

Scaling up NGO impact on development: learning from experience

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There are 4,000 non-government organisations (NGOs) engaged in development work in OECD countries alone, and a further ten to twenty thousand in the South. But despite the increasing size and sophistication of the NGO sector, the impact of its activity is often transitory and localised. NGOs often find it difficult to interact effectively with social, economic, and political forces at the national and international levels, with the result that grassroots development efforts can be easily undermined. Faced by this, NGOs are asking themselves searching questions about their future role and effectiveness, and are experimenting with a range of strategies to increase, or 'scale up', the impact of their development work.

With this issue in mind, Save the Children Fund (UK) and the Institute for Development Policy and Management at the University of Manchester convened a workshop in January 1992, to explore the lessons learned so far by the development community in relation to 'scaling up'. Over 80 delegates from around the world, from a range of NGOs, governments, official donor agencies, and academic institutions, attended the event. The issues raised through a number of case study papers (listed at the end of this article), examining four main types of strategy for achieving greater impact, were discussed by delegates in small groups. The strategies were deliberately chosen to encourage the consideration of 'scaling up' in terms much wider than simply increasing the size of NGOs or of NGO-funded development projects. Although larger operational programmes may be one way to increase impact, there are many others. This was confirmed by workshop delegates, who preferred to use the phrase 'increasing impact' to describe the processes under review, rather than 'scaling up', which seemed to imply organisational or programme growth.

The strategies considered at the Manchester workshop were:

- working with and within government structures to influence policy and systems;
- operational expansion;
- national and international lobbying and advocacy;
- strengthening organisations of the poor (including networking and federations).

Other strategies included legal reform, training, alliance-building among NGOs, and what Robert Chambers called ‘self-spreading and self-improving’: the dissemination of ideas, approaches, and methods of work through interactions among people at distinct levels and in different areas.

Clearly, these strategies are not mutually exclusive, and there is a good deal of overlap between them. Discussion focused as much on the linkages and compromises between the different approaches as on the strategies in isolation. There was, however, general agreement that we should differentiate between strategies which entail the NGO increasing its own size and expanding its operations and those where impact is achieved through some form of transfer to, or catalytic effect on, other organisations. Generally, these two approaches entail different costs and benefits, and it may prove difficult to combine both within a single NGO.

Delegates were at pains to point out that different types of NGO — international donors, intermediaries, networks and federations, and grassroots movements of various kinds — all play different roles in the development process. Therefore, they face diverse choices and alternatives and will adopt different strategies in seeking to increase their impact on development. Added to this was the observation (made with particular force in Somthavil Klinmahorm’s paper on Special Education in Bangkok) that ‘scaling up’ is often a spontaneous process, rather than a result of a pre-planned strategy.

Underlying all these observations is the crucial importance of context in determining which strategy is chosen, and how effective it is in practice. This, allied to the other complicating factors listed above, made generalisation over time and space very difficult. Indeed, there was no attempt in the workshop to arrive at hard-and-fast conclusions, or to identify universal solutions to problems. Instead, delegates considered it was much more important to share ideas and experiences from a rich diversity of backgrounds and contexts than to reach an artificial consensus. What follows is, therefore, a preliminary attempt to sketch out broad themes, to identify particular experiences that seemed significant, and to highlight key issues for further debate.

Increasing impact via co-operation with government

Relationships between governments and NGOs have often been characterised by antagonism, yet there are sound reasons for NGOs to enter into a creative dialogue with the institutions which determine official development policy and deliver basic development services. The state remains the ultimate arbiter and determinant of the wider political changes on which development depends, and it controls the economic and political frameworks within which people and their organisations have to operate.

A number of workshop delegates presented case studies describing their attempts to improve government policy and practice in directions which will ultimately enable poor people to gain more control over their lives in areas such as health, education, and food security. All agreed that this had to be a long-term partnership, since the pace of reform is always slow and subject to continual reverses. Beverley Jones (Christian Aid) and Gebro Wolde (Ministry of Agriculture) highlighted the problems faced in Ethiopia by attempts to introduce a participatory approach to agricultural planning. Recent political changes in Ethiopia may hasten this process, but thus far it has been extremely difficult to generate genuine involvement and 'ownership' by farmers at the grassroots. Similar points were made by Delanyo Dovlo (in relation to health work in Ghana), Jamie Mackie (in a review of the work of Voluntary Service Overseas within government structures in Africa), and Somthavil Klinmahorm (discussing SCF's influence over the special education policy of the Bangkok Metropolitan Administration). In part, these difficulties reflect the inevitable problems of working in poorly-resourced government structures, where salaries and motivation are low, staff turnover is very high, and bureaucratic systems are rigid. There can also be considerable differences in ethos and styles of work between NGOs and governments, a problem cited in the cases of Ethiopia and Mozambique. A number of papers concluded that, despite these constraints, the chances of achieving impact on policy and practice were enhanced when NGOs agreed to work within government structures from the outset. This increased the sustainability of the intervention, and enabled the NGO concerned to understand and deal with the constraints faced by the official system.

A further point of agreement was that personalities and relationships between individuals are a vital element in successful partnerships between governments and NGOs. But, even when these relationships do exist, this is no guarantee of lasting impact. As Klinmahorm's paper

demonstrated, it is partly because individuals move on, and partly because there is often a major barrier between the ‘pilot project’ stage of co-operation (which is heavily dependent on the NGO and one or two like-minded government officials) and the acceptance and diffusion of new approaches throughout the government hierarchy. The key to ‘scaling up’ successfully via working with government lies in breaking down this barrier; and this requires a deliberate change in strategy on the part of the NGO in question to enlist real commitment at all levels of the system, but particularly at the top. VSO has had some success in doing this by using what Mackie called ‘the planned multiplication of micro-level inputs’ — the slow and careful evolution of different forms of support which are small in themselves, but ultimately significant in their aggregate effect on policy and practice. Such approaches appear most likely to have impact in smaller countries, where NGOs may have better access to crucial decision-makers.

Overall, the workshop recognised the crucial importance of making government bureaucracies more responsive to grassroots needs, while cautioning against an uncritical acceptance of the ability of NGOs to influence government policy, especially where there are vastly more powerful forces (such as the World Bank) at work. The decision to work *with* but not *for* government must rest on the extent to which the structures under consideration may be reformed, the relationship between government and its citizens, and the level at which influence can be exerted most effectively. International NGOs must take into account the strength of the national NGO sector, and be careful not to undermine its initiatives, before deciding to work with government. NGOs must also calculate the potential opportunity costs involved, and the ‘trade-offs’ which may exist in relation to other strategies. For example, NGOs may find it difficult to operate simultaneously as a conduit for government and as an agent of social mobilisation; or to work both within government and as an advocate for fundamental change in social and political structures. There are also dangers in NGOs identifying themselves too closely with governments which may subsequently be overthrown or voted out of office. National and international NGOs may well be discriminated against by a new government because of their previous affiliation, however progressive the declared official intentions of the administration. Nevertheless, even under the most authoritarian governments, there are often opportunities for specific policy change within limited fields. One example cited concerned the Ministry of Health in Chile under the Pinochet regime, which developed a highly progressive policy on

breast-milk substitutes, with help and advice from local and international NGOs. Overall, there is no intrinsic reason to discount working with government as a strategy for increasing impact, and every reason to explore and experiment with this approach to clarify and reinforce those conditions which lead to success.

The direct approach: ‘scaling up’ by operational expansion

For many NGOs, the obvious strategy for increasing their impact on development is by expanding projects or programmes which have been judged to be successful. Over the 1980s this approach has been pursued in the South (where it has led to the evolution of a set of big NGOs — so-called BINGOs — in Asia), and in the North (where many NGOs have significantly expanded their operational budgets and staffing, as well as increasing the number of countries in which they work).

- There was no consensus at the workshop about the relative desirability of this strategy, and a large number of delegates argued the ‘anti-growth’ case. Their concerns about the consequences of NGO operational expansion were several:
- A belief that the comparative advantage of NGOs — the quality of their relationships with beneficiaries, their capacity to experiment, and their capacity to be flexible in relation to local contexts — is lost when they expand.
- The danger that internal organisational objectives, such as job security, increasing employment opportunities, and overtaking competitor NGOs, displace development objectives.
- The likelihood that NGOs’ large-scale service-delivery operations will be cited by multilateral assistance agencies such as World Bank, IMF, USAID, as evidence to support the ideological case for the reduction of the scale of public-service delivery systems: this creates worries about the potentially negative impact of such a strategy on the poor majority who do not directly benefit from NGO operations.

Others recognised these concerns, but remained convinced that an expansionist strategy was justified when there was evidence that existing operations were alleviating poverty, and that resources could be acquired to permit a programme to benefit more people.

Presentations fell into two categories: case studies, and analyses of the management issues associated with the growth of NGOs. In the first, Howes and Sattar reviewed the expansion of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), which has become one of Asia's largest NGOs, with a staff of more than 4,500 and an annual turnover of around £10 million. Usefully, they described BRAC's approaches to 'scaling up' under the headings of *additive mechanisms* and *multiplicative mechanisms*. Under the former, they described moves to expand into new geographical areas, and efforts to integrate new activities into existing programmes, or to incorporate complementary project activities (such as the establishment of a crop storage project to facilitate the marketing of products for a successful agricultural programme). Under the latter heading, they described BRAC's policy of encouraging the creation of new developmental organisations, and then withdrawing — an approach which would not entail BRAC's expansion in terms of staff and budgets. In the 1980s, BRAC tended to emphasise the former approach, but more recently it has switched to multiplicative mechanisms.

The distinction between these two strategies raised much interest, and merits further examination. Discussion of multiplicative strategies took place mainly in the session on supporting community-level initiatives (see below). These were highly recommended by delegates, but the focus on the grassroots did mean that little attention was paid to 'multiplying' at other levels. Robert Chambers made this point in his paper on 'self-spreading and self-improving' approaches. He illustrated the potential importance of NGOs that have the capacity to recruit and develop committed individuals who subsequently establish new and (it is hoped) high-quality NGOs. Some agencies explicitly adopt 'seed bed' strategies for nurturing future NGO leaders (for example, Tilonia in India and the Ford Foundation in some regions). Others contribute unintentionally when their staff leave and pursue their own initiatives: for example, the individual responsible for re-awakening Sri Lanka's dormant thrift and credit movement depended heavily on skills and knowledge he had acquired while working for the large national NGO, Sarvodaya Shramadana.

Only limited information was available on the results achieved by expansionist strategies. Howes and Sattar reported that BRAC had achieved 'a large measure of success', and Kiriwandeniya provided data on the developmental achievements of Sri Lanka's Federation of Thrift and Credit Co-operatives as it expanded in the 1980s. These positive experiences need to be tempered, however, with other evidence of expansion leading to reduced impact. Korten (1990: 126) has charted the evolution of the

International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF) from a pioneering, crusading role on a forbidden topic to 'an expensive and lethargic international bureaucracy'. In a similar vein, Dichter (1989: 3), who experimented with geographical project replication for Technoserve for many years, has concluded that 'replication is not what it is cracked up to be'.

Rip Hodson (formerly of Action Aid and currently at the London School of Economics) examined the performance issue, and argued that the disappointing results of some attempts to expand NGO operational activities was 'more likely to be due to management problems than to strategy failure'. From this perspective, the main question is not whether to abandon expansionist approaches. Rather, it is how to manage growth so that organisational structures, systems, and culture do not undermine operational performance. Billis and Mackeith also examined the management dimension, and provided a preview of their current research into the management challenges facing development NGOs based in the UK. Interviews with directors and senior managers of these organisations had revealed a range of problems, a number of which were consistently raised. Most significantly, these included:

- Tensions about decision-making: should it be hierarchical or democratic?
- Tensions between headquarters and field staff.
- Tensions about the ways in which fund-raising staff and operational staff perceive their missions.
- Tensions among staff about the relative merits of growth and no-growth strategies.

There are no standard resolutions for these problems, but Billis and Mackeith pointed to a substantial body of knowledge and experience about the ways in which UK NGOs, tackling domestic problems, have coped with rapid expansion in the 1980s. They suggested that these experiences could have broader relevance than has been appreciated.

The experiences of agencies pursuing expansionist strategies clearly vary, but all cases indicated that such an approach should be adopted only after considerable thought and planning. NGOs taking this approach must plan for the stresses of organisational restructuring and cultural change. They must determine how financially dependent they will become on official aid, and consider the consequences of this for their own accountability. They must face up to the possibility that future options for enhancing impact will be lost (an issue that is further elaborated in the conclusion to this article).

‘Scaling up’ via lobbying and advocacy

Many of the causes of under-development lie in the political and economic structures of an unequal world: in unfair terms of trade, low commodity prices, and oppressive burdens of debt; in the uneven distribution of land and other resources among different social groups; and in the restrictions and regulations which prevent poor people from making better use of the opportunities they have. It is impossible to address these issues fully through ‘development projects’. Action is also needed to lobby for change at the national and international levels. NGOs who choose this route to achieve greater impact must decide between constructive dialogue with the institutions they are trying to lobby (the incrementalist or reformist approach), and ‘shouting from the sidelines’ (the abolitionist approach). At root, this choice rests on the degree to which the NGO judges that its ‘target’ is able to be reformed over time.

John Clark (formerly of Oxfam UK and Ireland,¹ but now employed by the World Bank) argued that contemporary global trends provided a unique opportunity for NGOs to influence the future course of development policy among bilateral and multilateral donors. The break-up of Eastern Europe, the higher profile given to NGOs in neo-liberal thinking on ‘governance and democracy’, increasing interest in environmentalism, and the expanding scale of the NGO sector all combine to provide new and wider opportunities for NGO lobbying on a more significant level. Whether NGOs are able to take advantage of these, Clark argued, depends on the degree to which they are able to develop new skills and manage the move to an age of information rather than project activities. It also depends on new partnerships with grassroots movements which can provide the experience and evidence on which lobbying must be based. In this transition, it may well be that relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs are transformed into a more genuine partnership, as NGOs in the North concentrate much more on international advocacy in support of Southern efforts.

This theme was echoed by Nigel Cross of SOS Sahel, who emphasised the need for new techniques and methodologies (such as oral history) in ensuring that grassroots views were not misrepresented in advocacy work. Ahmed Sa’di, of the Galilee Society for Health Services and Research, argued eloquently for the right of poor people to generate and use their own knowledge and research to advocate their own rights.

Similar themes were raised by Tony Hall (London School of Economics) in his paper on NGOs and the Itaparica hydro-electric

scheme financed by the World Bank in Brazil. The success of NGO efforts in this case was based on a combination of pressures on the Brazilian authorities; 'from below' (the popular movements at grassroots level, which resisted the scheme), 'from above' (the international NGOs which lobbied the World Bank), and from the Bank itself. The key question becomes how to strengthen complementarities between local and international action in different political and economic contexts. What new skills will be required of NGOs in this task, what new forms of information, and what new partnerships or alliances?

In the case of the Voluntary Health Association of India (VHAI), Alok Mukhopadhyay argued that success in lobbying for changes in the health policy of central government is strongly rooted in action, organisation, and information at the grassroots. If this were not the case, there would be a real danger that advocacy might become merely rhetorical. The sheer size of the network represented by VHAI is a powerful factor in encouraging the Indian Government to respond to pressure. Conversely, the example of SOS Sahel shows the impact that a small NGO can have by concentration on a particular 'niche' activity (in this case, social forestry development in the Sahel), and by lobbying for change based on this fairly narrow but immediate experience. As in other approaches to scaling up, context is all important in determining the effectiveness of lobbying by NGOs. The success of VHAI is possible only in a relatively open democracy and with the kind of free press that exists in India. To give another example, John Parry-Williams demonstrated how SCF UK was able to assist the Ugandan authorities in developing a better legal framework to protect children's rights because this issue enjoyed high-level political support at the time.

On a more critical note, Chris Dolan's assessment of the future of lobbying by NGOs in the UK concluded that a major collaborative effort on the scale required to achieve greater impact on macro-level issues was unlikely to take shape. British NGOs, Dolan argued, lack the shared vision and ideology to make such an alliance a reality, and are prevented from coming together by increasing competition for funds. He also identified weak linkages *within* NGOs (between programme work and advocacy) as a barrier to effective lobbying, particularly important given the perceived need for lobbying to grow out of practical experience. Whether NGOs generate this experience directly or via their 'partners' is another matter, but this linkage was seen as essential if NGOs' advocacy is to gain credibility in the eyes of official donors. In the case of British NGOs, it is indispensable under the conditions imposed on such

activities by UK charity law. Pleas were made, therefore, for Northern NGOs to be much clearer about the issues on which lobbying by individual agencies was likely to be effective and issues where collective action was essential, and to come together around these in a much more forceful way.

Legitimising NGO advocacy in the eyes of donors and governments was seen as an essential task for the 1990s, particularly in view of the increasing tendency for donors to view NGOs as implementers of projects and providers of services, rather than as participants in a dialogue on policy. Indeed, there were calls for NGOs to play a more active role in training the staff of bilateral and multilateral agencies. Perhaps surprisingly, however, examples were cited in which participation by NGOs in 'safety-net' programmes (designed to compensate for the harmful effects of structural adjustment) had actually strengthened their ability to lobby multilateral donor agencies on behalf of the poor. The best example of this seemed to be the Economic and Social Fund financed by the World Bank in Bolivia. Although in this particular case participation in welfare projects enhanced people's capacity to lobby for improvements in the delivery of services, the same might not be true in other countries. Again, context is crucial.

It is not just official donor agencies which need to be convinced of the value of NGO lobbying, but also the members of the general public who support NGOs in the North. A number of papers highlighted the importance of development education in the North in generating more public support for new NGO roles, and specifically for NGOs' advocacy work.

In conclusion, while NGOs have succeeded in influencing official donors and governments on individual projects, and even on some programme themes (such as the environment in the case of the World Bank), they have failed to bring about more fundamental changes in attitudes and ideology, on which real progress ultimately depends. There is some evidence that there are certain 'softer' issues (such as health, education, and child welfare) which are easier to lobby on than others (such as land reform and economic policy). All lobbying (at least by charities in the UK) must be carefully formulated, and this means that the NGO agenda for advocacy must demonstrably grow out of grassroots experience if it is to claim to 'speak for the poor'.

Indeed, it was this theme — the need to link grassroots action and experience with lobbying and advocacy at the national and international levels — which emerged most strongly in the workshops.

Supporting community-level initiative: mobilisation, networking, and federation

A number of papers focused on strategies to increase impact by fostering the growth of self-governing grassroots organisations (GROs) and people's or popular organisations (POs), and encouraging them to link up through networks and federations. This approach was strongly supported because of its perceived capacity to permit a scaling up of impact without weakening the organisation's claim to legitimacy, or compromising its accountability to its membership.

In such a strategy, the major task of NGOs is to serve as an intermediary to accelerate the pace of the creation of GROs, provide them with assistance as they expand, and foster links between them. A rapid expansion in the numbers and capacities of such groups was seen as permitting not merely an increase in their development 'projects', but a much greater impact on state policies and on local, regional, and national political processes. Among delegates, however, opinions differed over whether the broader benefits of the proliferation of GROs would come from their contribution to political pluralism, or whether a more aggressive orientation, directly confronting oppressive social forces, was required.

The papers in this session took on a Latin flavour with two papers on the Philippines (Latin Asia), one on Central and South America, and another on Peru. The recent experience of the Philippines was of great interest, as the last decade has seen an extraordinary growth in the number of locally registered NGOs (around 18,000) and the establishment of numerous networks and federations. Karina Constantino-David described the problems arising from this explosion of voluntary organisations, and examined the experience of the Caucus of Development NGO Networks (CODE-NGO) in its attempts to create a forum through which NGOs could collaborate without compromising their individual philosophies and activities. The rapid growth of the voluntary sector in the country has been associated with the registration of large numbers of 'mutant' organisations that falsely claim to be non-government or non-profit-making. By Constantino-David's estimates, only about 2,000 organisations can be regarded as genuine development NGOs. Over the 1980s, these interacted in various ways, and by 1988 three-quarters of them had affiliated with one of the country's ten national NGO networks. At that time, discussions were opened to see if these networks, and their constituent NGOs, could find a framework for joint action and collaboration. Many of the NGOs concerned expected this to be feasible, given the extraordinary

heterogeneity of the constituency. A gradual approach — focusing on consensus-building exercises, developing trust, extending personal relationships, and preparing a ‘covenant’ for NGOs — permitted the establishment of CODE-NGO. Clearly, it is too early to comment in detail on the performance of the Caucus. But the initial achievements — including the creation of a self-regulatory mechanism, a women’s bank, collaborative policy advocacy, and collaborative personnel development activities — augur well for the contribution of this ‘super-network’. The vision it has is to develop a people’s movement in the Philippines to challenge the present narrow base of political power.

The work of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM) was examined by Horacio ‘Boy’ Morales. At present, this involves intensive social mobilisation at village level in five districts, forming associations and co-operatives that combine into a People’s Council which will prepare a District Development Plan. Ultimately, PRRM intends to extend this model across the nation, fostering a transfer of power from the present nexus (between the state, big business, and the church) to People’s Councils. In the early stages of the process, PRRM has already become aware that this will entail vast expansion in its own staff and financial resources. Clearly this has considerable significance for operations, in terms both of sustainability and the compromises that might occur if the Movement seeks large-scale external support.

Diana Mitlin and David Satterthwaite summarised an extensive study conducted by the International Institute for the Environment and Development (IIED) on the provision of shelter and urban services in Latin America. This had found that it was essential to rely more on community-based organisations, as both the state and private business lacked the capacity to provide such services effectively. Although such groups sometimes formed spontaneously, there was sometimes a need for intermediary NGOs to stimulate their formation, provide them with support, and help them to form partnerships with central and local government agencies and financial institutions. A major finding of the IIED study was that the NGOs that performed best, in terms of expanding housing and service provision, concentrated on pulling in the financial and technical resources of other agencies for use by community-based organisations, rather than on stepping up their own provision of direct services.

Linkages were also seen as being of great importance in Elsa Dawson’s paper on the SCF-supported Villa El Salvador Health Project in Peru. This case study highlighted the synergy or mutual enhancement between building community capacity and lobbying on policy. The credibility

gained and information generated by involvement at the local level strengthened the lobbying activities of the Peruvian NGO (INCIDES), which in turn increased the likelihood of policy reforms that would support community-based health initiatives. Judith Randel's paper on Action Aid activities in Uganda also illustrated the potential for community-based initiatives to be used as an entry point for developing a policy dialogue with the World Bank.

ACORD's twenty years of experience in local institutional development in Africa were analysed in detail by Chris Roche. He described the collapse of ACORD's early attempts to create structures for poverty alleviation by close collaboration with government agencies at district and regional levels, and attributed this to a lack of consideration of the organisation of beneficiaries at the grassroots. This was replaced by a direct operational approach in the early 1980s. In turn, this has been supplanted by a strategy of social mobilisation at village level, and establishing alliances and federations between grassroots organisations. The initial results are promising, and are consistent with contemporary attempts to help to strengthen democratic practices in Africa. However, by its nature the strategy is slow to show results, and it is highly dependent on context. Roche illustrated the way a change of regime in one country had led to policy reforms that made ACORD's new approach more difficult to implement.

In summary, the workshop reconfirmed the importance to NGO activities of local capacity building. In addition, it emphasised the need of NGOs to assist grassroots organisations to make links through networks and federations that strengthen them (in terms of advocacy, leverage over resources, or access to technical expertise) without their having to sacrifice autonomy to the state, to donors, or to intermediary NGOs.

Conclusion: some lessons and key issues

Not surprisingly, the extensive workshop proceedings indicate there are no straightforward answers to the question of how to enhance the impact of NGOs on development. There are strong arguments for the adoption of any, or all, of the strategies that we have identified. But each faces significant obstacles that must be overcome if it is to be effective; and the efficacy of all of them can be challenged by critical counter-arguments. It is simply not feasible to assume that there can be an 'optimal' strategy that can be given unequivocal endorsement. Proposals about the selection of 'scaling up' strategies need to be based on a contingency theory that

recognises the differing capacities of individual NGOs and the significance of context-specific factors. This does not, however, imply that all strategies are equally valid: NGOs have considerable room for manoeuvre in their choices, and in each specific context there will be more and less effective mixes of strategies for attaining development goals.

Southern and Northern NGOs need to think more imaginatively about the forms of 'partnership', the styles and structures of management, and the types of information that will underpin the new roles they must adopt if they are to take a position on the centre stage. Clearer conceptual frameworks must be developed for the analysis of relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs, and with grassroots or community organisations; the types of federations and networks to which they might ally; the gains and losses incurred by adopting different strategy mixes. Greater priority must be given to documenting strategies, and monitoring and evaluating outcomes, if experience is to contribute effectively to the selection of future strategy. For Northern NGOs, a major challenge is to work out how they can contribute to institutional development in the South.

A summary of the tentative lessons that can be drawn from experience, and a listing of the key issues that must be considered when a choice is being made, is presented below. Such a framework and listing is by no means comprehensive, and requires elaboration. For example, it does not include what Robert Chambers calls 'self-spreading and self-improving' approaches. These are approaches whereby techniques developed by NGOs, such as participatory rural appraisal, are spontaneously diffused, or where new NGOs are created by staff with previously gained experience in established NGOs. This is significant, because it draws attention to the processes by which the next generation of fledgling and experimental NGOs evolves. It points to the possibility of an NGO enhancing the overall impact on development by assisting its best young staff to set up new agencies!

Scaling up via co-operation with governments

Lessons

- NGOs must work within the constraints of government systems that are for many reasons resistant to change.
- Personal relationships with key staff are crucial.

- The problems of employing expatriate staff, such as unsustainability and problems of handover, must be thought through.
- High mobility of government staff reduces the impact of advice and training: tackle this issue if feasible.
- Allow government to take the credit for success.
- Plan for very long time horizons.
- Recognise that the influence of larger donors on policy reform outweighs that of NGOs: select a complementary strategy to lobby donors as appropriate.

Key issues

- Can governments be reformed? If so, which types should one focus on?
- How should Northern NGOs relate to Southern governments?
- How should NGOs cope with the practical difficulties of working within government systems?

Scaling up via operational expansion

Lessons

- NGOs adopting this approach must anticipate dramatic strains as organisational culture and structures change.
- Sustainability should be planned from the start, especially in terms of finance, workforce, and legal considerations.
- Extensive pursuit of the preferences of donors for service delivery is likely to convert NGOs from agencies with a distinctive vocation and ethos into public-service contractors.
- This strategy may place limits on other approaches: for example, the tone of advocacy work and the scale of social mobilisation may be compromised.

Key issues

- Does operational expansion automatically reinforce existing power structures?
- Do the needs of donors define a narrow role for NGOs in terms of strategies and activities?
- Does expansion reduce accountability to those on whose behalf the NGO works, including its supporters?
- Can NGOs expand operations without becoming bureaucracies?

- Does operational expansion by NGOs displace the state and strengthen policies of liberalisation and unfettered markets?
- Are there any services that *only* NGOs can provide, so that operational expansion is the only option?

Scaling up via lobbying and advocacy

Lessons

- To date, NGOs' influence has been confined largely to projects rather than to fundamental attitudes and ideology.
- Donors are keen to see NGOs as project implementers, rather than participants in a policy dialogue.
- NGOs' knowledge of donors is partial, and this limits their impact.
- A basis in practical experience is important for NGOs to generate information and enhance their credibility.
- British charity law significantly determines the work of UK NGOs with charitable status in the sphere of lobbying and advocacy.

Key issues

- How to carry out successful advocacy while remaining within British charity law?
- How to balance programme work with advocacy and lobbying, and link the two more closely?
- Which issues and targets are most important for advocacy and lobbying?
- Should NGOs seek to focus their advocacy work on symptoms or causes, programme design, or underlying ideology?
- How can Northern and Southern NGOs combine to influence donors more effectively?

Scaling up via supporting local initiatives

Lessons

- The opportunity for effective involvement in work at the local level is very dependent on the attitude of the state. Where such approval is denied, NGOs must carefully analyse their options for being either 'apolitical' or partisan.

- Official aid agencies are unwilling to support serious initiatives to mobilise and empower disadvantaged groups.
- Many NGOs are happy to obfuscate the extent to which their social mobilisation programmes are intended to empower or deliver services. At times this may be a tactical device, but commonly it is based upon an unwillingness to make this key decision.

Key issues

- Should strategies of social mobilisation be the major role for Southern and Northern NGOs in the future?
- What steps can be taken to ensure that grassroots organisations are controlled by their members, and do not merely follow the dictates of their sponsoring NGO?
- Are regional or continental patterns of social mobilisation very different? If so, what might Africa or Asia learn from Latin America, and *vice versa*?
- Should networks of local organisations remain politically unaffiliated, or should they openly align with political parties?
- What are the implications for empowerment work when ‘parent’ NGOs become heavily involved in mounting service-delivery activities financed by international donors?
- How can cadres of professional social mobilisers be developed without a reduction in the quality of relationships with intended beneficiary groups?

Three particular points should be noted in relation to the findings and issues identified above.

- 1 All ‘scaling up’ strategies have implications for the links (to community-based or grassroots organisations, the ‘poor’, volunteers or private contributors) through which NGOs base their claim to legitimacy, i.e. their right to intervene in the development process. The degree to which a strategy compromises the logic by which legitimacy is claimed needs to be carefully considered, and can provide a useful means of testing whether organisational self-interest is subordinating the fundamental aims when a choice is being made.
- 2 Related to the above is the recognition that increasing interest and support for NGOs among official donor agencies may create a predisposition, or foster a shift, towards operational and organisational expansion. These incentives need to be treated cautiously, because decisions to expand with official finance may have various unwelcome

consequences: for example, they may close off potential courses of action; or make NGOs feel more accountable to their official donors than to their intended beneficiaries; or imply support for policies of wholesale economic liberalisation.

- 3 The interactions between different strategies need to be carefully considered. Several case studies demonstrated that strengthening local initiatives and lobbying for policy change may be mutually reinforcing. Agencies should ensure that they are taking full advantage of such potential synergy. More research is needed to explore such relationships and the conditions which encourage their development.
- 4 Clearly, 'scaling up' the impact of NGOs on development is not synonymous with expanding the staff and budgets of the NGOs themselves. The choices facing NGOs are complex, since all options seem certain to generate internal organisational problems, and all require careful political analysis to gain an insight into who gains and who loses when a particular option, or set of options, is selected. Either by design or by default, all NGOs will have to make these strategic choices in the coming years. The quality of the decisions taken will be a major determinant of whether or not they manage to make a difference on a scale commensurate with the issues they were set up to address.

Note

1 Since this article was first published, Oxfam UK and Ireland has become two organisations: Oxfam GB, and Oxfam Ireland.

List of workshop papers

(These papers represent the views of the individuals who presented them, and without prior agreement should not be attributed to the organisations to which they are affiliated.)

Billis, D. and J. Mackeith, 'Scaling Up NGOs: the management dimension', London School of Economics, University of London.

Chambers, R., 'Self-Spreading and Self-Improving: a strategy for scaling up?', Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

Clark, J., 'Policy Influence, Lobbying and Advocacy: lessons of experience from global advocacy work', International Economic Relations, World Bank.

Constantino-David, K., 'The Caucus of Development NGO Networks: the Philippine experience in scaling up NGO impact', College of Social Work and Community Development, University of the Philippines.

Cross, N., 'Small is Neat: the influence of niche NGOs on development policy and practice', SOS Sahel.

Dawson, E., 'The Villa El Salvador Health Project, Peru', Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex.

Dolan, C., 'Will British NGOs Scale Up Their Advocacy and Lobbying in the 1990s?', Wits Rural Facility.

Dovlo, D., 'Government-NGO Partnership in Sustaining Health Care Services in Ghana', Save the Children Fund, Ghana.

Edwards, M. and D. Hulme, Theme Paper: 'Scaling Up NGO Impact, Learning from Experience', Save The Children Fund.

Hall, T., 'Itaparica: NGOs and the politics of empowerment', London School of Economics, University of London.

Hodson, R., 'Small, Medium or Large: the rocky road to NGO growth', London School of Economics, University of London.

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Jones, B., 'The FFHC Agricultural Programme in Southern Ethiopia', Christian Aid.

Kiriwandeniya, P. A., 'Walking the Tightrope: expanding the Federation of Thrift and Credit Co-operative Societies in Sri Lanka', SANASA, Sri Lanka.

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Mackie, J., 'Multiplying Micro-Level Inputs to Government Structures', Voluntary Service Overseas.

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Robinson, M., 'NGOs and Rural Poverty-Alleviation: results of an empirical investigation and its implication for scaling up', Overseas Development Institute.

Roche, C., 'From Scaled-Up, Through Scaling-Down, to Scaling-Up Again: lessons from ACORD's experience in Africa', ACORD.

Sa'di, A. H., 'The Role of Research in NGOs', Galilee Society for Health Services and Research.

Wolde, G., 'NGO Trends in the Agricultural Sector in Ethiopia', Ministry of Agriculture, Ethiopia.

Other references

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Korten, D. (1990), *Getting to the 21st Century: voluntary action and the global agenda*, West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press.

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