INTRODUCTION

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. BEST-AC's underlying theory of change is that grants and training will increase the capacity of business associations to engage in dialogue such that they will be able to make a clearer and stronger case to government, which will, over time, result in policy changes that help businesses to grow, invest and employ people and deliver more by way of tax revenue. BEST-AC is one of several initiatives aiming to strengthen the business environment in Tanzania.

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 was written by Annabel Jackson and David Irwin. The paper starts by outlining the alternative philosophies of attribution, then considers the challenges and good practices usually considered to apply in advocacy evaluation, before describing how the LIA has resolved these issues in its evaluation of BEST-AC.

APPROACHES TO ATTRIBUTION

Attribution refers to the ability to allocate the causality for an impact. The basic question in attribution is whether the impact was the result of the funded project or programme. There are four broad epistemologies of attribution, which have already been reported by DFID[1]:

- Regularity approaches depend on the frequency of association between cause and effect.

- Counterfactual approaches depend on the difference between two otherwise identical cases.

- Configurational approaches depend on identifying combinations of causes that lead to impacts.

- Generative approaches depend on identifying the mechanisms that explain effects.

The LIA, as a Scientific Realist approach, is rooted in generative forms of attribution. The LIA makes reference to, but does not rely on, attribution through analysis of patterns of regularity and difference.

CHALLENGES

Advocacy projects are seen as particularly difficult to evaluate because of:

- **Multiple and emergent objectives**. Objectives are frequently developed over time, through negotiation and exploitation of opportunities. As Davies[2] mentions "The development of

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[1] Stern, E, Stame, N, Mayne, J, Forss, K, Davies, R and Befani, B (2012) *Broadening the range of designs and methods for impact evaluations*. DFID Working Paper, 38.

[2] Davies, R (2001) *Evaluating the Effectiveness of DFID's Influence with Multinationals. Part A: A Review of NGO Approaches to the Evaluation of Advocacy Work*. DFID.

objectives is part of the advocacy process, not outside it." Outright victory, in the sense of achieving all the objectives of a campaign is rare. Often compromise is necessary, with some objectives being jettisoned or modified. Mechanistic approaches to evaluation risk damaging the advocacy tactics. Teles and Schmitt[3] suggest that: "The most effective advocacy and idea-generating organisations are not defined by a single measurable goal, but by a general organising principle that can be adapted to hundreds of situations.

- **Long and unpredictable timescales for success**. Coates and David[4] note that in advocacy "change often occurs in sudden leaps, in unexpected ways, and in response to the most unlikely circumstances." Teles and Schmitt clarify that it is the political aspect of advocacy that makes it unpredictable: "advocacy, even when carefully non-partisan and based in research, is inherently political, and it's the nature of politics that events evolve rapidly and in a nonlinear fashion, so an effort that doesn't seem to be working might suddenly bear fruit, or one that seemed to be on track can suddenly lose momentum." Successful advocacy needs to balance success on a specific issue or project with longer term success in future advocacy campaigns and the ability to sustain gains made.

- **Indirect effects**. Like other programmes, advocacy often has unintended positive and negative consequences. Chapman and Wameyo[5] emphasise the need to look at the wider context. "Although process evaluation and proximate indicators are useful, they tend to start with the advocacy activity and work outwards from it, and can thus miss larger trends, external influences or unintended consequences."

- **Multi-causality**. Advocacy change is a complex, linked ecology. Advocacy success can be the result of a whole series of factors, such as changes in attitudes, relationships, energy or skills from other organisations or issues. Teles and Schmitt emphasise that: "External effects of organisational activity (benefits created by one organisation that are reaped by another) are pervasive in advocacy in a way that they are not in service delivery programs."

- **The sensitivity of telling the story**. Whilst it can be extremely revealing to ask policy makers about the influences on their decisions, this is not a complete remedy for attribution since the answers reported will be affected by memory, awareness of influences and by personality (internal and external locus of control, the willingness to acknowledge outside influences). Davies emphasises the need to understand rather than gloss over conflicting views on desired ends and effectiveness because "differences are the prime mover."

GOOD PRACTICE

Different writers on advocacy evaluation make the same broad recommendations in advocacy evaluation:

- **Evaluate the advocates not the advocacy**. The California Endowment[6] recommend that funders should: "Include outcomes that involve building grantee capacity to become more effective advocates." Teles and Schmitt, who draw the same conclusion, argue that: "Evaluating advocacy organisations means paying close attention to the value they generate for others, rather than only focusing on their direct impacts."

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[3] Teles, S and Schmitt, M (2011) The Elusive Craft of Evaluating Advocacy. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.

[4] Coates, B and David, R (2002) Learning for Change: the Art of Assessing the Impact of Advocacy Work. *Development in Practice*, Vol 12, Numbers 3&4.

[5] Chapman, J, Wameyo, A (2001) *Monitoring and Evaluating Advocacy: A Scoping Study*. Actionaid.

[6] Guthrie, K, Louie, J, and Crystal Foster, C (2006) *The Challenge of Assessing Policy and Advocacy Activities: Part Two: Moving From Theory to Practice*. Report to The California Endowment.

- **Focus on contribution not attribution**. CAE[7] conclude that: "Given the multiple, interrelated factors that influence the policy process and the many players in the system, it is more productive to focus a foundation's evaluation on developing an analysis of meaningful contribution to changes in the policy environment rather than trying to distinguish changes that can be directly attributed to a single foundation or organization." Similarly, the Innovation Network[8] suggest that: "Proving attribution can be costly and difficult. Instead, in the field of advocacy, understanding contribution yields useful information without alienating partners or unnecessarily depleting resources."

Carr and Holley[9] from the Walton Family Foundation provide a useful interpretation of the different assumptions around advocacy evaluation. They identify four different stances on evaluating advocacy: nihilists argue rather vaguely that the subject is inherently too complex and subtle for evaluation; anthropologists emphasise the political nature of advocacy and the need for expert judgement; constructivists emphasise the different perspectives on success in advocacy evaluation and the role for evaluation to support learning; and post-positivists emphasise the need to have clear logic models at the beginning, that can then be tested with applied social science methods, usually traditional qualitative methods.

The LIA takes a Scientific Realist approach, drawn from Pawson and Tilley[10], which seeks a disaggregated understanding of programmes, distinguishing between different programme elements, outcomes, contexts, and mechanisms. Critical realism has a middle position between positivism and constructionism. Realists assert that science must be empirical, rational and objective. However, the focus is on understanding and explanation rather than prediction. The overall conceptual structure, therefore, 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 methodology was described in more detail in Briefing Paper 2. Scientific Realism supports attribution in three ways:

- It emphasises the agency behind any project or programme: the importance of people.

- It focuses on mechanisms, the routes whereby projects or programmes have impact.

- By disaggregating the programme into elements, it allows for a clear picture of partial implementation and also of incomplete impact.

LIA METHODS

The LIA uses these methods to test attribution:

- The evaluator reviews all documents from the case studies – meeting minutes, reports and correspondence where available – in detail to see if the PSO is mentioned or credited; or if their ideas are represented or their words used, whether credited on not. This analysis includes looking closely at the timing when actions were taken.

[7] Guthrie, K, Louie, Justin, David, T and Crystal Foster, C (2005) *The Challenge of Assessing Advocacy: Strategies for a Prospective Approach to Evaluating Policy Change and Advocacy*. Report to The California Endowment.

[8] The Innovation Network. (2009) *Pathfinder: A Practical Guide to Advocacy Evaluation*. Commissioned by the Atlantic Philanthropies.

[9] Carr, M and Holley, M,(2012) *A New Approach to Evaluating Public Policy Advocacy: Creating Evidence of Cause and Effect*. Paper Prepared for the 38th annual meeting of the Association for Education Finance and Policy, Walton Family Foundation

[10] Pawson, R. and Tilley, N. (1997) *Realistic Evaluation*. London: Sage.

- Quarterly reports provide factual information on the level of contact between PSOs and MDAs.

- BEST-AC evaluation and the LIA each contain detailed interviews with MDAs to obtain information on their openness to PSOs' influencing in general, their relationships with specific PSOs and, where policy change is evident, their accounts of the influences on the decisions to progress.

- An annual diagnostic tool of all PSOs asks specific questions to measure capacity. 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.

- The case studies include detailed questioning and conceptualisation of PSO staff to evaluate their level of skill. Evidence of high levels of skill gives some reassurance in drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of influencing. The interviews also probes and tests the theory of change behind PSO's actions.

- Later in the LIA the econometrician will examine the database of information to see if there are significant patterns between the BEST-AC projects and the economic impact.

- We sought to find unfunded PSOs as a counterfactual. This was problematic, however, not least because unfunded PSOs were not comparable to funded PSOs.

As well as looking at attribution itself, the LIA includes a number of other analyses around the subject:

- Surveys of PSO members test the significance of the advocacy issue and their involvement in its choice. This is not about attribution narrowly defined, but about the wider issue of checking that the impact is broadly relevant in the sector.

- The case studies ask about other funding and support that case study PSOs have received: it is possible that the PSO was effective, but this was not entirely due to BEST-AC.

As Mayne explains, the approach is: "measuring with the aim of reducing the uncertainty about the contribution made, not proving the contribution made"[11].

CONCLUSION

The business environment in Tanzania has many influences, whether government-mediated, market-related, or external. The business associations themselves have other influences beyond BEST-AC, such as other sources of support. Attribution of BEST-AC's work has additional challenges because BEST-AC is one step removed from the advocacy. It is not itself carrying out advocacy, or even establishing organisations to do so, but seeking to support and empower business associations to carry out advocacy.

The LIA is set up to give an informed but inevitably probabilistic picture on the attribution of results from the BEST-AC programme. BEST-AC naturally and correctly works in partnership with other agencies so it is important to interpret these attribution methods within an assumption of multi-causality.

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[11] Mayne, J (1999) *Addressing Attribution Through Contribution Analysis: Using Performance Measures Sensibly*. Discussion Paper. Office of the Auditor General of Canada.