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PANEL 3: Challenges in development evaluation

The blind-spots of evaluation: implications from research on Polish aid professionals

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The blind spots

- Ex-post evaluations mainly check whether the aid activities have the *intended* effects or not.
- However, dealing with *unintended* effects is one of the requirements formulated by the OECD Development Assistance Committee for evaluating development assistance.

http://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/daccriteriaforevaluatingdevelopmentassistance.htm

DAC Criteria for Evaluating Development Assistance

- *Relevance*
- *Effectiveness*
- *Efficiency*
- ***Impact***
- The positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or **unintended**. This involves the main impacts and effects resulting from the activity on the local social, economic, environmental and other development indicators. The examination should be concerned **with both intended and unintended** results and must also include the **positive and negative** impact of external factors, such as changes in terms of trade and financial conditions.

When evaluating the impact of a programme or a project, it is useful to consider the following questions:

- What has happened as a result of the programme or project?
- What real difference has the activity made to the beneficiaries? How about the effect made on the aid professionals *themselves*?
- How many people have been affected?

- *Sustainability*

Known **positive** or **neutral** side-effects of foreign aid on indigenous self-organization in Poland after 1989:

- Availability of funds for new and established organizations
- civil society activists in Poland were **exposed to new ideas** (human rights including women and children rights) and **approaches** via their cooperation with Western partners
- the **change of language** also contributed to a **change in mode of actions**. Instead of "initiatives", "activities", or "actions", Polish NGO activists had to start thinking and acting in terms of "projects".
- The appropriation of this new language triggered **normative change**: the way of thinking about social activism, the methods of assessment, and the mode of work
- Organisational isomorphism (i.e. selective emulation of organisational forms)

Even some representatives of the NGDO sector openly admit that in the beginning of the transition many NGOs were *established* in order to implement foreign donors' funded development projects in Poland.

- A negative side-effect of foreign aid for the Polish civil society has thus been that "*suddenly some grasped the idea that what used to be regarded as civic and voluntary activity can now be done for remuneration*" (Krzysztof Stanowski in Iłowiecka-Tańska 2011)

Negative side-effects of foreign assistance (1/2):

- NGOization of resistance;
- Grantosis;
- Donors imposing their „menu" of priorities for NGOs to pick up from;
- Monetisation of indigenous civic activism;
- (the presence of UN agencies) suppressing indigenous watchdogs' development;
- Brain-drain of national state institutions' staff in recipient countries;
- Emergence of parallel systems in the field of education, social assistance, health, etc.;
- Infighting among women's NGOs competing for foreign funds, caused by the absence of domestic financial or moral support in the first years of the transition;
- Another related unintended side-effect has been the relative isolation of women's NGOs from the general public and marginalisation from the local decision-making process;

Negative side-effects of foreign assistance (2/2):

- **aid fungibility** is an unintended side-effect caused by some aid modalities, especially by budget support. The concept of fungibility refers to the possibility that aid is used by the government of the partner country in ways not intended and not agreed with the donor country. For instance, direct budget support for the health care system of the recipient country may end up in the increase of its military spending;
- „soft" aid fungibility: when development assistance takes over issues like **education**, **gender equality** or **environmental protection**, this may lead to a partial "abdication" on the part of the local authorities on these issues;
- Or, having project partners focus on the **stimuli**, for example the remuneration Bosnian widows received by foreign donors after the war in the 1990s in former Yugoslavia

„Bad aid"

- *SWEDOW* (stuff we don't want): one million T-shirts to Africa, US food aid (American producers' food surplus sent over to the Global South, thus also contributing to the bankruptcy of local grains' producers)
- Tied aid

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Does „hat-changing" in development cooperation (*from beneficiary to donor*) prevent unintended effects from happening?

- "*I remember how [in the 1990s] our colleagues from the Netherlands came and they seemed to know better [than us]. They drove me mad. Actually, as I can see this* now, *most of the times they were right indeed*. *But I was not ready to agree with them. Or perhaps they were not sensitive enough when they communicated their ideas*" (r19_34)
- One interviewee reflected, "[T]his was education, when we were beneficiaries [we learnt] how important the partnership approach was. After all, we did experience the „Marriott brigades" and even though not all NGOs had first-hand experience [with them], [the Marriott brigades] were notorious" (r15_10).

Credibility and the **community of fate**: the advantage of Polish aid over established donors' assistance

An aid professional, who has been engaged in transferring the Polish experience with reform of the self-government, told a story when the German presenter at a conference in Ukraine shared her dissatisfaction for her speech not being as appreciated as the speech my research participant delivered. "***I told her: you see, they respect you, but you speak about standards that would be relevant here in 40 years. Whereas I talked about issues I have personally been involved in changing. Polish experts are credible, they understand the mentality of Ukrainians, their soul. . . . [The German consultant] is probably wiser than I am, but she has no sense of what communism was, what it means to be a Slav, that we drink vodka together***" (r17_15).

Avoiding double standards:

“after all these years [working in development cooperation] I can see how interrelated some issues are. If we are not capable of speaking in a sane way about the ***rights of women in Poland****, how can we shape those standards in the world?”* (r24_13).

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM
ON PRIVILEGE AND AGENCY
:

A respondent recalled, *"there is one aspect no one is willing to talk about.* ***When I go to Africa****, being a white woman, quite well educated,* ***there everything comes much easier for me****, than it would have been here in Poland or anywhere in the West. You enter this community [in Africa], this society and* ***by default you have a higher status****.* ***This is an outcome of social inequalities****. . . . It is hard to admit this, but [****being in Africa****] I can achieve more, I have a bigger capacity****… In Poland I am but one of a million; there, I am one of a few" (r3_10).*

ACKNOWLEDGING THE WIN-WIN ASPECT OF DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Another respondent argued that Polish NGDOs' capacity is enhanced, too: „We are the ones who ***learn from our foreign partners [in the Global South].*** *. . . Also, and this is an issue rarely talked about in Poland, because we are in this* ***network with Western partners****, we learn from them, too. . . . People who are not engaged [in development cooperation] tend to think that ours is some philanthropy, sacrifice, or that we are the ones who help. But what we, Polish NGOs, get is a win-win situation.* ***We are the ones being enriched****"* (r14_8).

FOR THE **CAREER** OPPORTUNITIES

An interviewee drew attention to another rarely publicly addressed aspect of the engagement of Poles in development cooperation. He said, "*I wouldn't like to be judgmental, but I have met people who work in the East because they want to share their experience, who truly believe that the crux of activism is to help others, who are worse off [than us]. These are people who have this need for [bringing] justice. Unfortunately, I also met people, who* ***work in the East****, because* ***this is how they heal their complexes****. These are people, who are not respected here [in Poland], but who are* ***regarded in the East as known experts, who are treated as heroes*** *[there]. … None of us is devoid of lowly incentives, there is this vanity in each of us. I would like to believe the positive traits are dominant*" (r17_15).

Policy recommendations:
WHAT FUTURE EVALUATION COULD FOCUS ON

- Policy cohesion (in line with the SDGs);
- Complementing development cooperation with global education (DEAR activities) at home;
- Promote volunteering abroad;
- Promote transparency and accountability of evaluators' work, train the evaluators;
- Decrease the bureucratization of procedures;
- Supporting ownership and sustainability of projects;
- Enhance the human resources of the relevant governmental institutions;
- Take into account the institutional capacity of NGDOs.

Thank you for your attention!

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