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Democratization

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713634863>

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To cite this Article: Crawford, Gordon , 'Promoting Democracy from Without - Learning from Within (Part I)', *Democratization*, 10:1, 77 - 98

To link to this article: DOI: 10.1080/714000115

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/714000115>

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Promoting Democracy From Without – Learning From Within (Part I)

GORDON CRAWFORD

Over a decade after its introduction, evaluation of ‘democracy assistance’ has become crucial, yet faced with considerable methodological difficulties. Such challenges are addressed from two separate angles in this two-part article. Part I examines how international development agencies have tackled the methodological problems, focusing on a recent spate of evaluation studies. It is concluded that the application of conventional evaluation methodology in this field, notably the logical framework approach, suffers from a number of deficiencies and limitations, while attempts at country impact evaluation have not adequately addressed the inherent difficulties. Additionally, it is felt that conventional evaluation reproduces a negative feature of democracy assistance itself – it is externally led and controlled, with limited input from local actors. To address such shortcomings, Part II (in the following issue) offers an alternative methodology based on a participatory approach in which domestic actors play a determining role.

Introduction

The 1990s saw the emergence of the promotion of democracy and good governance as a major objective and field of activity within the foreign and aid policies of western governments and international institutions.¹ Significant aid funds are now allocated to this area, yet what has been the effect of such external assistance on democratization? After a decade of such activities, the question of *evaluation* has become a crucial one. Has democracy and governance (DG) assistance had a significant impact in individual countries? What has worked, what has not, and why? It was noted previously, however, that ‘donors lack a systematic approach to evaluation [of democracy assistance] and there is no generally accepted methodology or set of indicators’.² The political development field is generally more problematic to assess than many social and economic development activities, with two main difficulties identified: first, the specification of criteria and indicators for judging success; and, secondly, the establishment of causal linkages between democracy and governance assistance and national democratic changes.³

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Democratization, Vol.10, No.1, Spring 2003, pp.77–98
PUBLISHED BY FRANK CASS, LONDON

This two-part article addresses the issue of evaluating democracy and governance assistance from two angles. Part I examines how international development agencies have themselves tackled the methodological challenges, focusing on a recent spate of evaluation studies. It is concluded that the application of conventional evaluation methodology to this field, notably the logical framework approach, suffers from a number of deficiencies and limitations, while attempts at country impact evaluation have not adequately addressed the inherent challenges. Additionally, it is felt that conventional evaluation reproduces negative characteristics of DG assistance itself, that is, it is externally led and controlled, with limited input from local actors. To address such problems, Part II offers an alternative methodology, based on a participatory approach. Although untried, it is argued that the methodology (potentially) entails improvements in evaluating DG assistance, as well as shifting control over the process of evaluation to domestic actors. In this way, not only is the process of evaluation itself democratized, but also greater domestic authorship of external democracy assistance activities can be asserted. Thus, this two-part article is essentially a methodological study, but one with a political twist, arguing that a participatory evaluation of democracy promotion efforts can contribute to the process of democratization itself.

Part I reviews a number of recent evaluation studies undertaken by bilateral and multilateral development agencies. It divides these into two main types, those based on 'logical framework analysis' and those oriented to assessing the impact of DG assistance at national level. These two evaluation types differ in their scope, narrow and broad. Logframe-related studies assess the performance of democracy projects and programmes against their own specific objectives, whereas country impact studies attempt to evaluate the contribution of DG programmes to broader processes of national democratic change. Thus, Part I is organized in two main sections. First, the application of the logical framework approach, along with the related 'results-based approach', is examined, with deficiencies critiqued. It is asserted that the methodology generated by a logical framework approach produces a narrow, project-based, mainly quantitative analysis, insufficiently grounded in the complexities and nuances of the political context in which such assistance take place. Second, attempts at undertaking country impact studies are examined, with shortcomings highlighted. It is argued that studies thus far have not satisfactorily resolved the inherent methodological challenges, notably the problem of 'attribution', that is, the difficulty of separating out the effects of donor activities from those of numerous other factors that influence processes of political change.

Logframe-related Evaluation: The 'False Dream of Science'?⁴

The logical framework approach (LFA), and closely related 'results-based' approach, are the most common methodologies for the evaluation of development aid projects, and have been applied to the DG sector by a number of donor agencies. The continued appeal of the LFA compels a serious examination. A brief, general introduction to LFA is provided here, followed by an assessment of its implementation in the DG field by four official development agencies: the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA) and the European Commission. A final section offers an overall critique of LFA, highlighting its shortcomings and limitations as a means of evaluating DG assistance.

LFA entails the application of the 'experimental approach' to evaluation, itself stemming from positivist social science, with evaluation methodology based on a theory of causality.⁵ The logframe approach rests on the tracing of causal connections between project inputs (or activities), outputs and objectives, with the latter divided into immediate objectives (or project purpose) and wider objectives (or programme goal). A logical framework matrix is initially prepared at the design stage of project cycle management, inclusive of the above dimensions, plus performance indicators and their means of verification, along with a statement of the risks and assumptions involved.⁶ This then provides a means of monitoring and evaluating progress towards achievement of stated objectives, one that is essentially quantitative in nature, although the use of qualitative indicators is allowable. LFA provides a seemingly rigorous evaluation methodology, though limited to tracing the realization of declared objectives. It is generally acknowledged, however, including amongst supporters of LFA, that it is best suited to evaluating lower-level project objectives and 'less well adapted to tracking performance of programmes and policies at a higher level'.⁷

Within the sphere of development aid, USAID and CIDA originally introduced the logical framework approach in North America in the early 1970s as a means of project management, inclusive of evaluation. Subsequently, it has been widely adopted by many European agencies, notably by GTZ (the German technical assistance agency),⁸ by the UK's development agency (now the Department for International Development) in 1985, more recently by the European Commission and SIDA, and, additionally, by the World Bank.⁹ Thus, although the LFA has come under increasing challenge in the 1990s from a participatory approach,¹⁰ its popularity amongst international development agencies is evident. But is it

a suitable methodology for evaluating DG assistance? Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA), part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, note that LFA has been recommended for use in the human rights and democracy field by the influential Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (though no reference supplied), yet DANIDA's own view is that logical framework analysis and political analysis 'are not particularly compatible'.¹¹ These issues are explored below by examining the attempts by donor agencies to apply conventional aid evaluation methodology to the DG sector.

CIDA and USAID: 'Results-based' Approaches

In the mid-90s, CIDA and USAID both introduced a modified, logframe-related approach to monitoring and evaluation on an agency-wide basis, known as 'results-based management' (RBM) and 'managing for results' (MFR) respectively.

For CIDA, a 'result' is defined as 'a describable or measurable change ... that is derived from a cause and effect relationship', in other words, attributable to resource inputs.¹² RBM entails a typical logframe approach with the construction of a 'performance framework' (PF) and 'performance measurement framework' (PMF). The PF provides the anticipated cause and effect relationships from the level of activities (inputs) upwards to strategic goals, including assumptions and risk assessments, while the PMF provides a systematic plan for measurement and verification through (mainly quantitative) performance indicators and data collection requirements.¹³

Following the introduction of its 'managing for results' system, each USAID country programme is required to produce a regular strategic plan, organized as a hierarchical 'results framework' of different levels of objectives: 'strategic objectives' (SOs), 'intermediate results' (IRs), and 'sub-intermediate results' (sub-IRs).¹⁴ The three levels of objectives are linked in causal hypotheses, that is, each is perceived as an essential step leading to the next level. Within the DG sector, a strategic objective could simply reflect the agency goal ('sustainable democracy built'), or one of the four agency objectives (for example, rule of law strengthened), while an 'intermediate result' is more specific (for instance, effective justice sector institutions). Performance indicators 'answer the question of how much (or whether) progress is being made towards a certain objective', with appropriate indicators requiring the ready availability of data sources.¹⁵

Both systems entail an annual reporting of performance and results achieved for all projects and programmes, short-term in orientation, in contrast to intermittent, in-depth, *ex post* evaluation of selected projects and

programmes. This orientation is related more to the accountability function of evaluation, and especially to business management practices in the 1990s, than the evaluation goal of 'lessons learnt'.¹⁶ Based on the MFR framework, USAID now produces an annual *Agency Performance Plan* and *Agency Performance Report*, providing targets and reviewing results respectively.

Performance indicators are clearly crucial to logframe-related approaches, and an early problem with their application to the DG sector was the lack of suitable indicators. Both CIDA¹⁷ and USAID¹⁸ have sought to overcome this shortcoming. Kapoor's paper (for CIDA) is broad in scope, covering different type of indicators (quantitative, qualitative and participatory) and provides an illustrative list of possible indicators for different DG sub-sectors. Of all donors, USAID has devoted most attention and resources to this area with the development of its very substantial and comprehensive *Handbook of Democracy and Governance Program Indicators*, published in 1998. In over 260 pages of tables and text, multiple 'candidate indicators' have been developed for the levels of 'intermediate results' and 'sub-intermediate results' under each of the four Agency DG objectives, inclusive of data collection methods.¹⁹ A 'preference' for quantitative indicators is expressed, valued for their 'objectivity', and, although qualitative indicators are also 'acceptable', the *Handbook* in fact contains only a few such suggestions.²⁰ No sooner was the *Handbook* published, however, than a shift away from a quantitative approach to measuring democratization became apparent, discussed below.²¹

In fact there has been some questioning of the appropriateness of a 'results-based' approach to DG assistance within the circles of both North American agencies. The report of an 'Evaluating Governance Programs' workshop, hosted by the International Development Research Center in Ottawa and attended by CIDA personnel, reflects a range of views, but includes those critical of the RBM-type approach.²² One point of apparent consensus was that 'the notion of causality in governance programming was rejected; there are too many variables at play. Evaluation of governance work is not scientific *per se*'.²³ Yet disagreement was also evident in general discussions of RBM and LFA. On the one hand, some criticism was expressed: 'traditional evaluation approaches which demand the application of the same tool and logic model to all initiatives were rejected as irrelevant and possibly destructive'.²⁴ Further, it was noted that some contemporary evaluation tools, 'such as Logical Framework Analysis – LFA, Results Based Management – RBM, and Indicators-based studies', were developed for 'blueprint-type projects' and 'and have little fit with complex and iterative, governance program agendas'.²⁵ On the other hand, other comments suggested that the tools were less the problem than their

application, with merely their modification and customization required to meet diverse settings.²⁶

USAID's MFR system has been vigorously critiqued by Thomas Carothers, a noted commentator on US democracy assistance. His criticisms of MFR are essentially two-fold, its quantitative basis and its distorting effects, and his forceful language is worth quoting in full:

The effort to assess the impact of democracy programs by using highly reductionist indicators is a deeply flawed undertaking that is consuming vast resources, producing little useful insight or knowledge, and introducing serious distortions into the designing and implementing of such aid.²⁷

The 'core problem', in his view, is that 'democratization in any country cannot be broken down neatly and precisely into a set of quantitative bits'.²⁸ In other words, there are difficulties both with the division of whole, complex processes into a series of fragments and with trying to quantify them. Using such 'informational bits as criteria of success without grounding them in sophisticated, deep-reaching analyses of the political context produces superficial and dangerously misleading pictures'.²⁹ Carothers cites the example of Cambodia in 1997 as evidence, where USAID reported that 'progress against indicators exceeded expectations' with regard to its democracy programme, 'almost surreally' oblivious to the recent coup that had derailed the democratic transition.³⁰ The problem with quantification, is that 'in most cases, numbers tell very little, and what they do tell is unclear. Reducing large elements of democracy ... down to two or three extremely narrow quantitative indicators does irremediable violence to those concepts'.³¹

It is the 'false dream of science...', the belief that all those messy particularities of people and politics can be reduced to charts and statistics'.³² As an illustrative example of the shortcomings of quantitative indicators, their use to measure the success of legislative strengthening is given. Two such indicators are the *number* of public hearings held or the *number* of bills initiated by the legislature as distinct from the executive branch. In Carothers' view, such increases may be for a variety of reasons, some with little to do with democratization, yet will be reported (falsely) as a favourable result.³³ Additionally, the MFR system is criticized for its distorting effect on the design of new programmes. Projects are designed 'that will produce quantifiable results' and 'the universe of programme design shrinks to match the indicators'.³⁴ In effect, 'the evaluation tail begins to wag the program dog'.³⁵

Two recent initiatives by USAID would suggest that Carothers's powerful critique has had some impact. One recognizes the shortcomings of

quantitative analysis in this sector, and seeks to improve the MFR system through the introduction of qualitative indicators as a complementary means by which to measure progress in achieving strategic objectives and intermediate results.³⁶ Echoing Carothers' criticisms, it was stated that 'measuring democracy is not a science. We acknowledge that attempting to gauge democratization quantitatively *fails* to provide the information we need to measure success'.³⁷ The second initiative entails a different evaluation approach entirely, the undertaking of country case studies to evaluate the impact of DG assistance on political change, discussed below.

Although such initiatives by USAID and some questioning of conventional evaluation methods within the Canadian context are both welcome, it is likely that the agency-wide annual reporting of results in this manner will continue in the foreseeable future, given the emphasis on 'targets' and 'performance measurement' in the cult(ure) of business management that currently pervades both private and public institutions. Supplementing quantitative indicators with qualitative ones to improve the measurement of results would seem less pertinent than the need to undertake a more genuine evaluation of past programmes, based on qualitative methods, in order to assess their impact, to learn lessons and to revise programmes accordingly.

*SIDA: The Evaluability of Democracy and Human Rights Projects –
A Logframe-Related Assessment*

SIDA introduced the logical framework approach as a standard part of its project cycle management in 1996. The evaluability of its democracy and human rights assistance by means of logframe methodology was given specific consideration in a detailed study conducted for SIDA jointly by a private consultancy firm, ITAD Ltd, and the Overseas Development Institute, London.³⁸ The title is significant in two respects. First, this is not an evaluation as such; instead the study investigates the *feasibility* of evaluation in this field. Second, in doing so, it limits itself to an exploration of logframe-related evaluation. Findings were negative overall, with only two out of 28 projects assessed as meeting the evaluability criteria and thus suitable for logframe-based evaluation. Conclusions drawn, however, are *not* that the logframe approach is inadequate or flawed and that alternative methods should be sought, but that low evaluability can be remedied through improved project design in logical framework terms. This is disappointing, with a more open-ended discussion of the challenging nature of the 'evaluability' of DG programmes not attempted. Two assumptions appear to underpin this study. One is that a wider impact evaluation is not feasible, given that 'most D/HR [democracy/human rights] interventions are small-scale relative to the complexity of the problems addressed' and that it

is 'over-optimistic to count on significant progress towards wider objectives from donor financed D/HR activities'.³⁹ Therefore, 'the evaluation of outcomes are generally more feasible than the evaluation of impact'.⁴⁰

While there is good sense in such statements, and the difficulties identified are real ones, is it valid to abandon any attempt at wider impact evaluation, or should ways of resolving such problems be sought? The second assumption is of the superiority of logical framework analysis, hence an apparent reluctance to examine other possible approaches to evaluation in this area. It is noted that the terms of reference did not imply such assumptions, however, specifying that the study 'analyse and possibly also propose alternative impact evaluation approaches'.⁴¹ This was not achieved in anything other than a perfunctory manner.

The negative findings are perhaps not surprising when it is recalled that SIDA had only introduced a logframe approach relatively recently and thus many projects were not based on a logframe. The absence of pre-existing logframes meant that an assessment of evaluability by a method dependent on them produced rather predictable results. The disinclination to investigate alternative evaluation approaches meant that the response to problems of low evaluability was posed solely in technical terms of improving logical framework matrices. Yet the reaction by SIDA to the principal finding of the evaluability study has been to abandon the planned second phase of actual impact evaluation of democracy and human rights projects, with methodological issues apparently left at an impasse.

European Commission: Methodological Ambiguity

The logframe approach has been adopted in two recent evaluations of European Commission democracy and human rights programmes, that of the Mediterranean Democracy Programme (MDP),⁴² and of 'positive actions in the field of human rights and democracy' (1995–99) in the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries.⁴³ Both studies are basically aggregates of project evaluations, with logframes used to assess the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of projects. Interestingly, although the terms of reference require the application of LFA in both instances, the evaluators differ in their response. The ACP study enthusiastically adopted the logical framework 'as the cornerstone of its methodology', describing it as 'the most widely accepted planning tool' and a 'useful quality assessment tool'.⁴⁴ In contrast, the MDP study expressed reservations as to the appropriateness of the logframe approach, emphasizing that political programmes have 'many 'soft' components with regard to project results, objectives and impact ... very difficult to measure in terms of the logical framework'.⁴⁵ Intriguingly, and notwithstanding the terms of reference, the MDP study cites support for this viewpoint from the

Commission itself, quoting the statement that 'human rights projects are quite different from infrastructure construction programmes, and the evaluation and selection criteria should therefore be based on a different approach'.⁴⁶ It would seem that little progress has been made in formulating that alternative approach.

Findings of both studies are mostly positive at the project level, though the ACP study is more critical. For example, it notes that impact is difficult to ascertain due to the attributional problems associated with single projects triggering a particular change. However, as with the SIDA evaluability study, this is not interpreted as a methodological problem or challenge, but merely that there are technical weaknesses in the logical framework, with the need for better definition of specific objectives at the project design stage.

Critique: A Technical Solution to a Political Problem

Logical framework analysis is an approach that has generated considerable controversy, focusing on its notions of causality and its reliance on quantitative data. Partly stemming from the general critique of positivist approaches to evaluation,⁴⁷ LFA within aid evaluation has come under increasing pressure from alternative approaches that emphasize participatory and qualitative dimensions,⁴⁸ notably for evaluating social development projects.⁴⁹ A review of such general debates is not possible here, and the critique offered in this research focuses specifically on the shortcomings and limitations of LFA as a means of evaluating democracy and governance assistance. Four main problems with LFA are briefly highlighted: its project, not programme, focus; its applicability to 'hard' rather than 'soft' data; its inward, not outward, orientation; its problematic emphasis on causality and quantitative indicators.

The logical framework approach is narrowly geared towards *project* evaluation, most appropriately where clear outputs can be achieved within a specific time-span and where 'hard' quantitative data is more readily available, that is, 'blueprint-type projects' such as infrastructural projects. It is less appropriate for evaluation of wider *programme* goals. This is especially true in an area like democracy and governance, a 'soft' area of programming in which institutional relationships and culture are the subject of reform, where time frames are hard to predict, and change is difficult to measure.⁵⁰

LFA is *inward-orientated*, inverting evaluation towards pre-determined project objectives. In contrast, evaluation of political interventions requires an outward orientation, able to capture the political context in which such interventions are implanted. This is particularly important given that the overall context is itself a significant factor in influencing the success or

otherwise of external donor interventions, for instance, the relative strength or weakness of domestic pro-democratic actors. Thus, the nature of democratization, and of programmes intended to assist such processes, are not appropriate to logframe-type analysis: LFA 'cannot anticipate and capture the political dynamics in which local actors will make their decisions'.⁵¹ Indeed, the logframe approach tends to assume the idea of progress, being designed to accompany a process of positive change. Two problems emerge, however. One is that democratization is not a linear process of positive and gradual change, rather it is an irregular process following a non-linear pattern, with progressions and regressions. In the case of regressions, LFA becomes obsolete. The second problem is that the combination of inward orientation and assumed progress means that LFA is unable to countenance negative, unintended effects of DG assistance.

Such criticisms can be broadened to reject more paradigmatically the 'inadequacy of numbers' and the 'false dream of science' with regard to the emphases on quantification and causality, as with Carothers' forthright critique of USAID's 'managing for results' system. Given the complex nature of democratization and the variety of factors involved, both structural and agency-related, the establishment of *plausible linkages* between donor interventions and political change may be the best that can be hoped for.

In sum, logical framework analysis is rejected here, as are 'results-based' approaches, as inappropriate for evaluating democracy and governance programmes. Such instruments of conventional evaluation offer little to resolve the challenge of evaluating DG assistance. They are narrow in focus, more pertinent to the limited functions of project cycle management, with little or no consideration of the range of factors involved in complex political change. They are oriented to providing an immediate assessment of newly completed projects, largely blinkered to possible negative, unintended effects, and less able to trace medium to long term impacts. The (pseudo-)scientific approach is unable to cope with the dynamic political context in which DG activities are embedded. LFA offers an inappropriately technocratic solution to a political problem. It is concluded that evaluating democracy and governance assistance is more art than science.

Impact Evaluations

A broader and, frankly, more interesting type of evaluation study investigates the contribution of DG programmes to processes of democratic change at either sectoral or national levels. A number of donor agencies have attempted such impact studies at country level, notably the European Union's evaluation of its PHARE and TACIS Democracy Programmes

(PTDP) in central and eastern Europe,⁵² and DANIDA's nine-volume evaluation of its democracy and human rights programmes. Additionally, as referred to earlier, USAID have undertaken country case studies to investigate the relationship between their DG programmes and political change.

Undertaking such studies is far from straightforward, however. Indeed, the methodological difficulties in evaluating DG assistance are at their most acute when conducting an impact evaluation at national level, that is, assessing the contribution of external assistance to democratization in a particular country. Seven problematic issues are identified here.

- *The multiplicity of actors and factors in complex political change* and the difficulties of differentiating the contribution of a single actor. There are difficulties in distinguishing the contribution of internal and external actors, as well as in separating out one donor from others.
- *'With and without' scenarios and issues of counterfactuality*, that is, how is it possible to gauge what would have happened anyway without external support?⁵³ External actors may be credited for developments that would have happened anyway, without their assistance. Baseline data certainly help in providing clear evidence of the developments that have occurred, but any attribution of these to external assistance remains hard to prove. At best, it may be possible to show some *correlation* between the nature of external assistance and such developments.
- *External–internal relationships*. In partially attributing perceived developments to the activities of external actors, have the interrelationships between internal and external actors been sufficiently addressed? External efforts may be dependent on local support, for instance. Alternatively, countervailing forces in the particular country may undermine external actions.
- *The overall political context* is an important determinant of programme impact, either conducive or unfavourable to democratic reform. Kapoor notes that DG programmes may be adversely affected by factors over which they have relatively little control, for example, a lack of political will by the political elite to carry out democratic reform.⁵⁴ A lack of attention to overall context may also affect judgements about impact in the opposite direction, with exaggerated claims about external efforts where its reliance on the strength of local pro-democratic actors is not recognized.
- *Tracing micro–macro linkages*. The shortcomings of analyses that 'tend to assume rather than to prove the impact of individual projects on the entire process of democratization' have been raised by Schmitter and Brouwer.⁵⁵ This can be described as the phenomenon of the 'missing

middle', requiring at times an 'act of faith' to leap from micro level outputs to such programme objectives as 'greater respect for human rights'.

- *Time-scale.* How possible is it to evaluate the impact of projects and programmes that have only recently been completed, given that democratic change is a long-term process?
- *Unintended impact.* External intervention involves a dynamic, interactive process and can have unintended side effects, often adverse. Does the search for positive impact ignore the possibility of negative impact?

These issues all raise a number of unanswered methodological questions. The remainder of this section critically examines how the three agencies have addressed these problems, highlighting shortcomings and ongoing difficulties.

European Commission and Evaluation of PHARE and TACIS Democracy Programmes: A Different Approach

An evaluation of the EU's PHARE and TACIS Democracy Programmes (PTDP) (1992–97) in central and eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union respectively was undertaken by ISA Consult and the European Institute, University of Sussex.⁵⁶ These democracy support programmes were established in 1992 and 1993 respectively and receive an annual budgetary allocation, managed by the European Commission. In contrast to the MDP and ACP studies (examined above), the objective of the PTDP evaluation was an *ex post* impact assessment, investigating the programmes' contribution to democratization processes in nine selected countries (out of 26). The PTDP study adopted a two-stage approach to assessing impact. The first stage involved a democracy assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the nine countries, using a methodology developed previously by Kaldor and Vejvoda.⁵⁷ The second stage entailed an examination of projects and programmes to assess their contribution to democratization in each country, that is, investigating to what extent they had contributed to the strengths and addressed the weaknesses. Eight evaluation criteria were invoked, fairly traditional in character: relevance, consistency, adequacy of procedures, cost-effectiveness, impact (both intended and unintended), sustainability, replicability, visibility.⁵⁸ A combination of quantitative and qualitative methods were used, with statistical analysis complemented by qualitative background studies (stage one above) and fieldwork interviews and roundtable discussions.

The overall finding was that 'the PTDP has been of considerable value for the development of democracy and civil society in Central and Eastern Europe'.⁵⁹ The most significant impact was judged as its contribution to the

growth of a lively NGO sector in all nine countries examined, regarded in turn as crucial to the democratization process.⁶⁰ It was noted that it is difficult to distinguish the impact of the PTDP from other western democracy assistance, and that democracy assistance itself is a 'comparatively minor instrument in assisting the process of democratization'.⁶¹ Nevertheless, it was held that such assistance had been important financially, psychologically and politically to non-governmental groups. It was believed that foreign funds had helped to create 'a moral community' essential to the construction of a democratic political culture.⁶²

The PTDP study engaged usefully with the methodological problems associated with impact evaluation. First, democratization is acknowledged as a complex process influenced by a multitude of interrelated factors, both structural and agency related, including democratic institutions and processes, economic development and political culture. Second, it is recognized that the impact of a single programme (PTDP, for instance), far less that of a single project, can never be measured exactly, given that it is very difficult to single out its influence from the range of factors affecting the democratization process.

Nevertheless, the attempt to address such issues is limited, perhaps due to the exacting time constraints under which the PTDP evaluation was undertaken. The study attempts impact evaluation at micro and macro levels, with those at micro, project level aggregated to enable comment on macro level impact, but plausible connections are not well established. Consequently, the study's finding of a positive impact on strengthening the NGO sector and democracy at large is based on a rather predictable and unsophisticated linkage between projects and national-level democratization, given the overwhelming focus of the PTDP on the non-government sector, accounting for 80 per cent of all projects.⁶³ In fact, Schmitter and Brouwer specifically cite the PTDP study as one where such linkages are assumed rather than proven.⁶⁴

The importance of background studies for country evaluations, analysing the political context with regard to changes towards (or away from) democratization, is recognized to some extent by the PTDP evaluation. It places emphasis on democracy assessments as an essential part of its methodology for determining the extent to which projects and programmes have contributed to democratization in each country. Nonetheless, limited use is then made of the background studies conducted, with their function limited to evaluating one criterion out of the eight listed (that is, the *relevance* of projects and programmes).

In sum, positively, this study has addressed the important issue of PTDP's contribution to democratization processes in selected countries and clearly outlined the difficulties of 'attribution' in impact assessment.

Unfortunately, the exacting time constraints under which the evaluation team worked doubtless militated against addressing such challenges more satisfactorily.

DANIDA: Evaluation of Danish Support to Promotion of Human Rights and Democratization 1990–1998

A large-scale evaluation was undertaken in the late 1990s of Danish support to the promotion of human rights and democratization from 1990 to 1998, resulting in a nine volume study published in early 2000 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The synthesis (Volume 1) was based on four thematic studies (Volumes 2 to 5: justice; constitution and legislation; elections; media; participation and empowerment) and four country case studies (Volumes 6 to 9: Ghana, Guatemala, Mozambique and Nepal). This constitutes the most comprehensive, single evaluation effort by any donor agency. It is described as a ‘lessons learned’ evaluation, with the emphasis on ‘self-critical learning, rather than on accountability’.⁶⁵ Stated objectives included assessing ‘if and how Danish-financed activities have promoted democratization and human rights’.⁶⁶ Issues of methodology and impact evaluation are highlighted here.

Methodology: Political aid is seen as not only new but also different from other development aid. One essential difference is that democratization is ‘deeply embedded in a political process which is the outcome of a battle between contending social forces’, with evaluation ‘faced with a set of challenges that are more pronounced than in the assessment of other types of development assistance’.⁶⁷

Therefore what methodology does the DANIDA study itself adopt to address these challenges? The methodology is described as ‘inter-subjective validation’, combined with a process-orientated approach’.⁶⁸ All eight case studies are said to have adopted this methodology, though with flexibility encouraged. Three issues arise, however.

First, the precise nature of the methodology remains vague and insufficiently developed. Not only are there significant methodological differences between studies, but also the Guatemalan team states surprisingly that it was ‘largely free to devise its own methodology’.⁶⁹

Second, although ‘inter-subjective validation’ appears to share some features with a ‘user-based’ or ‘participatory’ approach, with the terms of reference stating that the evaluations are to be conducted as a ‘participatory process’, the degree and nature of the participatory dimension within the methodology is not clarified.⁷⁰ Thus, participation appears limited to interviews with ‘key stakeholders’, largely project beneficiaries, rather than with a wider range of pertinent individuals and commentators.

Third, in the synthesis report, the authors include a discussion about methodology that itself suggests that methodological questions remain relatively open and unanswered. In making recommendations, the authors again note the unsatisfactory nature of the logical framework approach, but merely encourage DANIDA 'to experiment with other methods of monitoring and evaluating its work in the HR&D area'.⁷¹ Unfortunately, there is limited discussion of what such alternative methods could entail, aside from reflecting the 'qualitative nature of most democratization activities'.⁷² It would appear that no firm conclusions regarding methodology have been arrived at beyond recognition of the difficulties entailed and a call for experimentation. The study's own proclaimed methodology of 'inter-subjective validation' is presumably one candidate for further consideration, yet strangely the evaluators offer no commentary on its strengths or limitations.

Impact Evaluation: One stated objective was an impact evaluation of the extent to which Danish-financed activities have promoted the wider goals of democratization and human rights. Similar to the above discussion on methodology, hopes of a coherent response to the issues and difficulties entailed are rapidly dashed when it becomes evident that the four country studies have addressed this objective in varied ways. While the Guatemala and Mozambique cases stress the problems of undertaking an impact assessment, and effectively opt out of doing so, the Ghana and Nepal studies do attempt to provide impact evaluations.

The Guatemala case study states frankly that it 'makes very little effort to assess the impact of the specifically Danish assistance on the overall human rights situation', due to two well-rehearsed difficulties.⁷³ One is the problem of singling out Danish assistance from that of other donors, and the other is the 'widely acknowledged' difficulty of establishing 'a direct causal linkage between a project intervention and the broader human rights situation in any country'.⁷⁴ Consequently, the Guatemala case limits itself to identifying more or less successful aspects of the Danish programme. The authors of the Mozambique study acknowledge that impact assessment is useful in elucidating the 'overall experiences with HR&D as an aid instrument', yet they have little success in practice.⁷⁵ The Mozambique team find that the 'intended impact' of HR&D assistance is 'often ... intangible', and that 'available project documentation [is] often not ... precise enough when it comes to impact assessment'.⁷⁶ Thus, in contrast to the broader methodological problems highlighted in the Guatemala case study, the Mozambique team find that impact assessment flounders principally on the more technical aspects of imprecise goal definition and inadequate documentation.

In contrast, the Ghana and Nepal teams both make constructive attempts at impact evaluation. The Ghana study divides the human rights and democracy support into seven 'key areas' or sectors, and attempts to assess the specifically Danish contribution to each of these.⁷⁷ The Nepal study analyses Danish assistance by institutional beneficiary (that is state, local government, civil society organizations), and attempts to disaggregate the 'immediate impact' of assistance to each institution from the 'wider impact'.⁷⁸ The findings of the Nepal study differ markedly from that of the Guatemala and Mozambique reports, both in their tone and in their content, with positive impact claimed. For example, regarding support to the legislature, the Nepal team find 'identifiable results' such as 'better public relations [between legislature and citizens] partly through the establishment of an information office', while support to the electoral commission displays wider impact 'in the fact that the elections have been carried out in a comparatively free and fair manner'.⁷⁹ Are such findings reliable, however? While the Nepal team appear to identify lines of cause and effect, it is noticeable that the Nepal report displays few of the concerns about causation and linkage found in other volumes, and appears less conscious than the Guatemala and Mozambique teams of the problems in disentangling Danish support from other influences on the political system.

In sum, DANIDA are commended for undertaking such a large-scale and comprehensive evaluation effort. The overall study displays an awareness of the challenges and difficulties associated with evaluation in this field, especially with regard to impact evaluation. Nevertheless, in general more questions are raised than answers provided.

USAID: Country Case Studies in Programme Impact

This recent initiative by USAID was set forth in the *Agency Performance Plan* for FY 2001, outlining 'the Agency's decision to use qualitative information on country or sectoral case studies to explore the link between USAID activities and broader democratic change'.⁸⁰ To date, it is the most direct effort to address the difficult methodological question of *how* to determine the impact of DG programmes on democratization processes. A research design and protocol was prepared for three pilot case studies, Bolivia, Bulgaria and South Africa.⁸¹ Although the findings of the three country studies were unavailable at the time of writing (June 2002), the research methodology is of much interest in itself. The methodology is outlined here, followed by commentary on two perceived shortcomings.

As discussed, the major methodological challenge for evaluators concerns whether political changes in the recipient country can be partially attributed to external democracy promotion efforts, what Carothers dubs the 'causal conundrum'.⁸² USAID intends to investigate this 'conundrum'

through a three-stage research process involving a political context study, an account of USAID programmes, and identifying and tracing impact. These steps are examined in turn.

First, a political context study is deemed essential to provide information on democratization trends in the country concerned over the specified time period. This is completed as a desk study, focusing on 'particular areas of significant change (positive or negative), the principal sources of change, and the principal constraints to it', inclusive of key actors.⁸³ To facilitate this assessment of political change, Linz and Stepan's framework of five categories or 'diagnostic variables' is adopted: state coherence (a precondition for democracy); political society; civil society; the rule of law; good governance (or a 'usable state', able to deliver goods and services).⁸⁴ Such a political context study provides both (retrospective) baseline data and an assessment of subsequent changes at a broad level of analysis.

Second, USAID's DG programme in the country concerned is examined, inclusive of objectives, strategy and activities over the period of study, with initial identification of impact from available documentation and key interviews.⁸⁵

Third, and most significantly, researchers attempt to trace programme impact and connect it to higher levels of political change, thereby examining whether and in what ways USAID programmes contributed to democratization at a country level. It is recognized that 'iron-clad causal connections should not be expected', but 'plausible connections' are sought between the intervention and the political change.⁸⁶ The method is known as 'process tracing' and has a distinct logframe 'feel' to it: a logical sequence is traced from USAID activities to outputs (that is, concrete results such as numbers of election officials trained) to outcomes (for example, voter registration systems) to higher level impacts (clean elections). One difference from typical logical framework analysis, however, is that investigations are not limited to pre-established objectives within a project matrix. Research focuses on apparent correlations between programme impact and areas of political change, tracing connections until a possible relationship 'becomes too tenuous to be persuasive'.⁸⁷ Evidence of impact is sought from a variety of sources, with validation from two or more required, namely a process of triangulation. Research also examines instances where immediate programme impact is identified, yet where overall political change in related areas was absent or negative. This raises the possible scenario that DG programmes helped prevent or slow down democratic regression or backsliding.⁸⁸ Finally, evidence of impact is aggregated and considered against the overall political context, with judgements made concerning the contribution and significance of the USAID programme. Questions to be answered include whether the agency was active in those

areas most crucial to democratization and/or those most critical to possible backsliding.

Steps one and two are undertaken as desk studies by a small team of USAID officials and external consultants, inclusive of drawing up preliminary hypotheses about areas of programme impact and political change. The third step is based on fieldwork, conducted over a two- to three-week period, involving further document collection and interviews with 'mission and embassy staff, partners, political actors and host country experts'.⁸⁹ It is further stated that 'particular attention must be paid to interviewing actors who hold divergent views about both political trends and USAID assistance'.⁹⁰ A single local expert would appear to be contracted for this fieldwork phase only, assisting the small team of external evaluators.

While USAID is commended for shifting to more qualitative assessments and for tackling the challenges associated with impact evaluation at country level, two shortcomings in the methodology are perceived, one relating to unintended consequences and the other to the lack of local participation. These are examined in turn.

It is noted that the search for *positive* impact is stretched to include the examination of circumstances where no progressive political change is observed, entailing the difficult counterfactual of analysing whether external assistance could have prevented (or slowed down) democratic backsliding. Yet no investigation into unintended *negative* impact is apparent. Schmitter and Brouwer emphasize the importance of undertaking such an analysis, stating 'it is not sufficient just to measure the extent to which a specific goal has been reached. The "complete evaluator" has to deal with the entire array of changes emanating from a specific programme or project.'⁹¹ External intervention involves a dynamic, interactive process and can have unintended side effects. An intensification of ethnic divisions and conflict is probably the greatest fear, but other, less dramatic, consequences are possible. For instance, there is the potential for a distorting effect on the nature of civil society as some NGOs 'adapt to the discourse of the donors' in order to 'enjoy funding, visibility and a certain influence'.⁹² One negative effect is the intensification of upward linkages and accountability to donors, while downward linkages and accountability to members are detrimentally affected.

Local participation in the USAID country studies appears very limited. It seems that little or no domestic contribution is made to the political context study, undertaken in Washington prior to fieldwork. Yet, in making assessments of 'the general direction of change, particular areas of significant change (positive or negative), the principal sources of change, and the principal constraints to it', who is better informed than local

political scientists and other local experts?⁹³ They have invaluable knowledge of rapidly changing regime circumstances and of the alliances between national, pro-democratic actors, often so central to processes of democratic transition and consolidation. Yet desk studies undertaken in Washington would appear to ignore such rich sources.

Further, there is little or no opportunity for active local participation in the third stage of the research process, apparently restricted to one local consultant. Instead, the evaluation adopts the traditional approach of research undertaken by a small team of (almost all) donor country personnel, flying in and out on a short fieldwork mission. While the stated intent to interview actors with 'divergent views' is commendable, the degree of inclusion or exclusion of various stakeholders remains an open question. For example, to what extent will *indirect* stakeholders be included, that is those groups and individuals who are not direct recipients of democracy assistance but who are critically engaged with democratic processes in their country? Additionally, 'participants' are not actively involved in determining the nature of the investigation and in making assessments about the relative efficacy and impact of external support, but are used merely as a source of information. Issues of 'participation' are examined in greater detail in Part II of this article.

Concluding Comments

In sum, the methodological challenges in conducting country impact evaluations have not been adequately addressed nor resolved by the studies undertaken by these three international development agencies. While USAID's methodology provides the most detailed attempt at developing a suitable approach, it appears to remain oriented to fulfilling donor needs by demonstrating success and usefulness, with the evaluation process itself reproducing the negative characteristic of democracy promotion as an external imposition. All the above impact studies entail a donor-led enquiry in which external consultants make judgements concerning the relative efficacy and impact of donor programmes, with limited input from local actors. Such evaluation methods are at odds not only with the consensus that democratization is essentially an internal process, but also with the function of evaluation as a critical enquiry into the role of external actors. Potentially, evaluation provides an opportunity for critical reflection on democracy promotion activities, for eliciting the views of knowledgeable, domestic pro-democracy actors on external efforts as well as on democratization trends, with the aim of reviewing strategy in the light of such discussion and analysis. Yet, this can become an opportunity lost as the moment for critical thinking descends into mere corroboration and affirmation of donor efforts by those

relatively dependent on their funds, both consultant evaluators and beneficiary organizations.

In Part II, an alternative methodology is proposed which aims both at addressing the challenges of impact evaluation and at being congruent with democratization itself. A conclusion to the whole of this two-part article is offered at the end of Part II.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge the financial support provided for this research by the Social Science Research Unit of the Department for International Development, UK, and the research assistance of Iain Kearton.

NOTES

1. See Gordon Crawford, *Foreign Aid and Political Reform: A Comparative Analysis of Political Conditionality and Democracy Assistance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Peter Burnell (ed), *Democracy Assistance: International Co-operation for Democratization* (London: Frank Cass, 2000); Thomas Carothers, *Aiding Democracy Abroad: The Learning Curve* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999).
2. Mark Robinson, *Strengthening Civil Society Through Foreign Political Aid*, ESCOR Research Report R6234 (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 1996), p.ii.
3. Carothers, p.281; Philippe C. Schmitter and Imco Brouwer, *Conceptualizing Research and Evaluating Democracy Promotion and Protection*, working paper SPS No.99/9 (Florence, European University Institute, 1999), section IV, 1.
4. Posed here as a question, Carothers, p.287, first used this statement as a sub-heading for his critique of USAID's 'managing for results' system.
5. R. Pawson and N. Tilley, *Realistic Evaluation*, (London: Sage, 1997), pp.4–8; C.C. Rebien, *Evaluating Development Assistance in Theory and Practice* (Aldershot: Avebury, 1996), pp.19–21.
6. B.E. Cracknell, *Evaluating Development Aid: Issues, Problems and Solutions* (London: Sage, 2000), pp.108–12.
7. *Ibid.*, p.116.
8. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit.
9. Cracknell, pp.101–106.
10. Rebien; Cracknell.
11. Danish International Development Assistance (DANIDA), *Danish Support of Human Rights and Democratization*, 9 Vols (Copenhagen: Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000), Vol.1, p.66. Note that Gordon Crawford and Iain Kearton, *Evaluating Democracy and Governance Assistance* (Leeds: Centre for Development Studies, University of Leeds, 2002), p.14, state that their research did not find such a recommendation by the DAC, but, in contrast, that the DAC advocates the adoption of 'truly participatory evaluation techniques' in its *Evaluation of Programmes Promoting Participatory Development and Good Governance: Synthesis Report* (Paris: OECD, 1997), p.26.
12. Canadian International Development Agency, *CIDA Evaluation Guide* (Hull, Quebec: CIDA, 2000), p.12.
13. *Ibid.*, p.32.
14. Oddly, it is stated that the terms 'objective' and 'result' are used interchangeably; USAID, *Handbook of Democracy and Governance Program Indicators* (Washington, DC: USAID, 1998), p.5.

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15. Ibid., p.7.
16. See Cracknell, pp.54–7, on ‘the accountability/lessons learning dichotomy’. In theory, the accountability of the development agency pertains to development results rather than the proper use of financial resources, more the domain of an audit, but the distinction becomes blurred in practice.
17. Ilan Kapoor, *Indicators for Programming in Human Rights and Democratic Development: A Preliminary Study* (Hull, Quebec: CIDA, 1996).
18. USAID, *Handbook*.
19. For examples of USAID’s Democracy and Governance Program Indicators, see Crawford and Kearton, pp.30–31.
20. USAID, *Handbook*, p.8.
21. USAID, *FY 1999 USAID Agency Performance Report* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2000), pp.48–50.
22. International Development Research Center, *Evaluating Governance Programmes: Report of a Workshop: 8 April 1999* (Ottawa: IDRC, 1999).
23. Ibid., p.6.
24. Ibid., p.8.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Carothers, p.291.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid., pp.291–2.
31. Ibid., p.293.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid., pp.292–3.
34. Ibid., p.294.
35. Ibid.
36. At the time of writing (June 2002), these qualitative indicators had not yet been published by USAID.
37. USAID, *FY 1999 Agency Performance Report*, p.48, emphasis added.
38. Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA), *The Evaluability of Democracy and Human Rights Projects*, SIDA Studies in Evaluation 00/3 (Stockholm: SIDA, 2000).
39. Ibid., p.6.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., p.24.
42. European Commission, *Evaluation of the MEDA Democracy Programme 1996–98* (Brussels: European Commission, 1999).
43. European Commission, *External Evaluation of Community Aid Concerning Positive Actions in the Field of Human Rights and Democracy in the ACP Countries* (Brussels: European Commission, 2000). A third, earlier study of democracy promotion in Central and Eastern Europe, adopts a different and distinct methodology, discussed below: European Commission, *Evaluation of the PHARE and TACIS Democracy Programme 1992–1997* (Brussels: European Commission, 1997).
44. European Commission, *External Evaluation*, p.18.
45. European Commission, *Evaluation of the MEDA*, p.15.
46. European Commission, *Communication to the Council and Parliament on The European Union and the External Dimension of Human Rights Policy: From Rome to Maastricht and Beyond*, COM (95) 567, 22 November 1995 (Brussels: European Commission, 1995), cited in European Commission, *Evaluation of the MEDA*, p.15.
47. E.G. Guba and Y.S. Lincoln, *Fourth Generation Evaluation* (London: Sage, 1989).
48. Rebien; Cracknell, p.178.
49. D. Marsden and P. Oakley (eds), *Evaluating Social Development Projects* (Oxford: Oxfam, 1990); D. Marsden, P. Oakley and D. Pratt, *Measuring the Process: Guidelines for Evaluating Social Development* (Oxford: INTRAC, 1994).

50. Canadian International Development Agency, *Democracy and Governance Programming Lessons for CIDA: Ethiopia Case Study* (Hull, Quebec: CIDA, 2000).
51. Danida, Vol.1, p.66.
52. PHARE stands for the 'Poland Hungary Association for the Reconstruction of the Economy', and TACIS for 'Technical Assistance to the Commonwealth of Independent States'.
53. European Commission, *Evaluation of the PHARE and TACIS*, p.15.
54. Kapoor, p.41.
55. Schmitter and Brouwer, section IV, 3.
56. European Commission, *Evaluation of the PHARE and TACIS*.
57. Mary Kaldor and Ivan Vejvoda, 'Democratization in Central and Eastern Europe', *International Affairs*, Vol.73, No.1 (1997), pp.59-82, cited in European Commission, *Evaluation of the PHARE and TACIS*, p.13.
58. European Commission, *Evaluation of the PHARE and TACIS*, p.12.
59. *Ibid.*, p.7.
60. *Ibid.*, p.76.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*, p.77.
63. *Ibid.*, p.39.
64. Schmitter and Brouwer, section IV, 3.
65. Danida, Vol.1, p.1
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*, Vol.1, p.10.
68. *Ibid.*, Vol.1, p.11.
69. *Ibid.*, Vol.7, p.3.
70. *Ibid.*, Vol.1, p.120.
71. *Ibid.*, Vol.1, p.68.
72. *Ibid.*
73. *Ibid.*, Vol.7, p.55.
74. *Ibid.*
75. *Ibid.*, Vol.8, p.49.
76. *Ibid.*
77. In an unspecified way, the Ghana study attempts to add the meso level analysis that will be advocated in Part II of this article.
78. *Ibid.*, Vol.9, p.3.
79. *Ibid.*, Vol.9, p.47.
80. USAID, *Annual Performance Plan for FY 2001* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2000), p.5.
81. USAID, *Country Case Studies of the Relationship between USAID DG Programs and Political Change: Research Design and Protocol for Year-one Set*, (unpublished document, September 2000).
82. Carothers, p.283.
83. USAID, *Country Case Studies*, p.1.
84. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-communist Europe* (Baltimore, MD and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996).
85. USAID, *Country Case Studies*, p.8.
86. *Ibid.*, p.1.
87. *Ibid.*, p.5.
88. *Ibid.*, p.4.
89. *Ibid.*, p.9.
90. *Ibid.*, p.11.
91. Schmitter and Brouwer, section IV, 2.
92. *Ibid.*
93. USAID, *Country Case Studies*, p.5.

Manuscript accepted for publication September 2002.