Sur y Norte
Forjando Alianzas

Final report
Evaluating Social Change
A Funder - Social Movement Dialogue

Introduction

Forging Alliances South and North (ForAL) is an initiative to create links between U.S. funders and organizations, networks and social movements in Latin America and the Caribbean who share an interest in promoting positive social change. In recent years, ForAL has organized spaces for interchange between representatives of social movements and funders with the objective of deepening dialogue, improving mutual understanding and facilitating learning exchanges[1]. These efforts led to the creation of a funder-social movement working group on evaluation tools and methodologies with a specific focus on Evaluating Social Change.

The working group was made up of representatives of funders, civil society organizations and social movements, with diverse backgrounds and experience in the field.

The virtual group of volunteers met about 15 times by conference call between September 2008 and December 2009. It was coordinated by Diego Merino from American Jewish World Service (AJWS) and Ana Juanche, representing ForAL. The group began by reflecting on the members' own experience in international funding relationships, whether as funder or grantee, bringing a critical perspective to existing processes of evaluation in the working relationships between organizations of the North and South.

This document summarizes the conversations the group had. It begins with issues that the group considered relevant to the dialogue. Then the main elements of analysis are presented, followed by some reflections and suggestions regarding funding relationships and evaluation practices. Finally, a list of questions is provided that can serve as a guide to build evaluation

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[1] "The Challenges of Progressive Philanthropy in the Americas" in the 2003 World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil; a similar dialogue and public seminar at the 2004 Americas Social Forum in Quito, Ecuador and in May of 2005 "A New Relationship for More Congruent Collaboration", Mexico City, México.
The texts are available at http://www.for-al.org/english/documents/documents.html

processes involving funders and civil society groups or social movements.

While this dialogue process was not exhaustive, it certainly resulted in the acknowledgement of a common challenge: there are difficulties to be overcome in the field of evaluation. In addition, there was an interest in continuing research on evaluation practices (methodologies and tools) that are currently emerging from civil society groups[2] and social movements.

Dimensions of Analysis

The group shares a commitment to social change and agrees that evaluation is crucial to understand processes of change. This analysis is done in the context of relations between funders in the North (Europe and U.S.) and civil society groups and social movements in Latin America.

Therefore, the debate about evaluation is impacted by the characteristics of existing relationships between funders and grantees, which in turn are embedded in broader social debates.

In the history of international funding relationships, one can see processes of increasing complexity, with the presence of different worldviews, intentions, and ideas about methodologies and results. These issues and their consequences were analyzed by the group on the basis of three main themes, which are explained below.

Social change

The group identified different perceptions, conceptualizations, representations and approaches with regard to social change. The idea

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[2] In this document, "civil society groups" or "social organizations" refer to the full spectrum of civil society organizations, from NGOs to small grassroots groups.

of change is shaped by multiple factors: experience, ethical norms, historical and geographical parameters, the social position of the actors (funders, organizations and beneficiaries), conceptual references and worldviews.

Another aspect highlighted was that change refers to processes. This suggests, for example, monitoring whether the initiatives taken are driving change processes toward new kinds of social relations, with greater equality, democracy, and inclusion of the marginalized in public life, politics and the expansion and consolidation of their rights. In this sense, the importance of intentionality regarding social change is underscored. So, while there was not, a priori, a common vision of the group regarding social change, consensus was reached that its meaning lies in broad-based structural change in social relations.

This understanding of the dimensions of social change was relevant to the analysis of the relationships that funding counterparts choose to develop, since it has implications regarding methodology and practice and the underlying understanding of the conditions that make change possible.

The group agreed that change cannot be attributed to a specific actor, since social change is nonlinear, complex, and affected by multiple dimensions, actors and factors.

Evaluation

The search for references and evaluation methodologies that could provide evidence of such change turned up a good deal of material, but the group determined that analyzing it in detail would require more time and the participation of those who have been involved in using the different forms of evaluation. This dialogue process took as its starting point the

practices, forms of thought, and uses of evaluation of the group's participants.

The observations of the group with respect to the term "evaluation" included:

> ... "to understand, within a context of multiple actors, causes and effects, the effects of a specific intervention/attempt to promote change, and the value of that intervention."

> ... "[analysis of] the way in which our actions, proposals and contributions help or fail to help to deconstruct the current dominant model that attempts to impose itself not to overcome inequality but to perpetuate inequality."

> ... "the impact or difference in society or the larger global situation that results from the processes, projects, and plans of institutions."

> ... "evaluation as part of a process of analysis that takes place between different stages of theoretical reflection - action - theoretical reflection-action, as a joint exercise of the different actors involved in these stages, where they can develop an appreciation for each others' respective roles, evaluate the use of resources, identify ways to carry on the work, and develop recommendations for others who are involved in similar work. Thus it is an exercise that serves those directly involved and others as well."

> ... "Evaluation is the process that allows us to understand (not just to know) who has benefitted or not, under what circumstances, and in what forms as a result of the implementation of our projects. What unexpected results (positive or negative) were obtained? What factors positively influenced or limited the beneficial outcomes? Who learned what (through increased knowledge, ability, skill, etc.) through the implementation of the project and why? And what implications does this information have for social change and the organization's work?"

In the experience of the group, there is a gap between how civil society groups and funders understand evaluation, even taking into account the differences among funders in this regard. In some cases, evaluation is a relatively new concept for civil society groups and funders, and there is difficulty defining what it is or its usefulness. It is unclear what the interest is in the information generated from the evaluations and how it is to be used. Oftentimes, the organizations are satisfied with their own process evaluations that do not include precise methodological practices. Sometimes, evaluation is understood as referring exclusively to the activities in a project. Other times it refers to the monitoring of actions (which may be understood as the consequences of the activities). Thus, the term is used for several different things which have different meanings.

Methodologies with qualitative approaches and participatory methodologies that emphasize the importance of the life experience and the perspectives of individuals and social groups being benefitted by the work are not widely known. Likewise, approaches that require the use of a variety of methods to generate multidimensional information regarding impacts are in the minority. Even in the group itself, there was little familiarity with these approaches, which illustrates the point that, despite whatever importance is given to the issue, the internal capacity of civil society groups and funders to use qualitative approaches and techniques is underdeveloped.

It was noted that the type of evaluation most frequently mentioned in the context of North - South relations is what is called formal evaluation (the analysis of what goals and objectives have been met and identification of the factors that influenced the results). The participants from the Global South criticize the use of quantitative approaches because of their limited ability to reflect the kind of change that they regard as relevant. In addition, they stress that oftentimes there is no in-depth evaluation focused on the

intent of the program and the social change that it seeks to promote[3].

The group agreed that the type of work organizations and social movements undertake requires reliable assessment tools that reflect in an effective manner the changes that are achieved. This important qualitative information would be relevant both to the organizations and to the funders, as it would provide evidence of change that is produced in specific, complex situations.

The group noted that evaluation tools and methodologies reflect the political and ideological context in which they are produced. We identified some authors who use the so-called critical paradigms of the social sciences and their research methods to produce methodologies and assessment tools for meaningful evaluation. In addition to taking into account the complexity of any social situation, these references consider the importance of the following aspects: the broad political and cultural context in which the projects and the potential change take place; the participation of the actors involved in the project, and especially its beneficiaries, in the evaluation; the need to accept as valid different ways of understanding "social change"; and an emphasis on using evaluation as a learning tool, rather than just a means of demonstrating what has been done[4].

What is needed is an approach to evaluation that takes as its starting point the current reality of the people, that responds to their needs and is consistent with the way they live their daily lives, that is under their control, and that strengthens them with conceptual, methodological and

political tools. This permits them to incorporate evaluation into their processes so that it informs future actions, and not just those whose actions are being evaluated but also those of others who share the same political vision of transforming social conditions. Such an approach gives them a better opportunity to perceive to what degree they have progressed, become stuck, or slid backwards in the social change process. The funders noted the need for some sort of verification of the activities undertaken and their results. Differences were also noted in expectations and needs in terms of the structural dimensions of evaluation: Southern organizations expressed a desire for a political relationship with funders and in-depth analysis of the social change process while, the funders did not feel the same need to engage in frequent political analysis nor to establish deep relationships with a large number of counterparts.

The Context of North - South cooperation relationships

All of this led to a sense that this dialogue between funders and social movement groups about evaluation is "the tip of the iceberg". Existing tensions regarding evaluation point toward the broader context of funder-grantee relations, which are characterized by asymmetries of power in specific historical contexts and their underlying political disputes, forms of philosophical and economic thought, dissimilar cultural values, etc.

Typically there is discussion of ways of doing the work and the tools, methodologies and products of the evaluation. However the different political and methodological points of view regarding social change and the role of civil society groups and funders in these changes and in their respective societies go largely unexamined. In the current context of hollowed out proposals for social transformation and even of the role of government in society, the roles of funders in the North and social movement groups in the South

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[3] The definitions of formal evaluation and substantial evaluation were used in Aguilar y Ander-Egg, Evaluación de servicios y programas sociales. Madrid, Siglo XXI, 1994, p. 49.

[4] The texts are available at:
http://sites.google.com/site/foralproyectome

may likewise be hollowed out and their relations may assume a more technocratic character. It seems that notions of social change itself (and therefore of international cooperation) underwent a significant change with the imposition of the neo-liberal, free-market model on the global economy.

Thus, evaluation is often not seen so much as a learning tool and an indicator of new opportunities for collaboration. It is not used to identify achievements and challenges being experienced by funders in the North and civil society groups in the South in order to define new strategies and implement effective ways of overcoming inequality in the North and South. Neither is it generally used for institutional learning- regarding methodologies, strategies, identifying new objectives, etc. While there is a constant flow of new material on evaluation, there is relatively little investment in the development of methodologies, debates or training on the subject. With regard to external evaluations, there were questions about their usefulness and to what interests they respond.

In addition, it was observed that largely unacknowledged cultural differences underlie the relationships between funders and civil society groups. The understandings of social relations, social change, the role of different actors and the paradigms used in analysis and evaluation are influenced by cultural models that often are not explicit and that complicate dialogue and mutual understanding. Empathy and accepting the validity of another's view of social change processes can be difficult. Consequently, the practice of building consensus around strategic objectives is scarce.

The evaluation process sometimes becomes a manifestation or an indicator of asymmetries in the funder-grantee relationship. In such situations, it can serve to reinforce those asymetries rather than to deepen a common view of the social change that both partners profess to seek. Often, the process is started without answering important questions about the meaning of evaluation or the worldview that informs it. With a perspective based on the premise that civil society groups must "be accountable" to the funding partner for the work they have done, evaluation can become something unilateral.

Building transformative relationships and meaningful evaluation process

The group felt it important to note the shared interest in democratizing funder-grantee relationships and building real alliances rooted in a shared political commitment to transform power structures. This shared commitment is based on recognition of historical inequalities and a determination not to reproduce them. It is sustained by democratic values, respect for diversity and a common goal of building a fully inclusive, peaceful, sustainable, just and free world. Such relationships share the challenge of democratizing resources from a holistic point of view. Through solidarity and the recognition of differences the goals of both partners are advanced.

In a relationship of that nature, the central question of an evaluation is: What is the relevance of what we do?

The group suggests the adoption of a systematic practice of doing meaningful evaluations, taking as a reference important critical paradigms used in the social sciences[5]. This will enable different

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[5] Critical paradigms in the social sciences emphasize the understanding of historical processes and the political interests and other characteristics of social actors when analyzing human action. This contrasts with the positivist paradigm, which is based on establishing relations of cause and effect, relying on empirical evidence, to explain a

stakeholders to become familiar with these approaches, obtaining more and better elements that promote significant social change and at the same time questioning the internal practices of funders and civil society groups regarding planning, monitoring and evaluation.

With regard to the relationship between funders and civil society organizations, the group suggests:

1) Take into account, and preferably make explicit, that relations between the two partners are marked by unequal power and therefore it is necessary to expand dialogue and strengthen ties based on a broader scope of institutional goals.
2) In the context of North-South relations, clarify how each partner sees and understands social change, evaluation and its particular role in contributing to social change. In a relationship that is intended to promote social change, it is important to clarify the different understandings of it and, if possible, to find points of convergence regarding how to promote social change and an evaluation methodology that corresponds to that strategy.
3) Recognize cultural differences between funders and grantees. These differences should be seen as opportunities for learning, building mutual respect and fostering ongoing dialogue. The partners should take into account the specificities of each culture with regard to the social change process and the difference of perspective between funders and grantees and learn to live with that difference.
4) The development of a working relationship between social organization and funder is a mutual responsibility to

which both partners should be attentive. This perspective of "mutual accountability" implicates both the social organization and the funder. In this process of alliance building, it is necessary to commit time and energy in order to achieve increasing affinity of purpose on funding projects and other initiatives and to develop strategic alliances that are inclusive and respectful. In a broader sense, we see the need to build points of strategic consensus which are essential for collaboration on shared projects of transformation of political, economic and socio-cultural structures.

5) Expand the scope of analysis of social change and use evaluation in a strategic way. For instance, use evaluation to deepen organizational knowledge about the context in which the work is done, to deepen analysis of social change processes and to strengthen action. Evaluation is an educational process that allows both funders and grantees to look at the big picture of social change and their respective roles and limits (of each and of the collaboration itself) and to identify effective initiatives that will promote social transformation.
6) Use evaluation to identify successes and challenges the funders in the North and civil society groups in the South are encountering in implementing effective ways of overcoming inequality and in defining new strategies. Evaluation is an important tool for learning and identifying new opportunities for joint action, in pursuit of a more transformative relationship.
7) Identify and share concerns, interests and priorities of each partner in the evaluation process in order to determine what kind of process to use and how the information that is generated in the evaluation will be used.

phenomenon.

8) For social movement groups and networks, adopt evaluation as a regular practice and develop ways of evaluating their initiatives, which are dynamic and sometimes contradictory processes, that help them to identify advances and opportunities for innovation. Even small grassroots organizations will able to reach another level of understanding about their work and its real capacity to generate social change.

9) Create and use evaluation methodologies and approaches: that favor participation of people who are directly involved in the initiatives, are easy to understand for all involved, and enable the identification of changes that are intangible, unforseen, cumulative in nature, or otherwise relevant to the process of social change. No one evaluation methodology is "the" methodology. It is necessary to forge agreement on which to use. In the case of external evaluations, clarify the interests of those requesting them.

10) Interest in evaluation requires cultivation, given that it is not always part of the practice of the groups. It is necessary to ensure that adequate institutional resource,such as staff time, funds, training, and preparation, are properly allocated so that the internal capacity of the organizations and movements is enhanced.

In conclusion...

For the group, the experience of virtual dialogue between people from different countries and life experience was intense and meaningful. We made an effort to share ideas and perspectives from different and sometimes conflicting perspectives. We would like to end with an example that sums up this view about the possibilities of dialogue. In Spanish, the basic grammatical form to express the act of speaking is "Yo te hablo" or "I speak to you". In this sentence, the grammatical form follows the logic of subject - object:

Yo   te   hablo

Subject: I   Object: you
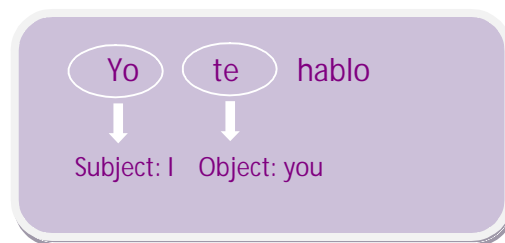
In the South American Indigenous language of Guaraní, the grammatical form is "Ña ñe'eta":

"Ña ñe'eta"

We speak together
(Multiple and inclusive subjects)

Questions for further reflection

Why
Ethical-political background

- Why do we want to evaluate? What are political and ethical reasons and interests that motivate the evaluation? Do grantees' and funders' interests coincide? Do we agree on the goal of the evaluation?
- What are the political agendas behind the evaluation?
- If there is not agreement on the primary objective of the evaluation, how will the distinct objectives come together? Is it possible to rethink and adjust objectives in order to unify perspectives?
- Do we have a clear understanding of what the other (grantee or funder) thinks and wants to accomplish? What sense does that make to us?
- What kind of mutual commitment do we want to make in taking on this work?

What
The nature of the evaluation

- What do we want to evaluate? (a project? an organization?, our collaboration? a social process?)
- Where does evaluation fit in our relationship? What impact can the evaluation process have in our relationship?

For what
The contribution

- What is the purpose of evaluation? What does it help? (Does it contribute to social change? To strengthening identity? To strengthening neoliberal perspectives? Does it contribute to strengthening human rights, dignity, and other fundamental values? Does it provide feedback that is useful for future projects of the organization or is it simply a look back? What do we want to learn through the evaluation process?)
- Can evaluation help to define strategies and strengthen social movements?
- How much complementarity, how much give and take exists in the funder/grantee relationship?
- To what degree does the give and take reflect aspects of transparency, democracy, respect for the priorities of the other, respect for alliances?

How

- How can we strengthen communication with the other partner to improve our understanding of their interests?
- Are we taking advantage of different possible avenues of communication? Are we striving to overcome communication barriers?
- Does the evaluation process generate skills and knowledge in the organization that strengthen its work?
- At what point in the process of the project does the evaluation come in? In the middle? At the end?
- How will the evaluation be written up?
- How will the results be reported?

- How will the evaluation process be organized and directed? How will problems along the way be monitored and resolved?

With whom, among whom
Humanizing the process

- Who will participate in the evaluation? How is the participation of all stakeholders, including beneficiaries, provided for?
- There are experiences of evaluation that are very rich but that few have access to. How can they be shared in order to permit a leap forward in communication that can enrich the organizational development of other groups and other initiatives?
- What other opportunities for outreach and sharing exist that could contribute to social movements around the world, so we can move from a merely funding relationship to a stronger alliance committed to social change?

Resources

- What resources are needed to undertake it? (Human, financial, time, organizational)
- Who will offer what resources?
- How will the resources be managed?

Participants

- Saulo Araujo, Grassroots International, USA

- Maria Atilano, activist, member of the World March of Women, Mexico

- Claudia Camacho, Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz (SERAPAZ), Mexico (secretary)

- Ana Criquillon, Central American Women's Fund, Nicaragua

- Liliane da Costa Reis, Consultant, Brazil[6]

- Ana Juanche, Service for Peace and Justice in Latin America (SERPAJ-AL) and member of ForAL's Steering Committee, Uruguay

- Virginia Lacayo, Central American Women's Fund, Nicaragua

- Monica Larenas, Fund for Nonviolence, United States

- Diego Merino, American Jewish World Service, United States

The group also appreciates the comments at the beginning of the process from Anabella Sibrián (Plataforma Holandesa para el Desarrollo, Guatemala), Eleanor Douglas (Save the Children / Urgent Action Fund / AJWS, Colombia), María M. Aguiar (Grassroots International, USA) and Rosa Guillén Velarde (Grupo Género y Economía, Peru).

If you have found this document interesting, we invite you to offer your suggestions and comments. Your contribution will enrich our ongoing reflection process.

Also, we encourage you to share this document with your contacts and networks.

An electronic version of this document is available in Spanish at:

www.foral.org/spanish/documents/documents.html

And in English at:
www.for-al.org/english/documents/documents.html

Please share your suggestions and comments through our forum at:

http://foral.yuku.com/topic/2/Evaluation-on-Social-Change-Evaluation-del-Cambio-Social

You may also reach us at:
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[6] ForAL contracted Liliane Reis da Costa to synthesize the work and draft this report.