

INNOVATIVE WAYS OF INVOLVING THE PRIVATE SECTOR: BUSINESS ADVOCACY: BEST-AC IN TANZANIA

BRIEFING PAPER 2: EVALUATION OF BEST-AC

EVALUATION APPROACH

Business Environment Strengthening in Tanzania—Advocacy Component (BEST-AC) is a business advocacy programme with the objective of supporting business associations to become organisationally and technically competent to advocate to government for changes that will improve the business environment for their members. DFID has funded a five year longitudinal impact study of BEST-AC from Annabel Jackson Associates Ltd, Irwin Grayson Associates and Coffey International Development. This paper has been written by Annabel Jackson and David Irwin.

The evaluation takes a Scientific Realist approach, drawn from Pawson and Tilley (*Realistic Evaluation*, 1997) which seeks a disaggregated understanding of programmes, distinguishing between different programme elements, outcomes, contexts, and mechanisms. The overall conceptual structure is to deconstruct the programme into its different parts, taking a theory of change approach, and develop classifications and measurement tools for each. The evaluation operates at three levels: the business sector, the portfolio of funded organisations, and case studies of advocacy projects carried out by seven business associations. The work is gradually creating a large database of information which an econometrician will analyse for statistical patterns. Thus, it combines qualitative and quantitative approaches in a way that is often assumed impossible in advocacy evaluation.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation uses a mix of complementary methods:

- A database of background information on each advocacy organisation and project.
- A diagnostic tool to measure the advocacy competence of business associations. The diagnostic tool measures four aspects of capacity development: organisation development including resources; relationships and the development of dialogue; advocacy techniques and approaches to influencing; and results.
- Interviews with case study business associations to discuss objectives, challenges, influencing tactics and achievements.
- Analysis of the quality of research reports and policy papers
- Surveys of business association members to explore their engagement with the association, and their knowledge of, and support for, its advocacy projects, and also their financial performance.
- A survey of public sector stakeholders to understand their contact with the business associations, and their views on the effectiveness of their influencing.
- Analysis of meeting minutes and documentation.
- A broad survey of business leaders in the selected economic sectors to judge broad trends in the business environment.
- Analysis of available economic statistics.
- Analysis of the assumptions underlying the programme and examination of evidence, from other programmes, supporting or contradicting them.

LESSONS FOR EVALUATING BUSINESS ADVOCACY

So far the evaluation suggests the following lessons, some specific to evaluating business advocacy programmes, and some generic good practice in evaluation:

- **Exploration of the mechanisms whereby programmes achieve outcomes.** Detailed analysis of tactics used by business associations has demonstrated the skills involved in advocacy, and therefore the progress in capacity building. Without skilled engagement with the process in this way the evaluator risks underestimating the achievements of the programme, since advocacy naturally has periods without concrete achievements such as legislative or policy change.
- **Evaluation should consider the full range of impacts.** Impact can include prevention, for example, stopping or delaying the introduction of legislation that may be harmful to business.
- **Integration.** Evaluation systems are integrated into the operation of BEST-AC. For example, the database is used for financial management and reporting. The diagnostic tools have been administered since the early years of the programme as part of a business review process.
- **Triangulation.** Analysis of meeting minutes and documents has been useful to check the details of the policy change sought and agreed. While business associations have generally been honest about what has happened, there is a natural tendency for them to exaggerate the level of commitment from stakeholders and their role in it.
- **Stakeholder perspective.** The evaluation takes a stakeholder perspective, comfortable with the possibility that interviewees will differ in their views on the effectiveness of the business associations. Government surveys and interviews have been carefully phrased to reflect the interviewees' perspective: they do not ask if the interviewee is listening, or imply criticism of non response, but rather seek to understand the environment in which the interviewee is operating and whether the business association is useful, important or influential in this. Interviews with stakeholders provide another way of checking information from interviews with advocacy organisations.
- **Commitment.** The case study organisations have signed memoranda of understanding setting out their responsibilities in the evaluation and the information they will receive in return.
- **Reciprocity.** The diagnostic tool is designed to give grantees feedback on their strengths and weaknesses, as well as supporting the evaluation. Case study grantees receive annual reports intended to encourage reflection and learning as well as helping them to demonstrate their value, for example showing the extent to which association members support the funded advocacy project. Feedback has the potential for contamination, for bias introduced by the evaluation or its process, but this is thought a worthwhile trade-off with the increased quality of information.

CONCLUSION

The Longitudinal Impact Study of BEST-AC provides a set of tools and methods that could be adapted to evaluate other advocacy programmes supported by DFID.