

Development Projects – examples of social sciences' contributions to monitoring and evaluation

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In 2001 Danida agreed to extend its support to the education sector in Nepal and to include secondary education. The programme was developed in collaboration with the His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMG/N) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). A formative research programme was undertaken as a post-design study by the Faculty of Education at Tribhuvan University in collaboration with the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS). Amongst other objectives, the purpose of the study was to develop indicators that could be used in monitoring and evaluation in pursuit of two important objectives: a decentralized delivery of education to all schools (secondary and primary) that linked the Ministry of Education and Sport at the national level to each and every individual school, and secondly, the securing of local community ownership of the schools.

The Danish ASPS in Uganda has as with all Danish SPS, poverty reduction as its main priority. However targeting the poorer farmers in an agricultural sector programme is complicated not least for reasons that include farmers' differing capabilities for securing access to land and other assets, to input and product markets, to the rural banking system, and to extension and advisory services. In such development aid, the ability to identify the poor within a specific context and locality is a critical weak point not just for the design of a particular project but also for monitoring and evaluating the development outcomes that it leads to. Sociological and anthropological methodologies can make an important contribution to the task as work linked to the Danish ASPS in Uganda illustrates.

Introduction

Social sciences have played a significant role in evaluation of Danida projects and programmes over the years. Evaluations undertaken seek to deal with the normal (DAC) evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. In order to highlight these aspects in an evaluation, a number of different methods are usually used.

Some of the main methods are:

- Documentary studies (project documents, previous evaluations, reviews, etc)
- Analysis of project data (costs, achievements, etc)
- Stakeholder interviews (Danida staff, national and local government officials, project staff)
- Beneficiary studies (interviews, rapid surveys, focus group discussions, etc)

More recently, impact assessments or studies have had an important status in Danida's evaluation work. An impact study is usually designed to illuminate the most important aspects of the project's or programmes's impact. In a number of recent studies in which social scientists have been active from DIIS, the main focus of such studies has been on the lives and livelihoods of beneficiaries and their families. A typical study today could be in the agricultural sector where smaller farmers have been targeted and in which there is also a gender dimension. Two lines of investigation are often pursued in such a study: the economic impact (production, income) and the social impact (empowerment). A secondary objective might be the impact on institutional and policy changes.¹

Evaluations undertaken by DIIS for Danida have pointed to several recurrent problems. More often than not there is a lack of proper baseline survey data. This makes it difficult to assess the economic

¹ See the Farmer Empowerment framework presented in the first Paper presented at the workshop.

impact of a project. Projects might well undertake impact assessments during their implementation phases, but there tends to be a lack of uniform or consistent data generated. The paucity and poor quality of data not only makes the identification of outcomes difficult, it makes it very difficult to discuss the degree of causality between the activities undertaken and the outcomes that are found. This issue of attribution is a major problem.

If the evaluation of economic changes is difficult, the evaluation of empowerment is even more so. Empowerment is both embodied and relational and hence not amenable to direct measurement. Here the role and art of the social scientist is crucial. Intangible aspects such as self-respect, dignity, vulnerability, all matter. They need to be explored through needs that the targeted group identify themselves, by exploring how their collective relationships change and develop over time, and as to whether they develop a 'transformative awareness'. In other words, do they develop a sense of their own agency, that is their (collective) ability to change situations and outcomes.

The chain in a project or programme is usually seen in terms of input – output – outcome – impact. Evaluation can be of the last step, impact, but it can also be of an earlier or ongoing stage. A useful distinction for the social science is to separate between effect and impact. Effect is seen as something that is closely linked to the project's objectives and it happens during or immediately after implementation. Impact, by contrast, deals with long term or sustainable changes brought about by a project, which may include unintended as well as intended changes, which in turn may be positive or negative.

This returns me again to the problem of attribution. We can register the fact that changes take place such as an increase in income or in self-esteem; but to what extent are these due to the project? The project does not take place in a vacuum, in isolation, as there are many other processes at work not all of which are closely linked to the project. The interactions between a project, the actions of people and the context in which they find themselves are complex and difficult to analyse. Here lies the problem of attribution to which there is probably no easy solution. What does help is good research-based knowledge, comparative material as to what works and does not work elsewhere, and analytical approaches that enable policymakers to explore and consider the processes and actors linked to the intervention under investigation.

At DIIS we argue for the involvement of social scientists throughout the project chain. In the following examples of Danida development assistance, I will try to illustrate how this has been attempted.

Example 1: Secondary Education Support Programme (SESP)

In this more detailed case example it is necessary to present the some background information about the SESP programme and the context for its implementation. The following is based upon programme documentation and my own knowledge of the programme².

Background

The Secondary Education Support Programme (SESP) has been developed jointly by His Majesty's Government in Nepal (HMG), The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Danida. It is designed to build upon the existing Basic and Primary Education Programme (BPEP) that in 2001 entered into its second phase (BPEP II). SESP is based upon a number of earlier documents including policy documents prepared in 2001 and 2002 for the 10th Five Year Plan and Medium Term Expenditure

² I was commissioned by Danida to revise the original draft proposal for the programme, in 2001-2002.

Framework (MTEF), government legislation including the Education Act (7th Amendment) (2002) and Local Self-Government Act (1999).

Danida undertook a Feasibility Study (2001) and the ADB prepared a Secondary Education Development Plan (2001). The latter was not carried forward as the plan for the sector as HMG and Danida requested that a number of changes be made both in the approach of the overall programme and to several of the elements within it. The preparation of these analyses involved high levels of participation by stakeholders at all levels.

The SESP is designed as a 5 year programme of support, to be undertaken in the period 2003 - 2007. It is seen to be the first phase of support to secondary education with a long-term horizon of 15 years if the intended outcomes of the programme are to be fully realized and made sustainable. It is developed with the Ministry of Education and Sport (MOES) and the implementing agency is the Department of Education. In this it supports the principle of national ownership in the sector programme approach. It should be noted that Danida and ADB support education at the primary level through BPEP, and ADB at secondary level through a smaller project Secondary Education Development Project (SEDP). In addition, Danida is supporting the decentralization of service delivery, of which education is a key element in the HMG's Decentralisation Implementation Plan.

In developing the SESP it is recognised that it would not be possible for HMG to achieve sustainable expansion of quality secondary education on its own with the economic conditions it faced and faces in Nepal. Therefore the purpose of SESP is to provide funding and technical assistance to achieve essential improvements in the quality of teaching, the curriculum and learning environments, while steadily building capacity at the central and local levels in Nepal to take forward these improvements in the future and to fund from their own sources a higher level of recurrent and development expenditure. Danida and ADB via SESP seek to support the development of a strong and resilient 'community ownership' of schools within a coherent decentralized framework.

Two essential features of this community involvement that we should note here are:

- the active involvement of School Management Committees (SMCs) in the planning and management of the school and the monitoring of student achievement, and
- in the longer term, strong and sustainable mobilisation of community funds (through monetary or 'in-kind' contribution) particularly for development and non-salary expenditures, and regulated according to the ability to pay

At the same time the schools have to be part of a national educational system. The rise in the number of poorly resourced, badly constructed and poorly performing community schools has shown that community planning cannot take place in a vacuum. The aspirations of communities have to be reconciled with the overall national and district ability to fund schooling and to provide minimum quality standards. Achieving this involves integrated planning at district level and thereafter at the national level. This means establishing effective linkages of district and community school planning with national planning processes. This can ensure that:

- 'Adequate' resources are provided for education in general and secondary education in particular, consistent with the country's overall resource envelope developed in the MTEF
- Funding gaps for implementing minimum standards are consequently identified to allow for a constructive and informed dialogue between the Government, civil society and external

development partners, on both those minimum standards (e.g. student-teacher ratios) and on future levels of support

- The allocation of resources between sub-sectors and between different districts is on a transparent and equitable basis
- National norms (e.g. on fee levels for secondary schools) are set on a fair basis and consistent with policies for poverty reduction in Nepal
- There is proper provision and organisation of those services that are needed to be developed and applied on a national basis – namely a common system of teacher training, a common core curriculum, a nationally organised system of public examinations, and systems for the accounting and audit of all public funds.

The essence of the programme is captured by its vision:.

A Student in 2012

A student in 2012 should have a set of rights with respect to secondary education:

- A student who has completed primary education will have access to secondary education irrespective of race, religion, ethnicity, gender or locality.
- A student in a secondary school will be taught on the basis of a curriculum that is relevant for the student with respect to appropriate life skills and vocational needs for their personal development as well as one that fulfils community needs and national requirements in terms of content and assessment.
- A student in a secondary school will be taught by teachers trained and qualified to teach the curriculum; he or she will be taught the required number of days allotted in the school year, in an environment conducive to learning and by teachers provided with instructional materials of an adequate quality and quantity.

A school in 2012

A school in 2012, through its own efforts, in partnership with government will:

- Be responsible for managing its resources including its budget
- Be equipped to teach a curriculum designed for the student, society and economy, and national aspirations
- Be rich in information about itself including assessment data
- Be capable of self-reflection and responsive to identified needs
- Be accountable to the community for student, teacher and school performance
- Have access to information and communication technology
- Have an improved learning environment including its physical facilities

A District in 2012

A district in 2012 will have a functioning decentralized system of local government in which responsibilities and resources of line Ministries have been devolved to District Development Councils, supported by the district line ministry offices. With respect to education and secondary education in particular:

- A District Education Committee in 2012 will see representatives from the DDC work with the DEO to prepare a District Education Plan (DEP). This will be developed on the basis the SIPs within a framework prescribed by national policies and programmes. The DEP will be presented to the District Education Committee (DEC) and then forwarded to the DDC for approval by the District Development Council as part of the Annual District Plan. The planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of secondary education in the district will be undertaken within the framework of the DEP.
- The DEP will be implemented on the basis of resources allocated from the MOES and administered through the DoE within the framework of an Annual Strategic Implementation Plan (ASIP). Resources contributed at district and community levels including provisions by civil society organisations (CSOs) and the private sector will supplement these resources.

Adapted from SESP Core Document, Danida, 2002.

Context: Population and demography

According to the 2001 census, the population of Nepal has reached 23 million. Most of the population, about 87% of the adults, live in rural areas. Rural villages make up a large share of the population of the 58 municipalities. Nepal's population is young with children under 15 years of age constituting the dominant group (about 43%). The dependency ratio is 0.83, which indicates that 100 people of working age support 83 people who are outside that age group. This has adverse implications for future human resource development and poverty reduction. Among the three factors determining the size and composition of the population, migration is the most important in Nepal. Internal migration takes place from the mountains and hills to the Terai and between rural areas. International migration is also becoming important as many young Nepalis go to India for seasonal and temporary work and many temporary agriculture labourers come from India. A recent feature of temporary migration is the increased tendency to go to third countries (East Asia, South Asia and the Middle East) for low skilled jobs.

With a growth rate of 2.37% per annum Nepal has the second fastest population growth rate in South Asia after Pakistan. About 24% of the population belongs to the official school going age group (6-15 years old).

Altitudinal and climatic variation within Nepal leads to a natural classification of three broad ecological zones: mountain, hill and Terai. The Terai in the south is a fertile plain, covering 23% of the landmass of the country. The mountains with their harsh environmental conditions have a sparse population, which lives at an altitude above 4,877 metres. Covering 42% of the landmass, the hills, set between the Terai and mountains are a complex zone of intermingling hills, spurs, valleys and river basins. Traditionally the destination of mountain and hill migrants is the Terai, which now has 48% of the population. This is due to the fertility of the land, better infrastructure and communication with the south. The expanding population has put great pressure on social services including education.

The north-south ecological regions span the 5 East-West Development Regions³. The Kathmandu Valley, located in the Central Hill Region often features as a separate regional unit to the other 15 due to its comparatively more urbanised and developed characteristics. Administratively, Nepal is divided into 75 districts, 3 of which are in the Kathmandu Valley. Each district is divided into a number of village development committees and municipalities. Currently (March 2002) there are 3,992 village development committees and 58 municipalities, including 1 metropolitan and four sub-metropolitan cities.

42% of the Kingdom's population is located within 22 of its districts and 13% of the population is characterised as remote. Remote is defined as an area with difficult terrain, difficult accessibility and poor communication facilities (including roads and tele-communications). The low population density results in most people having poor access to government service, including schools. There are at least 35 ethnic and 36 caste groups, speaking 36 different languages and a number of dialects as their mother tongue. Nepali language is prominent both as the lingua franca of the country and the state language.

³ Eastern Region, Central Region, Western Region, Mid-Western Region, Far-Western Region.

The state of education and secondary education in Nepal

The current system of secondary education consists of lower secondary, secondary and higher secondary sub-sectors, covering grades 6-8, 9-10 and 11-12 respectively. This structure dates from 1993. The lower and secondary levels of education have been identified as the main area of concern for the SESP. Considerable progress in secondary school education has been made in the past two decades. Access to secondary education increased dramatically with a 324% increase in the lower secondary grades (grades 6-8), and a 120% increase at the secondary level (grades 9-10). Even so, increasing access to, and improving the quality of education remains a formidable challenge. Although the gross enrolment ratio is 128% at primary level, the net enrolment ratio is only 72%. The gross enrolment ratio at the lower secondary level is 57%, and the net enrolment ratio for lower secondary and secondary school is 31% and 21%, respectively. Despite progress over the years, Nepal has still not achieved 50 % literacy for its population.⁴

Analyses of the performance of the education system and identification of problems reflect an education system in crisis. Challenges identified in the reports include low levels of literacy and educational attainment, unequal participation in schooling across income groups and social groups, high repetition and dropout rates throughout the system, and a generally low level of quality of education that does not serve the labour market well.

More specific problems include:

- A teaching force that is poorly managed, frequently politicised, inadequately trained or not trained at all, often teaching subjects for which they are not qualified, all leading to poor quality education.
- A curriculum that is overloaded and does not reflect the diverse needs of the students.
- Community schools that are seen as government 'owned' rather than an important resource of the community and a general lack of popular support for public education. Local support for government-aided schools is not sufficient to ensure financial sustainability and quality teaching.
- The migration of the children of wealthier families and families seeking a 'good' education for their children to private schools leaving the children of marginalized and disadvantaged families together with a higher proportion of girl children to attend government-aided schools. This contributes to sustaining a two-class education system and reproducing inequities both within local communities and Nepal as a whole.
- An education system that is seriously short of professional and leadership qualifications and is further marked by frequent transfers of staff at all levels and frequent changes in education rules and regulations. Amongst other things this has led to the weak implementation of policies that has created confusion and gaps in the system.
- An availability of public resources that is far too limited to support implementation of even the most necessary changes in education.
- Legislation in the form of the Education Act (7th Amendment) that is not coherent with legislation in other sectors, most notably with the Local Self Government Act, 1999.
- An emerging system of decentralised government based upon devolution of responsibilities and resources, but without coordination with the decentralised institutions of the MOES and DoE with respect to education delivery, and without any programme for developing the necessary capacities for implementing the policy of decentralised management of education amongst the requisite organisations and their personnel.

⁴ Unless stated the source of statistical data is for the year 1999 (MOES 2001).

Significantly it has been found that communities have little respect for the schools, the teachers, the quality of schooling, and the relevance of the curriculum for life opportunities. There is also a feeling that too many of the poor and disadvantaged were not getting the opportunity to go to school. There is despair about the current level of SLC passes (31% in 2001). Given the lack of organizational and management readiness for returning the schools to the community within a decentralized management framework, it is not surprising that communities either do not know about the proposals or do not possess any great expectations for improvement.

The role of social sciences in programme formulation

The first plan for secondary education was primarily concerned with delivering a service through a top-down approach that relied almost solely on the administration (MOES and Department of Education). Problems identified with this included:

- A previous history of organizational poor performance
- A failure to understand the competing perspectives on schooling from the government on the one side and from the communities on the other
- A lack of understanding of the issues involved in local institutions concerning resource mobilization, local ownership, relevance.
- A lack of understanding of cultural and social dynamics in institutional practices in local communities
- A lack of understanding of the nature and institutional practices that guide local politics (below the district)
- A failure to link up with and to utilize other ‘stakeholders’ in the education sector and other sectors (civil society/NGOs,/private sector/other ministries/donors, etc)
- And much more.

Two changes illustrate the role that social sciences had on the formulation

- a) The restructuring of the vision. The original vision placed the perspective from the school *only*. The absence of the student and his or her household from the vision reflected the one-sided approach in the original programme formulation.
- b) The instruments for providing education failed to consider issues of *ownership* and *participation* and *sustainability*. The objectives were revised to meet these needs. In the box below, the main change was to focus upon the institutional means of providing education. To this end the third pillar of activities ‘institutional capacity’ was introduced in addition to a reworking of many other elements of the programme.

Secondary Education Policy Objectives

Quality and Relevance

- Development of a curriculum that meets national requirements and is adaptable to regional and local differences.
- Employment and effective deployment of qualified teachers to teach the curriculum in all secondary schools.
- Provision of instructional materials of sufficient quality and quantity to meet the needs of the secondary curriculum in each secondary school.
- A school management that can secure the quality of secondary education in the school.

Access/Equity

- Provision of a secondary education accessible to all who complete primary education.
- Provision of a secondary education that reflects the needs of all sections of society including those marginalized on the basis of race, religion, caste, ethnicity, locality or physical disadvantage.
- Provision of secondary education that fulfils the particular needs of the girl child.

Institutional Capacity

- Development of a more participatory approach to all levels of institutional management in secondary education.
- Development of a system of decentralized planning and management to link the needs of the school to national policy and the expertise and capabilities of national organizations to the needs of the school.
- Maintenance of principles and practices of good governance in all aspects of secondary education management and organization.
- Maintenance of a resource base funded by both central district and local sources, sufficient to finance secondary education of the appropriate level and quality.

The social sciences in monitoring

The complexity and scale of the SESP meant that there was a clear need to “design formative research based methodologies that can subsequently follow the implementation of the SESP in the 10 programme districts”. In collaboration with the Faculty of Education at Tribhuvan University, social scientists from DIIS developed a Formative Research Programme with the following objectives:

- To examine the extent to which the SESP objectives of improved quality of secondary schools, access and participation of socially disadvantaged groups, and enhanced institutional capacity at district level and community ownership are fulfilled
- To create a research-generated knowledge that will:
 - Serve as baseline data for an impact analysis of the SESP
 - Aid the monitoring and assessment of the activities of the SESP
 - Enhance the planning and implementation capacity of the SESP
 - Inform national policymaking on secondary education through theoretically-grounded, empirical cases

The research studies for the FRP focused on the first two Programme Intensive Districts of the SESP in order to support the programme and its implementation directly. In addition, FRP had the

objective of strengthening the research capacity of the Faculty of Education (FOE), Tribhuvan University.

The Formative Research Programme was based upon four research studies: (i) Learning Environment; (ii) Teacher Development; (iii) Curriculum and Assessment; (iv) Institutional Management and Capacity Building.

In each study, a range of participatory research methodologies were used. These included local institutional and stakeholder mapping, focus group discussions, sample surveys and key informant interviews. Some of these techniques were used jointly by the researchers responsible for the different studies, some were not.

Briefly, the outcomes of the FRP were:

- Research reports from each of the four research studies with overall research findings for both districts as well as specific information on the four schools studied and policy and programme implementation recommendations
- A set of data materials from the household survey conducted as part of the FRP (cleaned data files, a code book, a questionnaire form and a field guideline). The data from the household survey provides baseline data for subsequent monitoring and assessment of activities and outcomes under the SESP

In addition there are:

- A set of research based methodologies that cover key elements of SESP and the processes shaping the provision and outcomes of secondary education at different administrative levels
- A set of qualitative and quantitative indicators for measuring the presence (or absence) of change in both processes and outcomes during the period of SESP implementation
- Basic monitoring indicators for use by SMCs

What has the formative research programme achieved in more general terms?

- a) A basis for monitoring that meets both planning needs upwards to the national Annual Plan for the programme and the subsequent Annual Strategic Implementation Plan (ASIP)
- b) A basis for monitoring that the local community/SMC can use to assess its own progress with respect to the school, strengthening a sense of ownership.
- c) Indicators that reflect the needs and interests of the local population but that also trigger responses from the department of education or the local council
- d) A local research capacity in Nepal.

Example 2: Poverty and Gender Monitoring in the Agricultural Sector Programme, Uganda (& Mellempfolkeligt Sammenvirke - Danish Association for International Cooperation)

Who is really targeted in a programme directed at small and marginal farmers or at different groups of the poor? It has become clear from examining a number of development programmes that the ability to target the poor or those groups that are marginalized and socially excluded has not been high. There are many reasons for this, not all of which can be seen to be the fault of those responsible for formulating a programme or for its implementation.

The government of Uganda is committed to eradicate mass poverty by 2007. Danida is a key partner through several sector programmes including the Agricultural Sector Program Support (ASPS) that commenced in 1998. In 2000 Danida commissioned the Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusinesses, Makerere University, and DIIS, to form a task group to monitor the gender and poverty impact of the ASPS.

The overall approach of the ASPS is to support farmers in specializing in their production, moving towards fewer crops produced for markets (commercial farming) rather than many crops, many of which are for consumption (subsistence farming). All agree that increased production is the way forward towards sustained food security, increased incomes and development for Uganda. The ASPS is to support this process with a variety of activities that share the overriding goal of poverty reduction as well as promoting equality between men and women. The debate has been as to how this goal can be achieved.

For example:

- Do improved advisory services for farmers benefit poor people and the better-off alike?
- What is the best way to introduce new technology and farming methods so that they also benefit poor farmers?
- How best can programmes be designed so that to reach women who do most of the work on the farms?

In order to address such questions, it is essential to obtain the perceptions of the people that the components of ASPS are targeting. To this end several hundred persons in five different districts were visited and asked to describe in their own words what it means to be poor and better-off, both as a household and as a woman.

These accounts of the conditions, challenges and constraints people face in everyday life were grouped according to themes: food security, access to land and other sources of income, health, education and men's contribution – or lack of contribution – to the well-being of the household, women's position, and involvement with externally supported interventions..

Following this, interview teams visited several thousand households and asked questions related to these themes. Based upon the answers collected, each household ended up with two scores: one score reflecting its poverty level and the other the level of gender equality between husband and wife within the household. In this way the original qualitative data have been turned into quantitative measures reflecting the situation across a significant section of the population in the five districts.

What did the input from social sciences provide?

The study provided important baseline data, describing the situation at the beginning of the ASPS. These data are important as they provide a basis for answering questions such as:

- What has changed in the different dimensions of poverty?
- How has the character of poverty changed?
- Has poverty been reduced and to what extent?
- How have any changes been seen in terms of the activities of the ASPS components?
- Has gender equality increased or decreased?
- What role have the ASPS activities played?
- Are the changes similar across the five districts?

One very interesting finding was that the capacity of the ASPS activities to target the poor was called into question. A significant proportion of the households reached under several of the components were not from the poor section of the population and in a considerable number of cases they were amongst the wealthy. It is not the case that the poor should be the sole beneficiaries of different component's activities under ASPS; with several components they are not intended to be the principal target group. However it was clear that those responsible for ASPS were quite surprised at the finding. This in itself demonstrates the importance of being able to know what proportion of the poor is being reached and in what ways (intended and unintended).

With Mellempfolkeligt Sammenvirke, the task of social scientists has been a little different. This Danish NGO receives approximately 90% of its funding from the Danish budget for development assistance. It works in partnership with local organizations in 8 country and one regional programme covering 3 continents. It does not undertake projects as such, but through its MS in the South strategy (MSiS strategy) it seeks to build the capacities of the partner organizations to undertake projects and to access additional project funds. Voluntary development workers sent by MS are a key instrument in this partnership strategy.

The capacity to facilitate work towards poverty reduction requires that MS and its partners have a common understanding of poverty, can agree on how to approach poverty reduction and have the tools necessary for the activities undertaken. The partner organisations' capacities for identifying the poor and for monitoring the effect and impact of a diverse range of activities are a very important part of this. It should also be noted that MS partner organizations are also diverse in terms of size and the type of poverty focus they undertake: from local project to national advocacy; from the poorest of the poor to unequal trading relations.

The same techniques outlined above in the case of the ASPS in Uganda have been modified and revised to undertake capacity building for poverty reduction in the MSiS programme. Once again it is the importance of gathering research data with social science methodologies to inform the ongoing implementation of a programme and the longer term approach for an aid programme strategy.

The above three case examples will be discussed in further detail at the workshop.

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1.11.2004*