

How do development projects measure outcomes ... and what can conservation learn?

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Rationale/background

- Collaborative study: FFI, BirdLife, Dept. of Geog.
- Objectives:
 - To explore the ways in which development sector NGOs assess the impacts of their interventions on livelihoods
 - To discuss whether experiences can be applied to assessing livelihood impacts in the conservation sector

Methods

- Desk review of literature (including published sources, unpublished documents and internal organisational reports)
- Review of online information (websites, e-documents etc)
- Discussions/interviews with key informants, in person or by phone (48 people consulted):
 - mainly development practitioners, in headquarters of development organisations, country offices, regional offices, project offices, as well as independent consultants

Limitations

- Access issues:
 - To M&E experts within organisations. Getting past gatekeepers is difficult
 - To classified internal documents which reflect on field experiences with M&E
 - To field practitioners actually implementing M&E frameworks, given time and scope of this study
- Difficulties with making comparisons across organisations

The organisations

	Area of focus	M&E framework
A	Fighting poverty: education; HIV/AIDS, emergencies, women's rights	No conceptual f/work; value-based f/work
B	Poverty: agri., education, emergencies, health, HIV/AIDS, water & sanitation	Changes in household livelihoods security
C	Poverty: improving access to natural resources & technology, agriculture	No M&E f/work. Projects use practical guidelines for M&E
D	Poverty: emergency work, research & lobbying, right-based campaigning	Asks questions about changed livelihoods
E	Fighting for children – poverty, disease, injustice & violence, HIV/AIDS, health, education	Changes in the rights of intended beneficiaries
F	Poverty & disease – water, sanitation, hygiene; policy campaigning	M&E framework tests various 'hypotheses'

Methods used

**'Science'-based Assessments
(Highly structured, quantitative)**

**Social science-based Assessments
(Experimental, usually qualitative)**

Control groups	Triangulation	Struc. surveys	Base-lines	Dir. M'smnts	Indicators	Case studies	Change Stories	Focus groups	Flow diag.	Semi-struc. surveys
						✓	✓	✓		
		✓	✓	✓	✓					
	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		✓
✓	✓		✓		✓	✓			✓	

Reported challenges

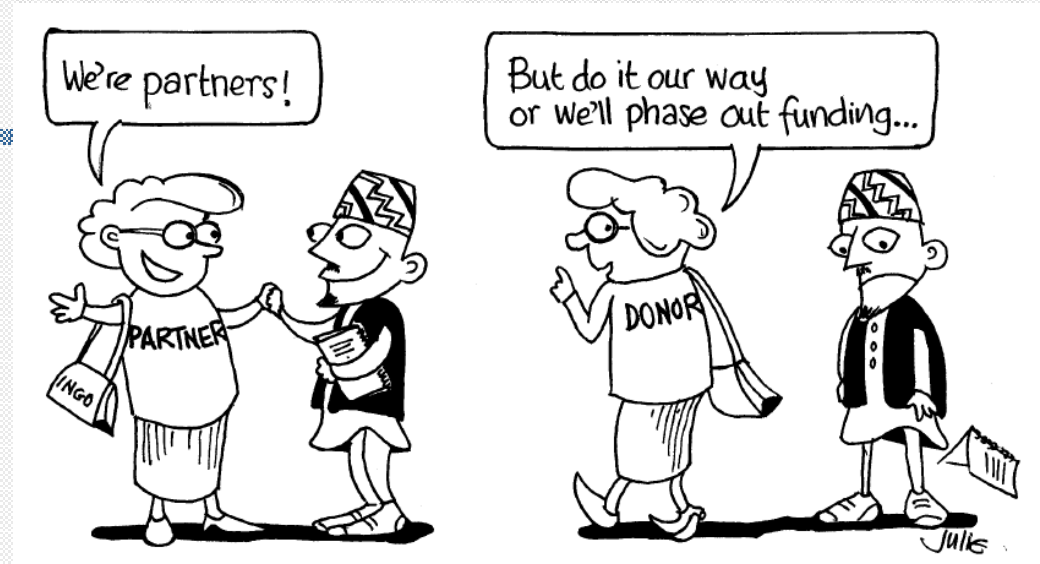
Most Common Challenges to Assess Impact

Too quantitative	Power issues	Purpose	Rights	Feed-back	No Incentives	Weak F'work	Weak Org support
		✓					✓
✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
✓	✓				✓		✓
✓			✓		✓	✓	
	✓	✓			✓		
	✓		✓				

Of all projects studied, the two most common problems were

- 1). Confusion about the purpose of M&E 2). Overdependence on quantitative methods, including indicators to assess impact

Key issues



- Accountability and engaging stakeholders
- Partnerships and building trust
- Encouraging reflection and learning
- Enhancing internalisation
- Strengthening organisational systems

What can conservation learn?

- Ask some basic questions
 - What are we trying to do here?
 - Why are we evaluating impact?
- Process matters more than choice of methodologies & frameworks
 - Majority of M&E problems can be traced back to organisational culture rather than evaluation methods
 - Need to engender a culture of reflection, learning and constructive criticism
 - Impact evaluation can significantly affect relationships with key stakeholders