluation, needs to be visual and verbal. Literacy is a noble goal, but it should not be a pre-condition for access to basic rights, organisational existence and self-determination. Culture, mechanisms, appropriate technology and systems whereby verbal and visual communication can become serious and respected options need to be developed. We need to see research, design and development, and then market the required ICT support in the industry. Options might include digital recording, verbally annotated photography, metaphor and teleconferencing for low income, low technology settings. Storage, relaying and sharing these media in time and data efficient ways would be critical. The benefits of this would extend beyond meaningful communication. Stronger communication would contribute to drawing in those at the margins of social and economic participation.
- **Grounded evaluation in all social and organisational settings.** Grounded data have been shown to be legitimate for CBO evaluation. Prediction and linear models have been shown to be ridiculous. It is my contention that linear prediction is also irrational in virtually all social and institutional contexts. National strategies, major programmes and most development, organisational or programmatic evaluation are unable to evaluate sensibly while they remain committed to indicators and prediction. This does not suggest that key social indicators, such as GDP, HIV prevalence, wealth distribution or unemployment are not important. These are part of describing our situation and are the statistics that help to point us towards underlying less tangible and measurable causes. Evaluating interventions on the basis of these tangible, measurable symptoms, however, even at the highest level,

cannot reflect the complexity of reality. Grounded evaluation is far more likely to provide sensible management and realignment information. The wisest indicator statement for most development programmes would be, “this plan makes sense, let’s wait and see”. We need to let go of our attachment to logical, linear frameworks throughout the development sector. Meta-evaluation research is needed into applying grounded evaluation in all settings.

6.6 Potential significance

The accusation of destruction by an industry that purports to build equity is a chilling one. The development aid industry has invested in its own complicatedness, at the expense of the genuine complexity of dynamic systems. Writing such as that of Dambisa Moyo (2009) confronts these complicated solutions as having been inept in supporting real change. Equivalent to aspiring to withholding an unpaid volunteer from greener pastures, the industry stands accused of aspiring to stable, established organisations rooted in social disaster, and destined to remain so.

Human social interactions are fraught with games, positions, perverse and self-defeating behaviours and negative feedback loops. Radically shifting these addictive patterns takes far more than methods. It requires that global systems, basic assumption and generation of society’s habits gradually change. Optimistically these are changing all the time. Systems and society are not static. Mini-revolutions are part of continuous social emergence. Less optimistically, this chaotic change seems to impact on society negatively as much as it does positively.

The role of development practitioners and of this study is to be advocates within the currents of change. We are responsible for leveraging the positive and raising awareness of the negative. Through many small interjections, creative collective consciousness may grow in a generally upward spiral towards a more enlightened, equitable society.

6.7 In closure

The simple act of demanding inappropriate requirements of community level development professionals as a condition for funding, reinforces the epitome of the development crisis. Development itself stands accused of deepening the divisions and widening the chasm between those with power and wealth, and those without.

A half a century into the modern development paradigm, aid in Africa has not been effective. Global and national divisions between the rich and the poor are wider and deeper than ever. How does the Millennium Development Goal of ‘eradicating poverty’

translate in a world system where the powerful cultivate wealth, but where wealth is partly defined by poverty, and people's very identity is carved into their position in this continuum. Human rights contravention is a reality for a vast proportion of global citizens. We live in complacency, paying optimistic attention to the little wins. We execute methods and follow rites in relationships, but have become caught in a stagnant net of under-achievement.

Developmental evaluation asks for some profound, perhaps unimaginable, shifts in worldview. Unimaginable because the 'system' is so pervasive that new paradigms are inevitably born from within it, based in the assumptions that define it. We are so close to the system, that we have difficulty seeing it well enough to confront it (Senge 2006, p. 160). We need to either find peace with a divided, unsustainable and unjust society; or a means of influencing a world system held in broad agreement by both developed and developing, that is in direct opposition to power equity. Far deeper shifts will be needed in our global belief systems before aid effectiveness and equitable distribution of power become a possibility, rather than an industry.

Like the oceans, 'the system' is a combination of elements, forces, currents and variables that operate in relation to each other. It has laws, energies and forces that are beyond the control of those caught in its flow. There is no control room at which it can be influenced. Global socio-economics has generated energy and momentum far beyond the management of its makers and members. We must then choose whether to be buffeted, eroded and drowned by the system, or to use its force for energy and movement. Do we sail the ocean, or do we drown in it? How would development and development evaluation practice use the power of the system?

We need fresh, less combative and less arrogant development ambitions around facilitating enabling environments, and confronting inequity and injustice. The role of knight has long become embarrassing and exhausting, but it remains by far the most relevant role for development practitioners. At every level the essence of development work compromises between meeting immediate needs as interim relief (saintliness), and confronting those politically and economically responsible for fulfilling constitutional rights (knightliness). Unless we are knights, all of us who benefit from the system (and development practitioners are not least among them), need to confront our own complicity in perpetuating inequity and injustice.

We need to see the NGO sector look up from its private sector leanings. We need to rekindle belief in a vibrant, influential civil society that holds governments, private

sectors and global systems to account. We need to see donor agencies align themselves proudly and unapologetically with activism, as well as government; and be blunt about their dual relationships to both their governments, and ours. I am no economist, but the knights of the development discourse need to be. In the global conversation, the causes of extremes of inequitable distribution need to be explained and confronted. For as long as development practitioners hand out the sop of the system which creates the inequity, they too remain its sheep.