

Current procedures and policies dominating aid: building strong relationships and enabling NGOs meet their stated aims?

A summary report on research carried out in Uganda, 2000-2004.

This document provides a summary of key issues arising from the research; a full report is available, with several detailed case studies underscoring the various conclusions presented here.

1. Introduction to the research: the team, the methodology and the frameworks of analysis

a. Why this research?

This research stems from the observation that there are growing numbers of policies and procedures being put in place to support 'partners' in the south (away from the relatively minimal procedures and a more responsive approach to funding in the late 1980s), towards a more tightly structured and bureaucratic set of systems.

What and who informs the development of these manuals and regulations, how similar are they across agencies, and how does it feel to be at the receiving end of them? An initial phase of the research found that UK NGOs were heavily influenced by donors and changing donor demands, as well as by the increasingly stringent requirements of their boards (often with business people sitting on them), and that many aspects of private sector management by results were being introduced into development NGOs.

But questions were also raised about how appropriate the tools being increasingly adopted by UK NGOs were in improving their roles and relationships with those they supported in the south. It was noted that few of these changes in UK NGOs were being driven by feedback from field staff or partners, rather they were driven by shifts in management agendas across the business and public sectors in the UK (and beyond) and there was a growing standardisation of development management tools among donors and UK NGOs.

These changes have continued apace. Restructuring, strategic planning, new policies and procedures for accountability, and the promotion of new forms of work, especially advocacy, are evident across the board. UK NGOs now spend much time and energy developing new policies and procedures for use by those they work with across the globe. This research was thus developed to try and chart these changes and to explore the links and connections from north to south, in two country case studies- South Africa and Uganda¹.

The research teams in all three countries were interested in exploring how do local NGOs engage with, shape, change or reject these new requirements. We have focused on the relationships between UK donors and NGOs and their partners overseas in Uganda and South Africa to understand how NGOs negotiate changing management practices and donor conditionalities. What are the implications of using these tools for the relationships and activities in Uganda and SA? As key examples of new management practices the research focused on rational management tools (logframes, monitoring and evaluation, impact indicators, reporting, strategic planning), and other donor conditionalities (e.g. gender, advocacy, rights and participation). As the research progressed it widened to explore issues of power, identity and development practice. The research is an attempt to start to trace the impact of the detail of aid management and funding conditionalities on shaping development work.

¹ The research team in Uganda included staff from ActionAid Uganda, CDRN, CBR, MUK and MISR. The team was led by T. Wallace, Oxford University. The research in Uganda has been funded primarily by ESCOR, DFID in the UK, with support from ActionAid Uganda.

b. Methodology

It was important to continue to explore issues raised in the first phase of the research about the compatibility or otherwise of the two languages of development : on the one hand as accountability to donors, project planning, indicators and impact assessment with a focus on achievement, and on the other as the language of participation, bottom up, building strong local civil society, ownership and sustainability.

In the UK the research mapped the changing donor landscape, comparing this with the baseline information collected in the first phase of the work in 1995, and the impact of these ongoing changes on UK NGOs. In Uganda and South Africa, the research investigated how southern NGOs understand, receive and respond to or manipulate the demands that now accompany the release of money from the North. To investigate this, the teams in Uganda, South Africa and UK combined two elements:

- Broad research to understand the context within which NGOs are working
- Deep research to follow through the links from donor or NGO in the UK to field level work within the country concerned.

An analysis was done of the database of NGOs in Uganda and relevant literature was read to gain a picture of the broad NGO context in Uganda. Then several NGOs were chosen for a first round of interviews, to establish the broad parameters and trends around the relationship between donors and UK-based NGOs with southern NGOs, and how different players perceived these relationships to impact on the NGOs in Uganda. From the initial round of interviews key trends and research questions were developed. These were then followed up in depth in the case studies that were subsequently undertaken.

The organisations interviewed included large and medium sized international NGOs with their headquarters in UK, and national Ugandan NGOs². They represented a wide range of experiences and perspectives, and they provided a variety of responses because of their somewhat varying visions, missions, values and goals. Some were exclusively donor agencies, others were membership and or network organisations representing the interests of their members or special groups, while others were either international or local NGOs involved in different development programmes.

Importantly, almost every NGO, local and international, requested confidentiality and anonymity as a condition of their participation in the research. People would only agree to talk to the researchers under this strict condition. This has implications for development practice, because if NGOs cannot say what they want to say about their work and relationships openly, how can relations of trust and transparency really be built?

The donors selected for interview in Uganda were DFID as the key UK-based funder, the European Union and the World Bank. These represented key multi-lateral players and one bilateral, the most significant bi-lateral funder in Uganda. The government staff interviewed were located in the Office of the Prime Minister and the Department of Local Government. Discussions were held, and meetings attended, with the staff of UPPAP based in the Ministry of Finance.

² These were: ACORD, Action Aid Uganda, AIDS Information Centre, AMREF, Appropriate Technology Uganda (AT), CAFOD, CARE, CDRN, Church of Uganda (PDR), DENIVA, Farm Africa, HelpAge International, HURINET, Living Earth Uganda, NAWOU, NUDIPU, NGO Forum, OXFAM, Plan International, Population Concern, SCF UK, TASO, Uganda Deb Network, Uganda Land Alliance, Uganda Women Finance Trust, Uganda Women Network, UPPAP, Uganda Society for Disabled Children, VSO, Water Aid and World Vision.

The one to one interviews were supplemented by round table workshops with donors and NGOs and by group discussions at some of the NGO head quarters in Kampala. The key findings were discussed at a workshop at CDRN in 2003, with a range of participating and non-participating NGOs.

c. The conceptual framework for the research

The critical areas of thinking our work drew from included:

1. Concepts of change: on the one hand, change can be seen as as a controllable, measurable event, that follows predictable routes and can be managed bureaucratically. This approach is tied to targets, impact, performance by results and dominates current public sector work in UK. DFID draws heavily on this approach, as do the trustees from the private sector. This is contrasted with an understanding of change as erratic, dependent on context and other events, and a concept of promoting social change that involves building up people to manage complex challenges and demands rather than systems for managing change. Our argument is that the UK NGOs are embedded in their social context which is dominated by management by results, yet they are working in contexts where social transformation is a much more complex, contingent experience.
2. Cross-cultural working. UK NGOs appear to work in universally prescribed ways almost regardless of local context. The lack of understanding of local forms of thinking reflects poor cross cultural awareness, that deeply affects their relationships. We will go further along this path and talk of the inherent racism in the approaches we encounter, with their connotations of north = superior and south = inferior, north has knowledge and skills which south needs to learn etc. The top- down and one-way nature of the relationships, we argue, is rooted in past history and ways of thinking and relating north-south.
3. Naming and owning: many of the processes such as gender, participation, group work, movements, start in countries of the south. They are then picked up by 'the north' and repackaged and exported as conditionalities.
4. Depoliticisation of development aid, which continues to be seen as a technical issue, not one of relationships, power, politics. Critical issues are around power- the power of donors, the limited power of recipients in contexts where resources are limited and the number of donors quite small. Limited analysis of power seriously undermines NGO commitments to building partnerships, because they do not recognise the need to counteract their power and position by ways that allow those with less power to be heard, participate etc. One way of responding to a lack of voice, representation and power is to join the dominant discourse and that is one 'coping strategy' clearly seen in Uganda.

2. The context for NGOs in Uganda: donor, government and NGO roles and perspectives.

From the state of collapse when the NRM took power in 1986, following years of instability, conflict and political isolation, to the "growth", "structural adjustment", then "poverty reduction" eras, to decentralisation and the LC structure, to the recent opening of the political space: donors, NGOs and Government have found themselves in a fast-changing environment, upon which they have had different degrees of influence.

a. NGOs in Uganda: the background

The NGO sector has been fast growing since 1986 in Uganda. Throughout the 1990's the sector was pervaded by enthusiasm and confidence in NGOs, as well as cynicism. Alongside NGOs involved in essential service delivery, there were also 'briefcase NGOs' that had sprung up, usually in response to donor funding. A few NGOs also entered the arena around rights, e.g. rights for women, land rights, lobbying to cancel the debt, and involvement in civic education, although the GOU was much more cautious about these roles for NGOs, and many NGOs have themselves been hesitant to engage on this more "political" terrain.

In the 1990s the sector was somewhat fragmented, largely focused on delivering services, with international NGOs (INGOs) dominating many lobbying for a, for which they also hold much of the funding. Given the degree of co-ordination, competition, dependence on foreign funding for survival, and heavy presence in Kampala, questions have been raised about NGO ability and commitment to work with and represent the grassroots in the countryside. INGOs remain dominant and the most vocal, probably because they have more experience and far more resources than local NGOs. While some work closely with local NGOs in funding partnerships and work on capacity building, other INGOs remain operational and work directly with communities in rural and urban areas.

Things were changing during the period of the research in a number of ways. There are many conflicting pressures and influences on the NGO sector at the start of the new millennium. The government wants them to become an integral part of the fight against poverty, through support to service delivery at the district level. They should be integrated into the district plans, their budgets declared and their work is to complement that of government offices. Government has been less welcoming of NGOs in other areas, for example, civic education. Many donors want them to become monitors of government spending and behaviour and to call them to account for the use of these new untied budgets. Others want them to become active in the policy making fora, especially representing and working with the wider civil society on issues such as poverty assessments and development the poverty reduction strategy papers. Some local and international NGOs have their own agendas, which include examining and questioning donor as well as government behaviour. It is against this fast changing and complex set of agendas, requirements, roles and responsibilities that this research took place.

b. An overview of NGOs and their activities

Some of the initial findings emerged from the NGO registration data held in the Office of the Prime Minister:

1. The sector is dynamic and fast growing, in a context where there is a constitutional and legal framework for addressing the rights of women and children, for improving services for poor people, and for working on burning issues such as HIV/AIDS, peace and reconciliation. The numbers of registered NGOs was 2655 in 2000, but over 4000 in 2003 and still growing. The numbers of CBOs is of course much higher.
2. The bulk of the sector is made up of local NGOs: 92% of registered NGOs, working from the national right down to the community level.
3. Local NGOs may have very short life spans, others are well established. The sector is fluid and responsive to all kinds of external factors including conflict, community needs and demands, availability of funding. Many local NGOs come and go, many are unstable, some only exist in name, while others are well-established and long term.
4. Local NGOs are very diverse in their coverage, location, size and focus. Most local NGOs tend to be clustered in areas where security and accessibility are good, and many are urban based. Activities depend mainly on the problems and needs of the people in their areas of operation, as well as on the different agendas of the funding institutions and/or governments. In a sample drawn from the NGO data base, we found that 15% are engaged in evangelism, something that is often not included within the development NGO sector activities at the international level, although the lines between evangelism and service are often very porous for faith based agencies worldwide. Agriculture accounted for 12%, programmes for women and youths for another 12%, as did micro finance or income generating activities. Quite a number of NGOs are involved in more than one sector. Almost all the NGOs were seen to have incorporated an income generating activity into their operations, mostly in the area of micro finance or revolving loan schemes. The shift in donor funding has compelled NGOs to change their strategies. Some now focus more on the 'software' aspects of the social sectors (for example capacity building for government staff and CBOs, policy advocacy and promoting a rights agenda), and some try and access funding for social service delivery through the districts, rendering them less independent from government funding. Whereas NGOs working in the northern and the eastern parts of Uganda are mainly involved in relief, war trauma counselling,

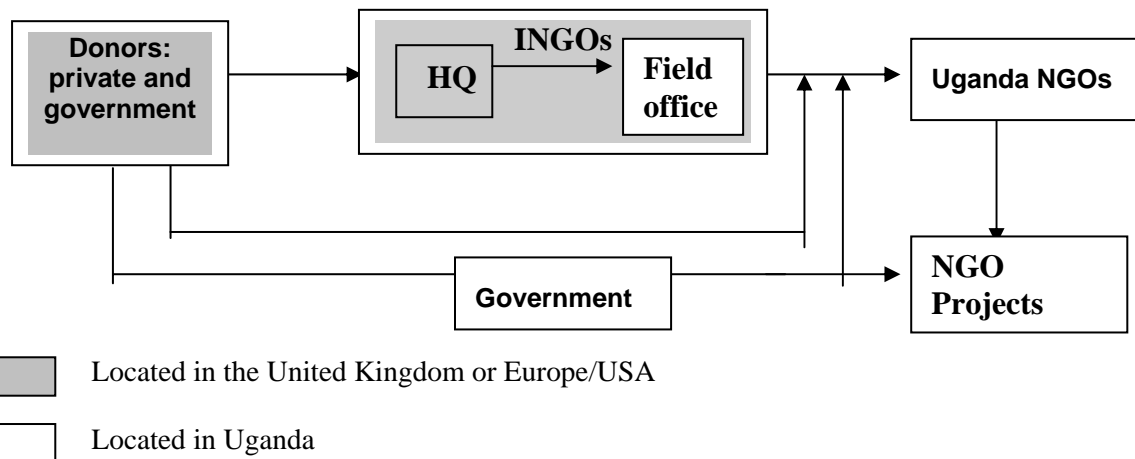
rehabilitation, resettlement and recovery work, NGOs in the central, western and southern areas of Uganda are involved in a diversity of development programmes. Many NGOs have also got actively involved in promoting gender and children's rights.

5. There are significant numbers of international NGOs working in Uganda, many have been there since the start of the Museveni era and others are more recent. They too have a range of mandates and operations, and they vary significantly in their size and the scale of their funding. Some INGOs are involved in advocacy and policy work and in addressing rights, as well as working on service provision and community mobilisation. Others work in the more remote and conflict affected areas and their focus is on humanitarian and emergency aid. These NGOs tend to be well facilitated with communication and transport services that most local NGOs cannot afford.
6. The funding sources for NGOs are also very diverse. Funding for local NGOs generated within Uganda is limited. It ranges from membership fees and subscription fees, grants, donations and government subventions for most CBOs and local NGOs. Some organisations have access to donor funding from INGOs, bilateral or multilateral agencies. These are a minority of Ugandan NGOs, but they are the largest and some also have extensive relations with a wide range of smaller NGOs whom they, in turn, fund. We did not explore the issues of funding, policies and procedures of small Ugandan NGOs which do not receive any funding from outside Uganda, although they form the bulk of the NGO sector in Uganda. In contrast, INGOs have a range of funding sources and strategies, ranging from child sponsorship, through to shops and other forms of public fundraising. They also have access to project and programme funding from their governments and multi-lateral organisations.

3. Critical funding issues for NGOs in Uganda.

a. The aid chain

Aid flows are complex and there are many different channels through which aid is disbursed, which can be represented as follows:



This funding chain is complex and subject to constant changes:

1. Diverse funding channels. Funding can go direct from donors to INGOs to local NGOs; it can go direct from donors to government in Uganda and then to local NGOs; or directly from donors to local NGOs in country. The preferred channels for funding are different between different donors and change over time. DFID for instance used to fund only through UK-based NGOs, then in 1994 it shifted to providing some funds directly to NGOs in Uganda. Some funders, such as the Community Fund and Comic Relief, continue to fund only through UK NGOs and have no in country funding. In contrast the EU, which had no direct funding to NGOs in the past, started exploring the new direct funding streams for civil society in 2002; this represented a shift from the past where all EU funding was state to state and channelled through government.

2. Changes in donor agendas Over that period, DFID also changed its funding focus and procedures, from responsive funding for NGO designed projects to funding projects that fitted DFID's poverty agenda to umbrella funding for a few NGOs working strategically at policy level in Uganda.

The size of the funding flows change also. During the 1990s, the global trend was for funding NGOs; the World Bank defined the state as seen as heavy, inefficient and often corrupt, and most large donors subscribed to this analysis. It changed dramatically at the end of the 1990s with a donor shift to directly funding governments that had pro-poor policies and shared aims around democracy and governance issues.

3. The funding mechanisms also changed and diversified over time. Donors may give grants for the work, they may offer co-funding. They may also allow NGOs to compete for bids for discrete pieces of work administered through contracts, with retrospective payment on completion of a good/satisfactory job against the contract. There has been a move recently towards 'partnership' or umbrella funding for a few selected NGOs by some donors, where the funding is based on shared strategic aims not on detailed project proposals.

International NGOs change their funding priorities and practices as well, often in response to new strategic plans, Trustee requirements, changes among their donors, and new ideas circulating in the development community at home. The situation is not static but fast changing and fluid.

4. Webs of relationships as well as linear aid flows. While there are clear aid flows through a complex and changing set of relations and conditions in the aid chain, it is also important to recognise that each "actor" is involved in a complex web of relationships, which affect behaviour and focus. For example, DFID relates to the Treasury in UK and is part of wider government agendas and thinking about how best to achieve change. Currently the UK context relies heavily on concepts of managed change, that targets can be met if the right inputs are made and procedures followed. It is a rational and linear approach to managing change, and this has an impact on the way DFID frames its work.

UK NGOs have relationships of competition and occasional co-operation in the UK, and contacts with a range of consultants and think tanks, as well as government agencies, around development. These influence their thinking and actions, as well as their relationships with their key donors, which may include the public in UK. In Uganda NGOs have inter-relationships which are sustained by, for example, movements of staff between agencies, attending meetings together, and working on advocacy and lobbying issues together. For people at the level of the communities their contact with CBOs or NGOs or donors is only one small part of their web of on-going relationships that shape their opportunities and day to day context.

5. Capturing, fluidity, change and complexity of relationships: all this makes for fluidity and constantly changing patterns of aid and, given the dependence of NGOs on aid, this 'instability' around funding priorities and financial flows affects the NGO sector.

b. Bilateral and multilateral donors

The following key aspects have emerged:

- Most bilateral and multilateral donors to Ugandan NGOs now have detailed strategies for their work with civil society, even though civil society is often vaguely defined (e.g. DFID's 2000-03 Uganda country strategy paper). The focus was shifting away from funding NGO proposals, often built around specific areas of expertise and focused on clear areas of need in Uganda, towards strategic partnerships for reaching the millennium goals and implementing the donor's country strategy.
- DFID is continually revising and refining its understanding of the role of civil society and the role of NGOs within civil society, and as they change their funding relationships with government (with increasing emphasis on budget support and the PEAP), so they in turn

change their funding priorities and mechanisms for NGOs. Thus the shift away from service delivery (unless this is done in partnership with government or is especially innovative) towards rights based approaches, advocacy and lobbying work., and monitoring government or enabling poor people to call the government to account. The EC was revising its strategy for civil society in Uganda as well as in Europe with a direct support role for civil society. The EU, like DFID, wanted to find an appropriate role for civil society in the new context of basket funding and capacity building.

- DFID said it wanted to move beyond a donor-recipient relationship with NGOs but funding for Civil society was only a tiny percentage of funding in Uganda. While there are many different routes to bilateral and multilateral funding for NGOs, most were only open to UK-based or European NGOs working in Uganda. Local NGOs can access DFID funding through the international NGOs they partner with and who receive DFID funding, or directly in country. The EU was preparing a programme for funding local NGOs. NGOs can also access DFID funding now at the district level, as part of the basket funding for government programmes, implying a new way of working together with government on service delivery, while at the same time being asked to monitor government spending and use of budgets, and to promote poor people locally to call government to account.
- DFID is the largest and most influential bi-lateral funder to NGOs in Uganda and, since other leading influential agencies such as the World Bank and the EU share DFID's changing agendas for civil society and NGOs in Uganda, DFID is a critical player in shaping the NGO sector in Uganda. DFID are also influenced by dominant donor trends and the wider UK political context. The focus now is primarily on meeting the targets outlined in the millennium goals around poverty reduction, working through governments which have 'good policies' as defined by the donor community, and encouraging the poor to gain their rights with the support of the NGO sector. The NGO sector is expected to continue to deliver services, but in partnership with government and in support of government targets; this trend is also clear in UK.
- The EU used one of the same UK consultants that worked with DFID in these issues, working alongside some local consultants. Donors heavily rely on a few key institutions for consultancy support, especially- for DFID- one or two Universities and one or two consultancy organisations, even if they are not very familiar with Uganda and make proposals based on generic ideas rather than local knowledge. The result is that the same analysis and ideas tend to get replicated across the donor community through consultancies. A small pool of people were exerting much influence with donors around civil society definitions and roles. Indeed the EC openly shared the views of DFID in understanding civil society and referred to a paper written by IDS, which was proving seminal to the thinking about civil society among donors. Uganda is seen by donors as a positive context for much experimental work in development aid, including the need to involve civil society in key roles in the management of donor aid. External consultants do, however, work alongside local consultants, though the TOR and agendas are often set externally.

c. Other UK funders

In the UK, Community Fund and Comic Relief fund the international NGOs that in turn partner local NGOs in Uganda, in which case the grant follows the INGO policies and procedures. Only a few local NGOs interviewed had had direct contact with these funders. The one who knew CF directly had found them to be bureaucratic, operating with complex procedures and with little locally available information. The two who gave feedback on Comic Relief had different experiences: one found them to be committed and allowed space for the NGO to operate as it wanted, the other found their demands tight and bureaucratic. The more radical NGOs in Uganda dislike the fact that CR funds through UK NGOs, the funding is then affected by the quality of relationships between the UK NGO and the Ugandan partner.

Overall, however, local NGOs appear not to really experience the different approaches or policies of different UK donors and they do not benefit from the new partnership agreements that DFID has with some UK NGOs, which allows them flexibility in use of funding.

d. International NGOs

1. As recipients of donor funding and funding from their HQ. Most international NGOs met receive their funding from their HQ agency based in the UK, though some can also apply to a range of northern donor counterparts (sister organisations in a federation). To access funding they either write project proposals or they need to show that their strategic and annual plans are in line with the current global agency strategy.

The country directors are responsible for raising this funding from HQ and, increasingly, through a range of local channels, especially from donors who are decentralising and relocating their funding bases within Uganda. This reflects the growing pressure to find new funding sources experienced by NGOs in UK as some key donors shift away from Europe to in-country funding.

All the country directors interviewed said that local fundraising raised both workload and ethical issues for them. As competition for funding and profile increases in UK, so the pressure grows for staff in Uganda to compete with each other and with local NGOs for grants and contracts. Fundraising loads increase, other “development” work takes second place and “visible” projects acquire a new premium (especially if they can be funded e.g. by Comic Relief or Community Fund rather than drawing down too much on internal budgets).

While some INGOs have experienced increased autonomy following decentralisation and regionalisation, all were aware of the need to fit the country programme to the key global strategic priorities of their organisation. Some were increasingly tied to following detailed business and implementation plans, some may take grants or contracts that tie them very closely to donor agendas and conditionalities, and special projects are sometimes developed to capture existing donor funds.

2. Funding and power issues. The issues of power between HQ and field offices around funding policies and procedures are rarely analysed by INGOs, yet it played a major role in development relationships at every level. Power is especially tied to the allocation of funding and who controls budgets. The tensions are often glossed over as inevitable, with grievances on either side. In the field, staff felt pushed around by endless demands for fundraising, new policies and procedures, shifting strategies and demands for visits, reports, plans and budgets, and evidence of success. These tensions were apparent in the interviews, especially around the process/experiential approach to change versus the need for measuring and proving outputs to justify funding and to attain further funding from HQ and from other donors.

The pressure to find simple recipes and replicable solutions was strong, even in an agency where people understood much about the need for analysis, reflection and learning. There were many contradictions, including issues of local vs international identity and the existing dominant culture rendering processes to transform power on the ground impotent. They raised questions about whose knowledge and priorities count, suggesting that those at the centre over-rule those developed locally. They related this to the straight jacket of financial and other accounting and the demands to provide evidence of impact, which militate against adopting the more open and ‘learning’ approaches the organisation espoused.

In relation to their relationship with their local partners, similar issues of power of funding, contradictory cultures, and systems out of step with demands for learning and taking new approaches were identified. The lack of downward accountability to partners was discussed; partners are highly accountable to their INGO funders but there is no reciprocal accountability downwards. INGOs often have one set of funding policies and procedures for all countries and all partners, yet partners vary greatly as do local contexts.

3. The issue of funding and profile. One thorny issue for the INGOs (and indeed for donors to these NGOs such as Community Fund, Comic Relief and DFID) was that of profile and attribution. Donors fund the work of other agencies, and it is the implementing agencies which do this work on

the ground. For all UK donors and for many UK-based INGOs funding is channelled through local 'partners'. However, when it comes to issues of accountability and the demonstration of impact and effectiveness - issues now dominating development agendas in the UK- they are all under increasing pressure to claim the successes of projects or programmes as their own, even where it entails appropriating their local partners' achievements.

The development of new logos and the need to get these logos out into the public domain is very evident in Uganda. INGO logos may appear on documents that purport to be the 'voice of local civil society'; these logos may appear on partners' own business cards. The tensions experienced by INGO staff are very acute. On the one hand they are asked to facilitate and enable partners to do the development work, but on the other they are told to ensure that the profile of their agency is raised through this work.

Local staff can find these mixed messages confusing: they feel competent and proud to belong to an INGO and may even question why they need to find and develop partner organisations when they are able to do the job quicker and better themselves. They are Ugandan so why not simply work operationally and then claim the credit for the achievements? Most international NGOs now push them to work through partners, which may well be weaker organisations, yet still want the international agency to get the credit and claim the impact.

It is a major issue that is poorly analysed and discussed in development agencies. Does providing the funding and other support legitimise the donor agency claiming the successes? If it does, then why do they not also associate themselves more closely with the failures, which are instead blamed on local organisations that lack adequate capacity? The current push to show the effectiveness of funding, to prove cost effectiveness and impact and to demonstrate positive change is a pressure on every agency from DFID through to the smallest NGOs. This can lead to seriously mixed messages being sent to staff about the role and value of local partners. It can also lead to competition for profile and claiming success, while allowing donors to distance themselves from failure.

4. As donors to local NGOs. Most UK based NGOs work through local organisations, and building and funding these 'partnerships' is their central funding strategy. A few continue to work directly with the poor, especially in emergency or humanitarian aid, but those in the sample all focused primarily on working with local partners- local government, NGOs and CBOs.

All INGOs now have clear strategic plans, drawn from and closely aligned with the global strategies of their organisations. This in turn has led to major realignments (one agency had reduced the number of their partners from over 50 to about 10, focusing on large network and advocacy organisations and moving away from support to small, localised NGOs, another had to develop exit strategies from communities where they had worked intensively over many years).

The strategic shifts in funding priorities, tied to new strategic plans have significant implications and impact on local NGOs. Some lose their funding almost overnight, others are required to change their focus to retain a funding relationship, sometimes staff have to be shed in large numbers. There appears to be little analysis of the implications of major strategic shifts by these INGOs. Indeed they often argue that they have the right and indeed the obligation to their own funders to develop clear strategic aims and objectives and to seek out those who can support the delivery of these. Some however do agonise over exit or phase out strategies that do respect those they have worked with in the past. Some UK based NGOs have built up a legacy of distrust and suspicion by making such rapid changes made in line with externally driven agendas rather than the needs of those they have been working with in the past.

The INGOs all work very differently with their partners. Yet their requirements are myriad and often very tight around funding. These often include demands for very detailed reporting requirements around budgets. Line by line budgets sometimes have to be reported against every month; some agencies require every cup of tea or samosa to be accounted for by local NGOs before they will pay expenses.

Some very significant issues around INGO funding of local NGOs emerged from the interviews. These were:

- The fact that no UK based international NGO had passed on the benefits of block grants or partnership funding to their partners in Uganda.
- Almost all donor funding channelled through international NGOs is administered using the INGOs policies and procedures. Local NGOs were usually unclear where their funding had come from i.e. who the back donor was. So NGOs receiving their funds in Uganda did not often experience the relatively open and process oriented approach taken by e.g. Comic Relief with NGOs in UK.
- The power given to those who hold the funding was not properly recognised, and was glossed over when in setting up local 'partnerships.' INGOs were however very aware of the power their funders held over them.

The interviews carried out for this research suggested that the pressures to move fast, to be upwardly accountable, to deny the power of donors in relationships often, but not always, over-rode the need to work in more open, flexible and sensitive ways. The pressure to find partners to deliver on international agendas risked over-ruling the role of being a supporter and builder of local organisations and processes. Many of these pressures came to field offices from the UK context and the web of relationships that UK NGOs were involved in.

d. Ugandan NGOs

1. As aid recipients. All the Ugandan NGOs interviewed depend mainly on donor funding. Some NGOs felt they had adequate funding and few problems with accounting for the funds, while others experienced funding gaps and problems with reporting to their donors. The NGOs that are membership organisations can draw on membership subscriptions and donations from other sister organisations abroad and well-wishers, but most have no alternative significant sources of income beyond project funding from donors.

INGOs, bilateral and multilateral organisations provide most of the funding for the local NGOs. Of late funds through banded funding and local governments has also become available to local NGOs, but the competition for declining donor funds among the local NGOs is increasing. There is increasing pressure from the government for NGOs to declare their income/budgets to be spent on programmes in a particular district, so their budgets could be treated as part of the district budget, and to raise their funding in future through district budgets. Many new NGOs are trying to tap into this basket of donor resources and are starting to face tougher times; at the same time donors (including many INGOs) are tightening the conditionalities around funding.

All NGOs talked of funding conditionalities and the increase in these in the past few years. Some NGOs said that donors had become stricter on demanding accountability for their funds, dictating specific planning, reporting and accountability systems as well as other systems and procedures due to fraudulent practices by some southern NGOs.

Many local NGOs observed that there is a tendency for some NGOs to develop proposals to respond to the interests of the donors in order to get funding, although they may not have the competencies in-house to run certain programmes.

A number of NGOs are funded by different donors: while diversified funding sources make available more resources to a southern NGO, they often complicate the working of that NGO by splitting their work into many programmes dictated by the priorities and interest of different funders. Unless an NGO has a strong culture it can fail under these circumstances. To be able to deal with many donors, the organisation needs to develop some special skills such as good report writing, computer, auditing (internal and external) and networking with others to enable them to understand the language of donors.

Almost all the Ugandan NGOs observed that there is still serious dependency on external donor funding for NGO activities and this perpetuates the 'dependency syndrome' of the Uganda NGOs. There are very few opportunities and little efforts made to fundraise locally. One NGO staff noted that: *"NGOs have poor negotiating skills and a colonial mentality- lacking confidence to challenge. Yet donors want to be called partners and not donors!! Ugandans should tell donors how money is to be used and not be pushed around by donors. The money is 'ours'"*

This reflected the Government's own dependence on external funding and led to debates in Uganda over whether aid was undermining local democracy and perpetuating a government agenda that was more responsive to donor demands than local needs. Many Ugandan NGOs raised the same thoughts during the interviews: their lack of independent fundraising was forcing them into dependent and weak relationships with donors, who were able to set the agendas and conditions for the local NGO development agenda and tended to undervalue indigenous organisations and cultural forms.

Ugandan NGOs did not distinguish between their donors. While INGOs and different donors pride themselves on the very different funding relationships they create between themselves and those they fund this view was not reflected in feedback from the local NGOs. Donors were definitely experienced as donors and not partners in development.

2. As donors to other smaller NGOs or CBOs in Uganda. Many of the problems of power and creating dependency were said to be replicated in the funding relations between smaller local NGOs and the larger more powerful umbrella NGOs based in Kampala.

4. Donor conditionalities

The issue of donor conditionalities is critical and all the international, local NGOs and CBOs interviewed talked of the significance of different conditionalities and how they experienced them, sometimes positively, often negatively. Donors set conditionalities in a number of different ways; they may relate to:

- programme content and development purpose (service delivery, rights based approaches, working to build civil society, advocacy, poverty focus etc),
- project design and implementation (tools for managing the project cycle)
- funding modalities and accountability systems (the changing nature of grant giving and accountability/reporting systems)
- the redefinition of the roles to be played by civil society in poverty reduction and development

These conditions come down the aid chain along with the much needed funding that all NGOs in Uganda are searching for. Some NGOs manage to negotiate and modify the conditions, some have influenced the terms and conditions of aid in different ways; many just accept and work with them as best they can. The research showed that the terms and conditions for accessing, using and accounting for aid have increased and did have a real impact on the way NGOs were working and their relationships with their donors and those they in turn fund.

a. Changes in programme content and development purpose

1. International NGOs. The focus of many INGOs has changed in recent years, and change is a constant feature of their agendas, in line with their country level strategies which 'nested' within the global plans, reflecting the key purposes and aims of the wider organisation.

Strategic planning is a new process for INGOs (although it is now used by all UK-based NGOs) and has experienced many teething problems (approval systems for country strategic plans are for instance often unclear and many agencies work for long period with draft or unapproved plans). The purpose of strategic planning is to focus, to clarify purpose, to prioritise and as such was seen as a tool for professionalising the NGO sector, following the private sector. However, the NGO

sector has settled for a planning process that is less flexible than some of the models available, made more rigid by the fact that for those with partnership funding agreements with DFID in the UK, their effectiveness is to be judged against their strategic plans rather than project level work. This ties them to holding strategies as tools for planning, monitoring and evaluation, rather than, for example, as maps to guide flexible and devolved decision-making.

Different degrees of autonomy are given to field offices within organisations. In the case study INGOs, two operate without field offices and through visits to partners, and they take a flexible approach. While for some autonomy in the field office and at the country director level has risen, for others autonomy and local responsiveness have greatly decreased, with approaches and strategies increasingly being drawn from global documents and analysis, not local requirements. In one large agency strategies are translated into tight business plans against which their performance will be judged. While most country offices feed into a strategic planning process through consultation and feedback, the final reports are written in the UK and often draw heavily on the development context in the UK for their final shape. Global strategies are often 'rolled out' for them by head office. There is a sense in some agencies that the global strategies do not reflect their local agendas well. The extent to which local field offices and staff feel 'ownership' of the international strategies varies; Many in UK expect fast changes in field offices around the world, and provide little support to staff or partners to manage change; only a few allow change to go at a slow pace. Staff in the field office may not really understand the new strategy or the changes it implies, or the reasons for these changes. It is rare for agencies to involve their partners in developing their strategies and there is very little debate about the way changes in agencies might affect the partners and the work on the ground; the change is always assumed to improve the work.

Strategic plans have entailed major shifts in the focus of many agencies. Some have moved from operational to partnership approaches; some have highlighted issues such as gender or advocacy as their way of approaching poverty reduction; others have shifted away from support to service delivery local NGOs to working with alliance and networks on global issues. Some have focused and slimmed down their operations, others have shifted their focus while trying to work with the same partners, expecting them to change to fit the new agendas. One was phasing out of the country.

2. Local NGOs. The larger local NGOs also undertake strategic planning now, some drawing on the guidelines developed for their donor INGO. There is a push to develop strategic plans, though about half of the sample local NGOs did not have a written one at the time of the research. Many were working towards developing them and felt they were an important tool, especially for fundraising from donors.

Four local NGOs said they had developed strategic plans in a participatory way with their members or the communities where they worked, and at least two were clear they would only work with donors who accepted their strategic plan. They said, however, that only the strongest NGOs in Uganda could take that kind of stand vis-à-vis donors, because the need for funding for most NGOs was overwhelming. Others confirmed that they were trying to write their plans to fit different donor agendas.

Over half of the local NGOs talked of the difficulties raised for them by trying to work to the different strategic plans of their donors, and how the changes in donor strategies could cause stop-start funding, or raise new priorities and demand different ways of working from them. Several reported losing funding when a donor changed their strategic focus. When donors clearly stipulate the kind of programmes that they will fund in their strategic plans this definitely leads to some recipient NGOs changing their development agendas, planning, and reporting and accountability systems to fit the themes of the donors.

A few directors observed that global strategic planning puts the control of the development agenda in the hands of the international agencies; local NGOs have to find agencies that want to include them because they fit their plans, or change their focus to secure funding. Some of the case studies

describe local NGOs even changing their sector focus in response to the new strategic priorities of their donors.

b. Project design and implementation

Local NGO respondents outlined the following as the major tools employed by most UK- based NGOs, which they often experience as requirements to get access to aid money:

- Written guidelines relating to key issues that have to be addressed, for example on governance.
- Terms and conditions of grant making, progress reports etc.
- Written agreements between UK NGOs and partners
- Quality frameworks
- Knowledge management
- Logical frameworks
- Monitoring and evaluation frameworks
- Strategic planning, visioning techniques, organisational development, change management
- Participatory research methods
- Tool kits
- Impact assessment
- Branding

Many INGOs appear to use management tools and approaches with little analysis or reflection about their relevance to the local context, and the impact they may have on their work. The logical framework and reporting requirements were the two most commonly used tools and the focus of most discussion. Tools around gender, participation and advocacy work are addressed later.

1. Logical frameworks. The logframe has become a central tool for project planning, for guiding implementation and for evaluation of achievements. It is a framework that is based on a logical approach to change, where change is understood as linear and controllable. While the framework allows for assumptions and risks that could jeopardise the project, these are usually listed and left.

All the UK-based NGOs use logical frameworks in their work, even though some of them have reservations about their usefulness and relevance in the local context. All INGOs do not use them however, or use different versions or in different contexts. Given the dominance of UK funders in Uganda, it is not surprising that the research found that 100% of the local NGOs interviewed know about logframes and can use them, or sometimes had bought in experts to help them to write them. They are compulsory instruments for many donors, especially DFID and the UK based INGOs.

About a third of the local NGOs said they find aspects of the logframe tool useful; they help them to be more logical in planning projects. They help with becoming more focused, and really addressing the objectives of the project, thereby making them 'more effective and efficient'. The logical framework was deemed 'to be practical, logical and to give an overview of the whole programme'. Using the logframe also helps NGOs to be more accountable to and improve their relationship with their donors, because plans, monitoring and evaluation are presented in formats easily understood by them. Ugandan NGOs said Log frames help management and donors trace progress in the implementation of planned activities and ascertain whether there is progress in achieving the anticipated goals. They openly recognise the worry that donors have about corruption and the misuse of funds, and the use of a logframe is seen as a transparent way of showing what is to be done and against which actions can be measured.

Almost all of the sampled local NGOs however voiced criticism of the *application* of the logical framework as 'not being ideal in the local situations':

- Some NGOs said that logical frameworks are so complicated that the lay persons- that are in most cases the primary beneficiaries of programmes- cannot understand them. The use of the logframe in practice (including their use of the English language) often excludes the very people who should play critical roles in the planning, implementation, and management as well

as the monitoring and evaluation of projects. Further, other NGOs see log frames as donor designed instruments that impose a method of thinking that is drawn from the western world. It is logical, dry and complicated and cannot be understood by people. One agency said of them 'they lose the voices of the poor but they please the donors'.

- While it may be an easy and clear management tool and document, several said it is of little use in running and managing projects. The day-to-day realities, unexpected challenges, delays in funding, recruitment, changes in government policy and so on mean that the aims and objectives in the written documents often bear little relationship to the realities of life on the ground. Front line staff need to be able to be flexible and able to rise to the many challenges of working with people who are poor, often marginalised, far removed from the world of written project plans
- Donor rigidity forces the users of instruments such as the logical framework to 'become dependent on the tool itself, even when they do not like it and this inhibits creativity and innovation' On the other hand, log frames are not a consistently understood or applied by donors. This creates difficulties for southern NGOs when they get multiple funding and have to adapt their logframes for several different donors.

Beyond logframes being seen as not really useful in their development practice, it was found that local staff working in communities are, in fact, often ill prepared for the difficulties of working with change in communities and local organisations, and that the written project plans were not helpful in guiding their relationships and work practice. Their training had often focused the project cycle and project management tools, on developing logframes with its pre-determined indicators, reporting requirements and impact indicators, while the skills of listening, flexibility, responsiveness, managing conflict and handling change have not been included on most donor run capacity building agendas. Learning how to do the logframe had taken a lot of training, time and money. Few international donors or NGOs had spent comparable amounts of time or money on how to build partnerships at the local level, how to be responsive, and how to engage with social change at the community level.

2. Reporting. All the NGOs interviewed and those that attended the different workshops raised reporting requirements as a major issue of concern. They said that reporting requirements have risen in recent years, in response to a perceived misuse of funds and lack of clarity about what local NGOs were doing. They understand that reporting on paper is seen to be a key tool of accountability, especially to distant donors who cannot visit them, yet it was found to be very onerous, and often by its very nature lacking in transparency.

Many local NGOs said they find different ways to manage multiple reporting to different donors who all have their own requirements and timetables for reports. One large local NGO says that it has been able to negotiate a reporting timetable with its multiple donors that it can manage well. Another said that it could discuss with its key donor (in this case USAID) and reach mutual agreement about how to meet the legitimate demands of the donor. Some of the other larger local NGOs have dedicated staff for managing reports or can pay to buy this help as and when needed.

However, the majority said they find reporting onerous and time consuming; writing these reports (always in English) takes a great deal of valuable staff time, yet most donors do not pay for their core funds and administration costs. Some ask for monthly reports, which most of those affected found very demanding. This was felt to be a serious contradiction by several NGOs, who said they lost staff time from working on the projects so they could do report writing. Some said they found the multiple reporting 'a nightmare' at times. Some said they get little feedback or response to their reports, some said they do not know if they are even read.

Another issue that was raised was that reports are usually to be written against the logframe and pre-set indicators which, as we have seen, are not often used for guiding project implementation. Reporting then leaves behind the daily realities, making reporting non-transparent and often tailored to the project document rather than the project experiences. Often reports are rewritten as they rise through the aid chain, with project managers revising the reports from the field, and staff

in INGOs revising them again for forwarding on to the donors. Some employ 'experts' to help with their report writing. The research findings raised questions about how useful this kind of heavy reporting is for either accountability or transparency.

Many donors say they want NGOs to discuss their failures as well as successes, but many NGOs wondered about this. In one INGO, it only proved possible for local NGOs and communities to open up about the negative as well as the positive issues when face to face meetings were held and the focus was on mutual learning rather than reporting and accountability. Unless a good relationship exists already, however, as reports are seen as a form of control and accountability, local NGOs find it difficult to open up to donors about the problems they face.

Another element that encourages lack of transparency arises when NGOs have to write reports on progress before they have received the funding and so have not been able to do the work. Several raised this as an issue of deep concern; donors expect regular reports even when they have failed to meet their obligations to provide timely funding.

c. Funding modalities and accountability systems

Budgets were another area of worry. The trend has been for budgets to get more detailed and less flexible in their use, coupled with the rise in the practice of retrospective funding, which many local NGOs are unable to access.

Many donors and INGOs have demanded very detailed financial accounts and invoices. The onerous nature of the evidence needed for claiming was an issue that recurred many times. Examples were given of women being expected to sign or put their thumb print on a paper every time they had a drink or a meal at a workshop in rural areas, to ensure that the project worker was not claiming for meals and tea that had not been provided. Others said they had to ask people to sign for every samosa or boda boda ride (although, some pointed out, accountability is not required when a soda is offered by a donor...) This demonstrates a deep concern about financial probity and, while misuse of funds is recognised by local NGOs as a problem, the systems devised to deal with this make some local NGOs feel they are under suspicion and not trusted, even with tiny amounts of money.

Several said they have to change or adapt their accounting systems to fit the needs of different donors. Some donors such as USAID have such complex accounting procedures that an NGO has to be trained in these, even when they are only to receive a relatively small amount of money for one year. Some NGOs that receive sustained funding from an INGO may have to change their accounting procedures to fit the latter's requirements. Local NGOs with multiple funders may find that they have to keep their accounts in different ways for each funder, using different currencies for their accounting and financial reporting.

The issue of late funding and the problems this causes for NGOs were raised several times. It is not at all uncommon for local NGOs- and even INGOs in Uganda- to find themselves in a fix after signing contracts with donors that are very detailed and binding. These have to be followed to the last dot, even when the donors fail to honour their commitments, especially late disbursements. Many NGOs cannot work without the funding 'upfront' and yet they have to account for the use of those funds as if they had had them from the start of the project. This causes major problems and highlights for the local NGOs their lack of power in the relationship as they cannot call a donor to account for poor performance and indeed have to 'cover up' that poor performance.

Time and again local NGOs pointed out the demands these reporting requirements and financial accounting make on their staff. They have to employ specialists and experts to help with these tasks. Yet donors are on the whole reluctant to pay for core running costs; these are costs they have to find ways to bear themselves. The demands are high but the resources available to meet those demands are very limited.

d. Support also comes down the aid chain.

Alongside these conditions some donors and many INGOs offer support to local NGOs in the form of capacity building and training. Several agencies, especially INGOs with offices based in Uganda, offer a range of workshops, seminars and other networking opportunities, which local NGOs appreciated. They did meet others and gain access to new ideas through their relationships with these donors.

Some of this support was much appreciated. One respondent from a large NGO felt that donors “*go a long way to give help to make us succeed*”. Other said the support was enabling and raised the standard of their work. The training available for technical skills around e.g. water, health or working in participatory ways is appreciated, but for most agencies there is less of this than training provided for project management and evaluation, proposal writing, report writing and budgeting.

e. The changing priorities for development work

Priorities change over time. The focus has shifted from micro level service delivery to scaling up, from a concern with environment to a focus on rights. New priorities come even as old ones are left unfinished. One feature of these are that they often change very fast.

A second issue is that wherever the concern first originates, it becomes part of an international agenda and debate, which is centred in London, Washington, Geneva. It is often experienced as an imposition when it reaches Uganda through donor requirements. The terminology may well be unfamiliar, and often a concept arrives with a set of frameworks and tools that have rarely been developed within Uganda.

Thirdly, the changes do not often seem to be evidence based. They are not driven by an analysis of past work and the findings of experience, but more often by changing debates in influential agencies in UK, Europe or USA.

Here a few points are made on two of the dominant current themes- one on the wane, gender and one in the ascendant, advocacy.

1. Gender. The gender issues are real and urgent in Uganda. DFID and many agencies have papers on the plight of women, some INGOs and local NGOs have made gender their priority, and have made progress on raising the issues and awareness in many forums across Uganda. Many donors require that project documents show how the work will address issues of gender, and gender mainstreaming is the current discourse around gender. Gender and its role in poverty is thus highlighted in most strategies of donors, INGOs and those local agencies that have strategic plans. Project proposals all have sections covering gender issues. There has been widespread staff and partner training, research undertaken and learning from experience about how to work with these issues in different contexts in Uganda.

However, when looking at the broader context in Uganda, there are limits to this: there is no synergy between the National Plan for Women and the PEAP, there is little gender analysis to be found in the sector wide plans and the four pillars of PEAP/PRSP do not take a gendered approach. Others have analysed this weakness around gender in the policy process and the key instruments for disbursing aid- in spite of the commitments in the Uganda constitution to gender equity. Further, the gap between the written documents about gender and the lived experience of most agencies and the people they work with appears very wide. While NGOs and some community participants can explain gender and gender equity, it is usually in terms of frameworks, definitions and concepts drawn from northern sources. Local definitions of gender and what the issues are for women and men in a specific locality seem to be over-riden by the use of concepts and tools imported from outside and often used with little understanding on the part of local people.

It was interesting to note that while all agencies said they had to include gender in their project proposals, they said there was little follow up or monitoring and evaluation by the donors of what had been achieved in practice in relation to gender issues. Some NGOs felt that gender was becoming less important to donors and INGOs as the rights-based agenda and the poverty focus

were becoming more urgent. Gender issues are increasingly actively pushed in practice largely by individuals- usually women- within agencies who have a personal commitment to the issue; it still does not appear to be central to the way organisations organise their work or assess their achievements.

2. Policy and advocacy work. One of the recent trends in the role of NGOs in civil society is the formulation of network organisations, alliances and coalitions; these play crucial roles in advancing and/or advocating the rights of particular groups. Many such NGOs have developed over the past ten years in Uganda, around issues as diverse as debt, women's rights and civil society participation in policy setting.

These agendas are relatively new for most NGOs in Uganda and, while they fit with the priorities of a few national Ugandan NGOs (and indeed they have been instrumental in campaigning on these issues), problems have been caused by the recent push by donors for most or all NGOs to follow the new lobbying and advocacy route. Many lack the skills and experience needed to work in these new, more fundable areas of work.

While some CSOs participate actively in the policy agenda work they continue to feel marginalised in the policy debates and say they are responding to donor/funding demands rather than really representing their constituencies. They are rarely given the space or time to develop proper representation mechanisms and 'this limits their role in representing poor people and their power to influence policies.' Often their response to funding demands undermines their ties to local constituencies, raising questions about their legitimacy, which in turn undermines their ability 'to be heard' at policy meetings. Some researchers have argued that some local NGOs are severely compromised because they are sub contractors effectively to the very organisations they wish to lobby (government and donors), thus leaving them in a weak position for advocacy work.

Other reviewers have found that policy dialogues have not always been based on broader consultations with the poor; neither communities nor CSOs with close links to the poor are really involved. Several NGOs in this research study felt that their kind of knowledge counted for less than the knowledge and evidence of 'experts', usually from outside Uganda working with quantitative and often economic data.

The interviews we held confirmed this sense among many Ugandan CSOs of being in a relatively weak position in the policy processes while some of their funding is dependent on their participating in these processes. While the donors have created several fora and opportunities for such lobbying work, which has been welcomed by networking and advocacy NGOs, they also control who comes and the terms of the debates. Previous research has found that the donors often set the advocacy agenda, so local NGOs are participating in agendas not yet led by them.

Several INGOs were aware of the danger that international donors and NGOs are often filling the spaces for advocacy work that should perhaps belong to local civil society. There is a level of unease among some of them, and they recognise the resentment many local NGOs feel when they speak for them or for the poor in Uganda. However, their international experience and expertise make them attractive to many donors, and the pressure on them to obtain access to high level meetings and their own need for real influence combine to make them dominate some of the advocacy spaces.

g. The redefinition of the roles of civil society: the 'uncareful' use of power

Donors in Uganda have a very strong role and position, vis-à-vis both government and civil society. Donors are setting the agendas in many ways, even including redefining the roles and responsibilities of the NGO sector in Uganda, through policy processes and also through the very tools of project planning and implementation. The detail of development management is rooted in who holds the power: Government has had to agree with the donors on many policy changes as a condition to access aid and loans and the relationships between donors and NGO often echo the donor relationship with GOU.

Donors fund NGOs and select those they will support and work with on the basis of their new concepts of NGOs and their roles in civil society, including the shift from service delivery for poor people towards issues around advocacy on behalf of the poor and the representation of the poor on government fora. Donors want NGOs to engage in the many new policy processes that have accompanied the shift to a pro poor donor agenda, the availability of HIPC money and the shift to budget support. In addition the experience of NGOs in working participatively has been picked up by donors, who have involved them heavily in participatory poverty assessments and preparing the PRSPs in Uganda. And, now that donors no longer manage and control their own individual projects they need new channels of monitoring and accountability for their funding. NGOs have been identified as the key players to monitor budgets and to play a role in 'calling government into account'. This new agenda is clearly set out in the Civil Society Umbrella programme run by DFID in Uganda. Its purpose is to promote 'civil society interacting with government at all levels to effect pro-poor policies, social progress and democratisation.'

This is very ambitious, requires new skills and competencies and marks in many ways a change of purpose for most NGOs in Uganda, where working with and monitoring government has not previously been part of their role. It was developed by donors with very limited local NGO participation, and will have a profound effect on what will and what will not be funded. Perhaps inevitably in the first phase, DFID funding has switched largely to Kampala based networks and alliances.

The complexities of both dialoguing with government, increasingly accessing funding through district level government in line with district plans, and holding government to account in policy implementation seem largely to have been overlooked. The politics of power and control between NGOs and government at all levels are glossed over, and sets of contradictory roles are laid out for NGOs and civil society to follow. NGOs are given a legitimate role as advocates, but are also expected to work closely with government in providing services; they are expected to get some of their money from government now, and also to hold government to account on behalf of the poor.

5. Implications

a. The quality of the relationships being built.

What do the various dimensions of funding flows described so far imply for the relationships between the various actors involved? Four agencies defined their relationships with some or all of their donors as good, and others had one off examples of supportive donors. There was no consistent pattern; one agency, for example, cited DFID as a good 'partner', many others said they found DFID rigid and bureaucratic. Similarly one agency built a strong relationship with USAID, while others found them distant and inflexible. Several agencies said they had a good relationship with one or other of the UK NGOs, more cited the Dutch agencies as more open and flexible.

There were, however, consistencies among the NGOs who felt they had been able to build good/strong relations with some of their donors: they were all large and respected NGOs in Uganda, with a wide international and government donor base. Some strong local NGOs are able to negotiate more acceptable and useful planning and reporting procedures. They have been able to reject some unacceptable conditions, such as employment of expatriates who may be expensive and not conversant with the local problems, or procuring equipment from certain markets. A few donors, or more commonly individuals within donor organisations, are open to more flexible and alternative ways of working. The factors they identified as making the relationship supportive were:

- Face to face discussions
- Shared trust and values; trust was built between key individuals on each side
- Relationship not investigative but focused on how to improve, share, support and learn together
- Provision of appropriate and needed training
- Negotiations beginning right at the start, from project/strategic planning onwards
- Equal involvement in evaluations and learning

The majority of the local NGOs interviewed did not feel they had built really strong relationships with most of their donors and they did not view these relationships as partnerships. They felt themselves to be recipients of donor funding, having to accept most if not all the plethora of conditions and tools attached to that funding. They felt they had not been involved in developing or shaping these tools, but they try as much as possible to accommodate the conditionalities, sometimes at the cost of affecting their identity, profile and even their values. They are concerned that they:

- Allow the donors to set the agenda- strategic planning is seen by some as a donor driven tool for defining priorities and what will and will not fund
- Tend to rely on writing rather than face to face interactions - because of time and distance and also because they are seen as more objective and transparent. Yet they are far less comfortable for, and useful to, many local NGOs
- Are based on concepts of change and how to plan and monitor change drawn from contexts far away from Uganda, placing high value on donors' approaches and knowledge. Conversely, the tools do not reflect local knowledge or understanding. Thus, they emphasise the importance of literacy in English over skills such as knowledge of the local language, cultural sensitivities, ability to work with poor people.
- Highlight that trust is being lost, so increasingly written reports and budgets are being used to monitor relationships and performance
- May or may not be good management tools but they are not useful for developing local skills and a good development practice at the community level
- Promote upward accountability to the donors; they do little to promote strong bonds between NGOs and the communities they work with, indeed community voices are often squeezed out in the planning processes within the logframe. They take time away from the latter and focus on the former.

One condition highlighted during the research related to the reliance by many donors on external experts. Often these are said to have little experience in Uganda. Several local NGOs complained that consultants were expensive and diverted much-needed funds. They also took up a much time, as often they know so little about the context. They may exhibit a lack of trust and even a sense of superiority to the local agencies, yet they are often inefficient because they require a lot of support to deliver their work.

The critical issue for many was not whether or not donor policies and procedures are good - some are and some are not - but the reality that these external interventions shape the dynamic of local relationships and even the identity and agenda of the different organisations involved.

b. The aid chain reaches the ground.

In spite of their many differences, in size, staff makeup, focus of activities and the contexts in which they work several themes emerged from the case studies that showed a remarkable similarity of experience and perception around development work at the local level.

1. Relations with donors. They all said that their donors- be they Ugandan organisations, field offices of international NGOs, or other international donors- talk of partnership. Yet in spite of this commitment, they find that almost all their donors work to a strategic plan or business plan- a set framework- that has been developed far away from the local setting. They appear to be driven more by their own strategic plans than the local needs and perceptions: *“this makes the whole notion of community choice and the reality that the poor know what they want very superficial...”*

Further, they are acutely aware of their position as receivers. They know donors can change priorities or stop funding at almost any time, sometimes without explanation. Donors are rarely transparent about the funds they have to spend in a country, or about how those funds are allocated; only one or two INGOs have even tried to be more open about their funding flows in Uganda. Donors often set the priorities and the core agenda, and can sometimes divert local NGOs away

from their own core mission. They found that some of their perspectives and values could not be easily accommodated within donor procedures. For example, one person said that spiritual approaches couldn't be fitted into a logframe. For him development was not a package or a product to be delivered to people, as it so often appears to be in project and strategy documents, rather

The donors have clear policies and procedures around what they will and will not fund, and how they want the work to be done. Most find they try hard to meet the conditions, but often find them onerous. Others say that because of donor fears of misuse of funds they have to provide receipts for everything. This was not uncommon, yet they noted that INGOs and donors do not require them to sign every time they are offered a soft drink or cup of coffee. Beyond this, the project horizon and short-term funding is limitative, yet donors expect to see real impact. This is very difficult to achieve: *"If someone has been doing something the whole of her life, change of behaviour and attitudes does not come overnight. Learning is not usually achieved within the lifespan of projects"*

All the NGOs have adopted the language of the donors in their proposals and reporting formats. Many feel comfortable with this, and feel they have become more professional through using these procedures. They feel less comfortable with some of the other donor conditionalities, particularly the new thrust towards advocacy work. Most said that they were feeling under pressure to undertake or increase their advocacy work. Yet most do not really understand this language and it does not fit easily with the way they work, their skills or their priority activities.

Several people interviewed talked of the tension between the world of the donors with their strategies, plans, objectives and impact frameworks, and the reality of the lives of the poor in their area of Uganda. The incompatibility of the frameworks with people's lives led to conflict and caused friction between some of the local NGOs and their donors. Others tried to manage these conflicts internally and did not report back any problems to their donors.

2. The challenges of donor funding.. There are of course real benefits from accessing external donor funding. This funding allows them to scale up their activities and employ more staff. It often enables them to become more specialised and they do receive training and support from some of their donors to improve their work. Donors have encouraged and enabled them to formalise their organisations in some cases, and set up boards and ways of working that in turn attract other donors. They also enjoy the interaction with external players, which stimulates them to think and work in new ways. Through some funders, they can become members of networks with other NGOs and so learn and develop through contact with them.

All the NGOs said they needed external funding to survive and this dependence is reflected in the way that many local NGOs appear and disappear in response to new funding or the ending of funds from a donor. From their perspective donor funding came with the following challenges:

- The evident lack of trust in them by their donors, who are very concerned about their ability to be accountable and competent
- Meeting the different demands, timetables and budget processes of different donors; several NGOs recognised that they struggled to meet the planning and accountability demands of their donors. They found these demanding, but their failure to meet these demands caused serious problems in their relationships with the donors.
- The lack of real recognition of all the factors that affect development work and can delay the work and its effectiveness. For example, insecurity; local politics and power relations; financial difficulties; limited access to essential resources- including transport, buildings, office equipment
- The tension between trying to meet targets set by donors and the need to mobilise and engage local people in the work, which can take much longer than the project span
- The donors want local participation, but do not allow for the time this takes. They also overlook the heavy demands this places on local people, who are often too busy for the work involved. The packages around PRA and involving communities are often superficial and do not promote involvement or local ownership as they are supposed to

- Cost recovery is a current mantra but people often cannot find the money to pay for the whole range of services they are expected to contribute to- their situation is not understood in its entirety. Local people often do not understand loans and expect these agencies to give them grants, because they are poorer than the agency. Repayments can be hard to secure
- Now they are expected to access funding through the district government, but this is very hard for many reasons. The district lacks adequate income; resources are often allocated along political lines with some groups and areas marginalised or even excluded; there is limited capacity in some districts for disbursing and monitoring funds.

Two issues were explored in more detail with these NGOs: gender and participation.

1. Gender. The understanding of gender that most of these local NGOs were working with was very limited. The main thrust of the ‘gender work’ was ‘having some women included’. They found that by and large the term gender was not understood by local people, and they explained it to them largely in terms of having women’s representation on boards, in user groups, on committees and ensuring women had access to some of the project resources.

The terms gender and gender mainstreaming were heard widely in these NGOs, but what staff really meant by these terms was often unclear. While there are exceptions and examples of good practice working with gender issues, these appear to be the exceptions, and to exist especially in relation to issues of sexual and reproductive health work. This research endorses the view that for many local NGOs gender is an imported term and concept. It is poorly contextualised or analysed and staff grapple to find ways to translate the gender concepts they do learn into practice. Overall they address gender through the application of quotas.

Staff know that gender is a key donor concern and have often received some training in gender concepts and tools. They appear not to have training in how to reach out to listen to women or to work with them to overcome some of the barriers they face, or to find out what the critical issues are for women in their area. In addition, for staff from church based organisations gender appears to them to conflict with their religious beliefs, where God created man as women’s superior and head of the family. Trying to interfere with these positions seems inappropriate to them and they say that congregations will reject any such teaching.

The lack of time for real work at community level and the lack of understanding of the concepts and words now used by development agencies around gender seemed to combine to mystify the issue. The positive experiences of working directly with women and men on gender issues that has been seen in some HIV/AIDS and conflict work especially, seemed to be lacking in the sample NGOs.

The findings at the local level supported the findings presented above:

- the rhetoric of gender within the development sector is not being turned into good gender practice on the ground
- there is little real commitment to monitoring or learning about gender issues- outside of a few key agencies with a strong gender focus in practice- appeared to hold in the sample case studies.
- While the rhetoric of gender and the language and concepts of gender (in English) are known and used in these local NGOs, turning those concepts into a development practice that related to the needs, fears and aspirations of local people was very difficult for staff. Concepts had been reduced to some simple actions, largely focused on trying to increase the number of women in different meetings and fora.

Ways of relating to and working with local communities on issues around exclusion, inequality, unequal access to resources including knowledge and decision making appear weak in all but a few agencies. The focus on meeting the targets for restocking, provision of health care, water supplies, savings and credit can often over-ride the commitment to spending time working with local people

on their perspectives, needs, hopes and fears. Yet gender work needs to be rooted in 'where people are', and build on local understanding and analysis of the issues to have any real meaning and bring about real social change.

2. Participation. A similar set of findings around participation emerged from the local NGO case studies. The commitment to local participation and the use of externally developed tools, in this case PRA, had become watered down or distorted when applied in practice.

For example, participation was often equated with contributing towards a project. So the contribution of labour, sand, stones, equipment was equated with participation. Yet often people are forced to contribute these things if they wish to share the benefits, and these contributions may be very onerous for the poor in the community. This kind of participation then becomes equated with ownership. People are said to 'own a project' if they have made these contributions. Yet the research showed that the local people consulted were clear that the projects they were part of did not belong to them. They had been brought in from the outside, they were being asked to join in someone else's project. This had clear implications for long-term sustainability.

Participation in practice is often reduced to a few short exercises, carried out over a few days, or even only one day. Often tools from the PRA toolkit are used; it is rare to hear staff talk of story telling, dancing, poetry as sources of participation, even though these are often preferred forms of expression in Uganda. Participatory exercises often have to be undertaken in a short time, and can easily become mechanistic and no longer a conduit for really listening to and engaging local people.

Even where local people do get involved with a local NGO in developing ideas for a project, once their ideas are converted into a logframe for fundraising and project management purposes, the community becomes dissociated from the project, 'it is all too complicated for them'. But often the project has been introduced quickly and without adequate time for real community participation and involvement: it then remains defined as an external input and therefore the responsibility of the local NGO or donor. Many concepts and tenets underlying development thinking get lost in translation between the donors, local NGOs and the people they are trying to work with.

There are great expectations built on the concept of participation. Through participation the community is expected to be mobilised and contribute actively to the development and implementation of the project, and later its sustainability (collecting fees, managing repairs, replacing health kits, continuing the savings and credit service). Volunteers are expected to take on often complex roles as managers, overseers, mechanics, regulators and these are essential for the long term running of the project, yet their use in poor communities is often unrealistic and they drop out after a time because of other commitments and heavy workloads and responsibilities.

In a recent debate in London on aid to Africa³, every one of the six speakers stressed time and time again that aid is only valuable and useful if it is put at the service of those it is sent to. Yet this research showed all down the line, and perhaps even especially at the grassroots level, that local people have little say in shaping the projects and work. Even the concept of participation often becomes, in reality, a tick box activity, carried out using a set of tools that are applied mechanistically and quickly.

The time needed for real dialogue, to share issues and analysis with local people is rarely available in projects receiving short-term donor funding- though there are exceptions. The pressure to deliver against clear plans and targets and to show these have been achieved certainly appeared to threaten long term community development work with these local NGOs and the people they work with. The way the work was being done in many cases undermined the aims of long-term sustainability and addressing issues of gender equality.

³ The best way to help Africa is to leave it alone. Debate organised by Intelligence squared and addressed by Claire Short, and a range of academics, media analysts and activists. London, 2004.

6. Conclusions

a. The complexity of relations within the aid funding system.

Our work has illustrated the complexity of the relationships between donors and recipients, and how far these shape behaviour and outcomes. They throw up questions about identity and who sets agendas and for whom. Who has the confidence or power to resist new donor demands? They also highlight the difficulties of building relations of trust in contexts where priorities and policies are fast changing, where the procedures are tight and based on upward accountability, and where little time is really given to training staff and partner organisations in how to engage in development with local people. The tensions inherent in many grants and contracts between meeting set targets and the focus on impact while working to develop local organisations and processes are also evident.

Further the policies, tools and procedures of aid management have an in-built bias towards tools and ways of thinking imported into Uganda from the donor countries. They place the donor agencies in the driving seat much of the time. They tend to impose donor or managerial ways of thinking and defining issues that may not be shared – or even understood- by local organisations or communities, and which contain culturally specific concepts of how to promote change and for whom.

These tools and approaches also tend to simplify the complexity of doing development work with poor people in Africa. Issues of inequality and poverty are over simplified; more challenging issues such as ethnicity, the legacy of colonialism, the cultural norms around issues of age and gender are often overlooked altogether. Our case studies highlight the messiness of development in reality, and the contrast between the tools and the challenge of development in practice.

The research led us back time and time again to issues around power, culture, partnership, whose agenda, NGO identity, and whose voice was driving the work. It highlighted the tensions that exist where two or more very different organisational cultures work together, and the lack of understanding, listening, and often suspicion and lack of trust that exist in so many of the relationships at each level.

There are a few exceptions. A few NGOs work to a different paradigm, in spite of the difficulties in getting funding from the dominant donors in Uganda. Some positive elements are also to be found within some of the cases presented, even though the overall picture may not be so promising.

b. The potential of working differently with the aid system.

It was possible to start to identify approaches that can lead to better and healthier relationships within the current aid system. These included the need for genuinely mutual respect between agencies, listening and learning and the development of shared, as opposed to imposed agendas. This was possible where donor agencies were really willing to listen and was facilitated by time for discussions and face to face meetings. It was possible where donors and local NGOs worked together on shared and negotiated planning, and where the donor had trust and confidence in the implementation of the project and took a 'hands off' approach. Advice and support was appreciated when the overall context was one of support rather than control. Joint evaluations allowed for learning, flexibility and openness, but were far less common than externally imposed evaluations against fixed agendas.

Time and again local NGOs said that they needed to be part of the process from the strategy setting and planning stages, and they needed to be able to find ways to allow the needs and voices of the poor to be integral to the agenda. Most development actors subscribe to these principles and values, in theory. In practice, however, they are hard to find. Indeed some international agencies ostensibly committed to building strong local organisations and partnerships have been seen in recent times to start becoming operational again, seeing themselves as more effective in addressing the needs of the poor than local organisations. How then will local organisations and voices ever set and run the agenda for development and change?