



NGOs, Evidence, Policy and Practice

Development Studies Association (DSA) Study Group on NGOs in Development

1 May 2013 Webinar Report

1. Background

After consultation with Study Group members and Convenors at the end of 2012, the study group on NGOs and Development agreed to hold an event on the theme of evidence and how NGOs respond to this agenda. An opportunity arose in early 2013 to hold a joint workshop on this theme with the DSA/EADI Study Group on Multidimensional Poverty and Poverty Dynamics and Human Development and Capability Association: Sustainable Human Development Thematic Group. The event was planned for 5 –6 April at the University of East London. However, due to the low numbers of registered participants across all three study groups, it was decided to cancel the event and re-arrange a virtual meeting of the NGO Study Group.

INTRAC agreed to host a webinar at which the same 4 papers would be presented on Weds 1 May. There was one change in the papers presented, with Rachel Hayman providing a presentation and Funmi Ogunlusi choosing to present her material instead at the DSA annual conference in November 2013. The final agenda is annexed.

2. Participants & Attendees

Chair: Rachel Hayman, INTRAC

Presenters: Kate Gooding, University of Leeds; Tiina Kontinen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland; Rachel Hayman, INTRAC, Jo Jeans, CAFOD (representing PPA *Empowerment & Accountability Learning group*)

Online questions facilitator: Susannah Pickering-Saqqa, University of East London

Over 50 people expressed an interest in attending (see separate participant list). On the day, 19 participants attended all or part of the webinar from UK, Ireland, Jordan, Switzerland, and Uganda. Participants represented NGOs, academic institutions and independent researchers/consultants.

3. Key discussion points

Kate Gooding's presentation on "evidence-based advocacy" was based on 6 months of fieldwork in Malawi in which she spent time with case-study NGOs. The concept of "evidence-based advocacy" was problematised as evidence was used for the multiple purposes of identifying, understanding and proving. Discussion points included the definition of research and the ethics of using people as evidence.

Tiina Kontinen's presentation on developing contextualised monitoring of empowerment considered how development actors can address the "need to show and the need to know" the effectiveness of their empowerment interventions. Discussions focussed on how such a methodology, once developed, might be used by development actors, and whether it would complement or replace traditional matrix approaches to monitoring.

Rachel Hayman's presentation explored the process of undertaking a systematic review on behalf of DFID and the implications for NGOs in providing evidence of their impact. It highlighted the lack of acknowledgement of the processes of change within the systematic review methodology of this particular review. Discussions ranged from the broader concerns about the undervaluing of qualitative research to the challenges of establishing causal relationships between inputs and outcomes within projects.

Jo Jean's presentation outlined some key findings from the experience of four NGOs in developing and implementing BOND's NGO Evidence Principles. One of the principles, Voice and Inclusions, is designed to ensure that the perspectives of people living in poverty are incorporated into any considerations of evidence. Discussions highlighted DFID's support for and engagement with the development of the BOND principles.

In the closing discussion, comparisons were made across the differing epistemological assumptions outlined in the presentations - within the set of BOND principles, the contextualised monitoring approach and the DFID systematic review – and how these reflected wider debates and challenges around evidence.

4. Webinar Feedback

In discussion with participants and convenors it was agreed that the success of the event was due to:

- Wide dissemination of invitations via NGO Study Group membership and contact database, DSA website and Bulletin, INTRAC web site and e-bulletin, LinkedIn International Development groups.
- Over 50 people registering for the event from all around the world, with four people (including a DFID staff member) expressing interest in receiving papers/recordings although unable to attend. Another 3 people have subsequently been in touch who could not attend but who wanted to receive the papers.
- Use of Webinar technology, which offered a time and cost-efficient way (for participants) of meeting and sharing ideas across an international membership of the Study Group. Also allows people to dip in and out if they have other obligations; or to not turn up if other priorities arise.
- User-friendly Webinar software, which allows for high quality presentations and discussions.
- A very clear set of joining instructions emailed to each registered participant by INTRAC and the use of test sessions with each Presenter before the event.

The following issues were identified as needing further thought next time:

- While it is cost-effective for participants (as participant was free), webinars do require preparation time and technical support on the day. We need to weigh up the cost of running versus the benefit of reaching out to a wider audience. People could be asked to pay to participate; or we might have to limit participation to DSA members only.
- It was difficult to get participant engagement beyond the Presenters and Convenors? Reasons given by participants for not engaging more included:
 - Reluctant to speak when don't know the others in the 'room'
 - Know that they can email the presenters directly afterwards so prefer that option to speaking when they don't feel comfortable with the technology and not knowing who is in the room
 - Not having a microphone
- Recognising that discussion may be limited, possible options to increase engagement might be:
 - Presenters to ask explicit questions at the end of each paper for Participant discussion.
 - All participants (numbers allowing) to be invited to introduce themselves at the start of Webinar in order to encourage familiarity with who is in the room.
 - Chat function to be used to ask participants questions at end of each presentation.
- How to encourage the maximum number of registered participants to become DSA members? The workshop has led to a few additional people asking to join the mailing list; they seem mostly to be Masters or PhD students (i.e. currently non-fee paying members of the DSA), but others we need to check with the DSA office.
- A couple of people mentioned that it was too long, and that fewer papers and a shorter timeframe would be preferable.

5. Conclusions

- The webinar was considered successful in providing an opportunity to bring the study group together virtually – which otherwise would not have happened. It demonstrated the reach we can have well beyond the UK and the usual academic constituency.
- The Study Group would run future Webinar events as a cost and time-efficient way of meeting across an international group, although these should complement rather than replace face-to-face meetings as they should be seen to serve different purposes.
- The Group will work to encourage broader participant engagement at the next Webinar.
- Discussions would continue on the issues emerging from the presentations between Presenters and Study Group members.
- The presentations made at the Webinar would be made available via the DSA and INTRAC web sites.
- Options for following-up on some of the general questions raised, notably around meanings of evidence, will be explored as well as publication avenues (although we recognise that most of the papers are based on ongoing rather than completed work).

- The experience of using webinar by study groups should be considered by the DSA study group convenors, and possibly the costs and benefits discussed in the next Council meeting.

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Agenda

Wednesday 1st May ,13h30-16h30 (BST or GMT+1)

This virtual seminar (webinar), organised by the DSA Study Group on NGOs in Development, will explore the pressure on NGOs to produce more robust evidence in their reports, evaluations, case studies and communications.

12h30-13h30	<i>Set-up - Please follow the instructions on how to join in good time</i>
13h30-13h50	Welcome, Overview and Instructions for Participation
13h50-14h20	Research and advocacy: ideas from NGOs in Malawi , <i>Kate Gooding, University of Leeds</i>
14h20-14h50	Towards contextual evidence of empowerment in a development NGO , <i>Tiina Kontinen, University of Jyväskylä, Finland</i>
14h50-15h00	SHORT BREAK
15h00-15h30	Experiences from a systematic review of aid for maternal health: a reflection on why NGO studies rarely made the grade , <i>Rachel Hayman, INTRAC</i>
15h30-16h00	The Evidence Principles: experiences from a pilot tool , <i>Jo Jeans, CAFOD (representing PPA Empowerment & Accountability Learning group)</i>
16h00-16h30	General questions, conclusions and next steps