

## Helpdesk Research Report: Evidence for the Effectiveness of a Process Approach

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**Query:** Review the evidence on the effectiveness of development initiatives that have employed a process approach, or key features of this approach.

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### Contents

1. [Overview and Background to the Process Approach](#)
2. [Effectiveness of Programmes That Have Applied The Process Approach](#)
3. [Community-Driven Development Programmes](#)
4. [Tensions Between Long- and Short-term Goals](#)
5. [Studies That Assess Other Key Aspects of the Process Approach](#)
6. [References](#)

### 1. Overview and Background to the Process Approach

This report examines effectiveness of development initiatives that have employed a 'process approach' or key features of this approach. In recent work on security and justice, the OECD has defined the process approach as an approach that:

- Works incrementally from smaller problems with short-term results to larger problems and longer timeframes.
- Focuses on concrete problems that directly affect people, where resolving the problems will deliver noticeable improvements in people's lives.
- Combines the need for long-term commitments with the need to operationalize activities (and especially resources) on the basis of shorter-term political cycles to remain sensitive to political changes and developments.

- Gradually develops relations with key stakeholders and understanding the political environment and stakeholders' constraints.
- Gradually develops capacity appropriate to the changing scale of the activity and the nature of the environment.
- Identifies and tests options with a tolerance for a range of outcomes, ensuring space for innovation and local consultation.

This report will examine the wider literature on the process approach, looking more broadly at the evidence for the effectiveness of this approach in a variety of development interventions. Section two assesses the evidence on the effectiveness of programmes that have applied most or all of the components of the process approach. The studies reviewed in this section generally highlight an association between applying the process approach and improved organisational and developmental outcomes. Most of these studies, however, do not closely interrogate the link between the process approach and development effectiveness – the majority primarily serve an illustrative function by highlighting how features of the process approach can lead to improved outcomes. The studies also highlight a number of political and institutional barriers to implementing the process approach effectively.

One important area of development programming where programmes tend to apply several key features of the process is community-driven development (CDD) or community-based development (CBD). Section three assesses the literature on the effectiveness of CDD and CBD programmes and finds the evidence to be mixed.

Section four examines an important tension associated with the process approach. Although starting small and scaling up on the basis of better understanding and evidence is desirable, strong political imperatives for quick and large-scale action often remain, particularly in fragile or conflict-affected contexts. This raises the question how useful a process type approach is in these contexts. The literature suggests that there are no general rules about how best to overcome this tension and that while more incremental approaches are preferable, they may not always be feasible.

Section five provides a brief overview of literature that focuses on individual dimensions of the process approach, assessing three key aspects – scaling up; incremental approaches to capacity building; understanding the political environment; and innovation, risk and experimentation. The literature on scaling up and incremental capacity building provides some evidence that approaches which employ some of the key features of the process approach tend to be most successful.

### *Background to the Process Approach*

The process approach has not featured prominently in the development literature over the last twenty years, but the approach has a long history. The approach was first presented by Korten (1980), who makes the case for a 'process learning approach', based on an assessment of the past failures of a 'blueprint' approaches to development, and five case studies, where a more gradual, iterative process has proven successful. Korten (1980) argues that programmes should go through three distinct phases – *learning to be effective*, where programme participants search for ways to achieve their goals; *learning to be efficient*, where key procedures are adapted; and *learning to expand*, where the programme is replicated over a wider area.

The process approach largely stems from concern about the poor performance of development projects that adopted a 'blueprint', top-down approach to development, characterised by project cycles, experts, targets and outputs (Bond 1998). These 'blueprint approaches' typically bypassed local institutions if they were deemed to lack capacity, and project managers were tasked with sticking rigidly to project plans (Bond 1998).

Bond (1998) identifies two main schools of thought amongst advocates of a process approach. On the one hand, there are participatory and learning purists such as Korten (1980) and Chambers (1993), who argue for the abandonment of the concept of 'project', and see process as synonymous with local institutional development. On the other hand, there are managerialists who still maintain a big role for projects and outsiders, and argue that management systems must be made more flexible (Brinkerhoff & Ingle 1989, Rondinelli 1993).

Bond (1998) presents the key elements of a process approach, based on a review on the literature. The key features are mostly the same as those highlighted above, but with some slight differences in emphasis - notably this description is more explicit about participation and does not emphasise the need for 'quick wins':

- **Flexible, phased implementation** (to start small and expand, longer time frame, experimental approach).
- **Learning from experience** (embracing error, links between implementation and planning, iterative improvement of small interventions, to be effective, efficient and to expand. appropriate technologies).
- **Beneficiary participation** (in explaining social context, in problem analysis, in planning and decision-making, in resource mobilisation and implementation, in monitoring and evaluation, empowerment of beneficiaries).
- **Institutional support** (political support, devolved authority, use of permanent institutions, local capacity building, organisational change, facilitating beneficiary organisation).
- **Programme management** (well qualified and motivated leadership, new professionalism, stability and continuity of key staff, variety of short-term technical assistance).
- **Long-term technical assistance in a facilitating role to avoid dependency** (project management unit with flexible, informal approach, creative management, good co-ordination between the many agencies and groups involved).

Although the 1980s saw widespread calls for the adoption of process approaches, by the turn of the century, Bond and Hulme (1999) were still lamenting the continuing lack of clarity surrounding the approach and a lack of empirical experience of 'process projects'. This view has been confirmed more recently by Wiggins (2005), who argues that although Korten's proposal for a process approach was embraced enthusiastically at the time, it did not have an obvious impact on development practice. He notes that there have been few programmes that have gone through Korten's three phases of development and scaled up from small scale local projects to have a national impact. He argues that this low level of adoption may be the result of the prevailing bureaucratic culture of official funding agencies and the high demands the approach places on skilled, experienced and motivated staff in the early stages of implementation. Wiggins (2005) highlights the importance of committed leadership

in determining the success of a process approach. Process projects rely on learning over long periods of time and as a result require leaders and senior staff that are committed to and have the capacity to lead others to adapt projects in line with outcomes and changing conditions. He acknowledges that the poor take-up could imply that the approach is simply impractical, but concludes that it is probably an idea that has simply never been tried with sufficient determination.

Although the concept of the 'process approach' is rarely mentioned in the literature, the key dimensions of this approach are widely accepted in practice. As Barakat and Chard (2002, p.818) have argued, there is 'a consensus among practitioners and implementing agencies on what they ought to be doing in development work. That is, transforming practice from a top down 'blueprint' to a participatory 'learning-process' approach building on existing institutions and capacities'. They continue: 'despite this consensus, records of actual practice over the past three decades show that, with few exceptions, there has been remarkably little change: inappropriate 'blue-print' strategies and approaches identified in the late 1970s and again in the early 1990s are still in evidence today'.

While the process approach has received relatively little attention from practitioners over the last twenty years, many of the key features of this approach have been prominently featured in work on **organisational learning and knowledge** (Ramalingham 2005) and in the recent literature on **complexity theory** and development (Ramalingham and Jones 2008, Jones 2011). Complexity theory has focused attention on feedback processes and a greater focus on the interaction between different processes that drive change (Ramalingham and Jones 2008).

Another emerging concept in development policy that has echoed many of the lessons of the process approach is the idea of '**resilience**'. Gross (2008) has argued that a resilience model should replace a focus on sustainability amongst development and environmental policymakers since the latter concept involves the following elements: the capacity to absorb, to change, and to accommodate the unexpected. Resilience has also been an important concept in the literature on fragile states. A resilient state is seen as the opposite of a fragile state, with the ability to cope with changes in state capacity, effectiveness, or legitimacy (OECD 2008, USAID 2011).

#### *Issues with measuring the effectiveness of the process approach*

There are a number of difficulties associated with analysing the effectiveness of the process approach. First, as mentioned above, the concept has not proved popular. As a result, there are only a small number of programmes that employ this terminology and an even smaller number of studies that evaluate these programmes' effectiveness. Furthermore, as Ferrero y de Loma-Osorio and Zepeda (no date) show, in a number of development projects, such as the *Bajo Lempa* programme in El Salvador, implementing staff were following a process approach, without identifying an 'integrated theory' that described their programme.

Second, and related to the first issue, programme evaluations are not always explicit about the process through which a programme has been implemented. Most evaluations focus on outputs and inputs, so even if certain aspects of a process approach have been utilised in practice, they may be difficult to identify.

Third, programmes that follow the process approach may be particularly unsuited to rigorous evaluation since they are unlikely to view 'success' and 'failure' in the same way as traditional evaluation frameworks that assess linear outcomes. As Walton and Heeks (2011) have argued:

*'Success looks different when examined through a process approach lens....In a traditional project, success is achieved when the objectives are completed as originally planned. If these objectives are met on time and within the budget, the project is successful. From a process and learning perspective, though, "success" merely contributes to a wider understanding of the systems that make up a particular context, which can always be improved upon further. This notion is reflected in the ongoing nature of the process approach. There are rarely plans to stop, only to constantly evolve'* (p.19-20).

## **2. Effectiveness of programmes that have applied the process approach**

This first section reviews the evidence from the small number of studies that directly assess the effectiveness of the process approach. Most of the evidence from these studies comes from case studies of development initiatives from around the world. The largest number of relevant literature focuses on comprehensive rural development programmes, but other studies have been conducted on programmes in the areas of information and communication technologies for development, natural resource management and peacebuilding.

One key deficiency of these studies is that they are highly selective about the development initiatives they assess. Most of these studies focus on process approach success stories as a means of supporting an argument about the usefulness of this approach. Few studies highlight programmes that have followed the process approach but failed, or compared the outcomes of process programmes with programmes that have adopted a different approach. An example of this methodology is provided by Chandy and Linn's (2011) study of scaling up in fragile states, which is discussed in section 5.

Most of the studies do not make a clear case that improved development outcomes can be directly attributed to the application of a process approach. In most cases, qualitative case studies simply highlight several positive benefits of pursuing this approach and describe an association with improved outcomes. Some of the studies detailed below show that these programmes have had a positive organisational impact on the organisations and institutions that implemented them, but describe mixed outcomes in terms of the development effectiveness (see, for instance, Korten (1980) and Walton & Heeks (2011)). Several studies also note that there are considerable difficulties associated with implementing the process approach including the need for donors to be more tolerant of risk, the need to commit to longer time frames, and the need to commit more resources to capacity and management (see Korten 1980, Bond 1999).

### Comprehensive rural development programmes

The most rigorous accounts come from Bond (1998) and Bond and Hulme (1999), who examine Sri Lanka's Moneragala Integrated Rural Development Programme (MONDEP), a comprehensive development programme for one of Sri Lanka's most deprived districts started in 1984 and supported by Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (NORAD). NORAD's funding was long-term, non-interfering and flexible. The Ministry of Policy Planning and Implementation (MPPI), which implemented the programme, encouraged a degree of experimentation and autonomy within the MONDEP. An independent mid-term review, conducted after 12 years, gave a favourable report on the programme. Bond (1999, p.6) argues that the programme's success was 'probably rooted in the process approach taken during the first phase, where the features included:

- A 20-year time frame with rolling planning and built-in review mechanisms;

- A direct poverty focus for many projects, aimed at marginalised farmers and encroachers, estate workers, unemployed youth and rural women;
- Involvement of target groups in participatory planning approaches and social mobilisation;
- Supporting and building the capacity of local institutions, rather than by-passing them'.

Bond and Hulme (1999, p.2) argue that MONDEP's experience demonstrates that a process approach 'can lead to effective development interventions and that these are not the preserve of NGOs operating on a small-scale'. He notes, however, that this approach requires more intensive management than conventional blueprint approaches. This is because the approach requires managers to have a full understanding of the complex social realities of local contexts. It also requires managers to be more flexible and adaptive.

Bond and Hulme (1999, p.7) also examined the extent to which the programme followed the process approach in practice, and found that it had a 'moderate' fit with all aspects of the approach. He notes that evidence for the 'success' of the programme 'is more a matter of consensus and circumstantial, rather than direct, evidence. This evidence comes from various sources, such as an independent mid-term review, opinions of beneficiaries, donors and officials, an independent report of a commissioned development journalist, and 22 reviews of projects within the programme'.

Korten (1980) looks at five successful development initiatives from Asia that broadly follow the process approach. The stories generally show success in organisational terms, but the evidence that these approaches proved effective in developmental terms is inconclusive:

- **Indian National Dairy Development Board:** This vertically-integrated single industry co-operative was established in the 1970s. Studies have shown that the programme 'operates with a high level of efficiency and lack of corruption, and provides major social and economic benefits to the poorest members of the member villages' (p. 485).
- **Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement of Sri Lanka:** After a critical evaluation of the Movement's work in the 1970s, a research institute was established, which collected data about Sarvodaya's projects and fed into discussions with field staff to seek solutions. The effectiveness of Sarvodaya's programmes has not been verified since.
- **Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee:** BRAC is an NGO with unusual capacity for rapid learning. BRAC's approach gradually developed towards a 'people centred approach' in the 1970s, which was more focused on the poorest members of rural communities. The new approach involved a research unit that fed in empirical analysis into future programmes. Korten notes that 'the spontaneous replication BRAC is observing is probably the strongest available indicator that its program is truly meeting felt needs' (p.490).
- **Thailand's Community Based Family Planning Services:** This government department achieved excellent results due to strong leadership and a willingness to adapt programme design and learn lessons from prior experiences.
- **Philippine National Irrigation Administration Communal Irrigation Programme:** This government programme made exceptional efforts over a number of years to form local organisations. It piloted programmes and used research and field-based learning to achieve positive outcomes, although Korten notes that 'there is still no assurance the effort will succeed' (p.494).

He concludes that 'the determinants of success cannot be found in an easily replicable program variable – whether private or public, multi-purpose or single-purpose, broadly or narrowly defined target group. Each project was successful because it worked out a program model responsive to beneficiary needs at a particular time and place and each had a strong organization capable of making the program work' (p.496). He also notes that there are significant barriers to implementing these approaches including greater risk of programme failure, a lack of donor capacity to support these approaches, and the need for more long-term commitment from donors.

The usefulness of a process approach in rural development is advocated in **a wide-ranging study on rural development by Uphoff et al (1998)**. This book documents the experience of several innovative rural development initiatives including BRAC in Bangladesh, the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme in Pakistan, the Khorat Integrated Rural Development Programme in Thailand, Plan Puebla in Mexico, Six-S in Burkina Faso, and the Organization of Rural Associations for Progress in Zimbabwe. Based on evidence from these successful case studies, the book advocates a 'learning process' approach, arguing that 'for sustainable development, the capacities and orientations that are created must remain flexible, open to new information, ideas and instructions. Economic, social, ecological, political, and other aspects of the world are always evolving and changing... For innovations to remain relevant and effective, they must be continually checked against new realities and revised accordingly' (p.19). While the authors acknowledge that 'some efforts undertaken in the name of the learning process have been poorly conceived' (p.23), they nevertheless argue that the approach helps development agencies and individual practitioners to recognise major problems as they arise and respond accordingly. This study does not rigorously evaluate these initiatives, but rather uses descriptions of these initiatives to describe the process learning approach.

Jones' (2011) study of development and complexity highlights two process approach success stories from the wider literature. Bourgon (2010) describes the successful case of the **Brazilian Unified Health System (SUS)**, which was established in 1996. The system deployed a number of characteristics of the process approach, including integrating community participation at a variety of levels, local experimentation and innovation in service provision and governance. The programme uses health councils to allow community and stakeholder participation in health care planning and delivery and deploys auxiliary workers, who are members of local communities employed to work as the assistants of health professionals. Research has shown that local experimentation and innovation have been a major factor in the system's success and adaptability.

Another case study comes from Lam and Ostrom (2009). They describe an innovative **irrigation programme in the central hills of Nepal**. Jones (2011, p.41) argues that this programme 'shows how implementation can take into account the need for self-organisation, and how learning the needs for implementation can respect complexity'. Again, the programme proved successful and utilised several characteristics of the process approach. The programme used farmer-led planning, built on existing efforts, peer-to-peer learning, and facilitated deliberation to integrate new ideas. An evaluation of the programme was designed to 'take into account the complex configuration of forces shaping the programme's impact, rather than viewing change as a simple additive process. It focused on understanding how unfolding patterns of irrigation performance were shaped by a number of key variables in different contexts' (Jones 2011, p.41).

*Information and Communication Technologies for Development*

One of the few recent studies to examine the impact of a 'process approach' is Walton and Heeks' (2011) report on ICT4D (Information and Communication Technologies for Development) projects. They look at four successful ICT4D projects and find the presence of the five key elements of a process approach in these projects: 'flexible, phased implementation; learning from experience; institutional support; and programme management' (p.1). The four case studies point to some of the benefits of the process approach, but show mixed results with regards to development effectiveness:

- **The Committee to Democratise Informatics (CDI):** This Brazilian NGO works in partnership with community-based organisations to provide computer training to disadvantaged Brazilians and at-risk youth. The organisation had trained over half a million students in 8 years, although few students found employment after training. CDI uses piloting and experimentation in the early stages, and its leadership strategy shows flexibility and a willingness to re-evaluate its management strategy and continually make improvements.
- **e-Choupal:** A scheme established by the Indian Tobacco Corporation as a means to simplify the agriculture supply chain for rural farmers. Farmers selling their crop through e-Choupal receive a price that is roughly 2.5% higher than they would by negotiating at regional government markets. This scheme uses a pilot strategy for rolling out new services so that their design can be tested and adapted according to context. It also employs a learning strategy, by recruiting informed locals and continually conducting research.
- **Grameen Phone:** This is a programme supported by Grameen Phone (a for-profit mobile operator) and Grameen Telecom (a non-profit rural telephone company), designed to improve mobile communications in Bangladesh using a unique mobile reseller model which pays village phone operators so that they can purchase the equipment required for re-selling usage on their mobile phones. By the end of 2005, Grameen Phone had provided telecommunications access to 45% of villages in Bangladesh. Grameen was able to use its experience of providing services to the poor and translate these lessons into success with their new Grameen phone programme.
- **M-PESA:** A mobile banking platform established in Kenya, launched through partnership between Safaricom (a Kenyan telecommunications company), Vodafone (an international telecommunications company) and DFID. After being established in 2007, the scheme recruited 2 million customers in its first year. The case is notable for its explicit mention of the use of experimentation prior to the widespread roll-out of their system. It has also adopted a learning strategy and decentralised some aspects of their operations and supporting these institutions where decentralisation occurred.

Walton and Heeks (2011) do not make bold claims about the general effectiveness of the process approach: 'In general, it appears that there is room for a new way of thinking, in terms of the approaches that are used in ICT4D practice. As seen from the evidence, the process approach offers a reasonable alternative to the traditional methodology that is typically associated with ICT4D, but also infuses a necessary perspective that is currently lacking in some ICT4D projects and programmes' (p.26).

### Natural Resource Management

Mosley (1996) examines the use of a 'participatory process approach' to developing a comprehensive water resources management plan in Sri Lanka. He describes how the approach incorporated a

number of elements including 'seminars of the steering committee of senior officials, a series of technical workshops facilitated by international experts, numerous interviews of officials and stakeholders, field inspections, consultation and synthesis of documentation, and a final two-day workshop/retreat' (p.191). The project outputs, the strategic framework and the action plan were successfully achieved. The process also led to a heightened level of interaction and understanding between officials and stakeholders, and greater consensus amongst senior officials. Mosley (1996) argues that the case emphasises the importance of negotiation and communication skills in water sector planning and management.

Kroma (2003) examines the usefulness of a 'learning process approach' to farmer innovation through a case study of a collaborative, participatory research and extension project in natural resources management in central Ghana. Using participatory methods, the case study shows that 'small group forums for joint analyses and farmer-to-farmer exchange of knowledge are significant factors in sustaining motivation for participation' (p.48). The development of trust and group identity on which this approach was dependent developed over a long period of time. The report concludes that '[s]ocializing learning processes clearly foster important synergies between youths and institutional partners, and in the broader community learners are embedded' (p.48).

### Peacebuilding

Hilhorst and Van Leeuwen (2005) have used the concept of a 'process approach' in relation to their study of local peacebuilding organisations. Their use of the approach, however, diverges from most common understandings of the process approach. It understands the process approach as a tool for understanding, rather than a guide for implementation. They see a process approach as involving the following: appreciating that organisations are the outcome of their own social, cultural and institutional history; recognising that organisations constitute social networks that often stretch beyond their confines; that they consist of different realities and discourses that are used strategically to manage relations; that the meaning of an organisation results from everyday negotiations of staff members and stakeholders; that organisations are fundamentally political in nature and are involved in the politics of legitimisation of their organisation vis-à-vis other stakeholders. They argue that this approach implies more flexibility with regards to evaluation and capacity building and more long-term commitment from donors. The usefulness of this approach is not assessed in the article, and the emphasis instead is on examining how a failure to adopt this approach led to poor outcomes amongst two peacebuilding NGOs in Sudan.

## **3. Community-Driven Development Programmes**

Community-based development (CBD) or community-driven development programmes (CDD) typically employ several features of the process approach. CBD is an umbrella term referring to projects that actively include beneficiaries in their design and management. CDD is a term coined by the World Bank that refers to CBD projects where communities have direct control over key project decisions as well as the management of investment funds (Mansuri & Rao 2003).

As Fearon et al (2009, p.3) have noted, these programmes typically contain two major components: 'first, the democratic selection of community committees and second, the allocation of block grants to be spent on development within communities with project selection and oversight led by the community committees'. An important recent sub-sector of CDD programmes have been community-

driven reconstruction programmes, where the principles of community-driven development have been applied in a post-conflict or post-disaster setting.

Despite the growing popularity of CDD programmes, there have been surprisingly few studies that examine their impact (Fearon et al 2009). Fearon et al (2009, p.3) note that the most well-known study finds only mixed evidence that CDD programmes 'strengthen the targeting of beneficiaries, enhance service delivery, and improve sustainability; moreover, the review unearthed little evidence on whether projects better reflect community preferences and whether exposure to CDD increases the capacity for subsequent collective action'. They state, however, that more recent work (Arcand and Bassole 2007; Labonne and Chase 2008) 'has started to find more positive results' (p.3). This section reviews the existing evaluative literature on CDD programmes, with a particular focus on examining the importance of the key aspects of the process approach. Although the studies reviewed in this section are not as clearly focused on the process approach, some of them use more rigorous evaluation techniques than those used in studies described in the last section.

A number of studies focus on community development programmes in conflict-affected regions. While these studies emphasise that aspects of the process approach (such as their capacity to deliver rapid results) have proved particularly valuable in conflict environments, the evidence that these approaches have been effective is mixed. Several studies describe positive impacts of these programmes on social cohesion (Fearon et al 2009) or suggest some positive development outcomes (World Bank 2006). Other studies, however, state that there is little evidence of material improvements (Fearon et al 2009) or raise questions regarding the long-term impact of these programmes (see McBride & Patel 2007, Casey et al 2011).

#### General assessments of community development

**Mansuri and Rao (2003)** examine both impact evaluations and qualitative ethnographic/case studies on community-based and community-driven development. They find that:

- The evidence does not indicate that CBD/CDD projects have been well targeted to the poor within communities.
- While there is some evidence that CBD/CDD projects create effective community infrastructure and improve welfare outcomes, such evidence is missing for most projects. It is also unclear whether the participatory elements in CBD/CDD projects contributed to successful outcomes. In addition, it is unknown whether alternative project designs may have produced better outcomes, given the absence of comparative studies.
- The success of community driven development is likely to be affected by what resources and strategies are adopted to bring communities together; how effectively differences are debated and discussed and solutions arrived; and how well the project aligns with different interests and incentives in the community.
- Even in egalitarian societies, elites will often dominate the process of constructing and managing a public good as they tend to be better educated and have fewer opportunity costs on their time. This does not, however, necessarily translate in 'elite capture' (where elites tightly control decision-making and appropriate all the benefits from the public good), but may entail more benevolent elite involvement.

- The sustainability of CBD/CDD seems to depend in large part on the existence of upward commitment and responsive government – i.e. line ministries need to be responsive to community needs and contribute to covering recurring costs of community projects; and national governments should be committed to the idea of transparent, accountable, and democratic governance.
- Local cultural and social systems greatly affect the success of CBD/CDD. As such, there should not be a wholesale application of ‘best practices’ applied from projects that were successful in other contexts. Rather, attention should be paid to careful learning-by-doing, which requires a long term horizon. Such careful evaluation of CBD/CDD projects with good treatment and control groups, baseline and follow-up data is essential, but has thus far been lacking.

This review highlights a number of key findings where there appears to be some consensus in the literature on community development. Many of these findings advocate the key features of the process approach such as an emphasis on capacity development, gradual scaling up and learning, and monitoring and evaluation. Key points include:

- There is a need to take into account political economy dimensions including elite incentives when designing CDD programmes.
- The evidence that CBD/CDD programmes can be rapidly scale up is generally lacking but there are a few positive case studies, including the story of the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in India.
- The evidence suggests that scaling up should occur gradually, in line with the process approach. ‘Effective CBD/CDD has to involve slow, gradual, persistent learning-by-doing where project design gradually adapts to local conditions by learning from the false starts and mistakes that are endemic to all complex interventions’ (p.38).
- This requires effective monitoring and evaluation.
- ‘Careful and adequate attention should be paid to the training and development of a core cadre of facilitators since they are the fulcrum of successful community based interventions’ (p.40).
- ‘All this requires a very long term horizon. Both institutions such as the World Bank, and countries that take on the CBD/CDD agenda, need to realize that changing from topdown to bottom-up development in a manner that is effective and sensitive to local context and culture cannot be done hastily’ (p.40).

**Labonne and Chase (2008) rigorously evaluate a large-scale, World-Bank funded CDD project in the Philippines** in which communities competed for block grants for infrastructure investment. They find that ‘participation in village assemblies, the frequency with which local officials meet with residents and trust towards strangers increased as a result of the project. However, there is a decline in group membership and participation in informal collective action activities’ (p.i). The programme used an incremental, iterative approach to funding eligible municipalities – a ‘community empowerment activity cycle’. The cycle had four main stages, repeated three times in each participating municipality ‘: (i) social preparation, (ii) subproject identification, (iii) subproject

preparation, selection and approval and, (iv) sub-project implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and operations and maintenance' (p.9).

### Community development programmes in conflict-affected regions

Fearon et al (2009) evaluate a **community-driven reconstruction (CDR) project in Liberia**, financed by DFID and implemented by the International Rescue Committee, using randomized evaluation techniques. The aims of the project are to improve material well-being, reinforce democratic political attitudes, and increase social cohesion. The programme aims to achieve these goals through rapid disbursement of development funds, strengthening of local communities, and greater transparency and accountability in decision-making. As such, the programme involves several key features of the process approach: incrementalism, focusing on concrete problems and focusing on quick impacts, participation, strengthening local institutions.

Through surveys and an analysis of behaviour through a 'public goods game', the authors found that:

- The CDR programmes had a measurable, positive impact on the level of community cohesion: beneficiary communities seemed subsequently to be better able to raise funds and act collectively to implement community projects to improve their own welfare.
- Exposure to CDR seems to have increased social inclusion in beneficiary communities: traditionally marginalised groups made significant contributions to community projects in CDR communities. In addition, individuals in CDR communities reported less social tension and exhibited greater acceptance of marginalised groups.
- The CDR program reinforced democratic values and practices: there is some evidence for greater support for elections and participatory processes in CDR communities.
- There is little evidence of positive improvements in material well-being related to the CDR programme: improvement in local public goods was not accompanied by improvements in household-level welfare (e.g. livelihoods and asset holdings) (summarized by Haider 2009).

A **review by the World Bank (2006)** focuses on the impact of CDD programmes in conflict-affected countries. It finds that CDD has been effective in addressing key concerns in such contexts, in particular:

- The demand for rapid and cost-effective delivery of goods and services at the community level;
- The need to promote participatory models of local governance and service delivery;
- The need to rebuild or strengthen social capital and foster peaceful, representative, and inclusive forms of planning and decision making at the local level.

It stresses the particular importance of political and conflict analysis, and capacity building in conflict-affected contexts. These key lessons are reiterated in other World Bank studies on CDD in conflict-affected contexts (Strand et al 2003) and in donor guidance on CBD in these contexts (see USAID 2007).

**A recent review of four CDR programmes implemented by the IRC in Afghanistan by McBride and Patel (2007)** find that all programmes were effective at establishing community structures and processes, and somewhat effective at improving social cohesion. Despite this progress, it was unclear whether the positive outcomes would be sustainable in the absence of either a follow-on programme that would ground learning, or a national programme for decentralisation and reconstruction. **Casey et al's (2011) study of a CDD programme in post-war Sierra Leone**, finds 'positive short-run effects on local public goods provision and economic outcomes, but no sustained impacts on collective action, decision-making processes, or the involvement of marginalized groups (like women) in local affairs, indicating that the intervention was ineffective at durably reshaping local institutions' (p.i). A review of CDD programmes by **ADB (2006)** noted that these programmes were particularly useful in conflict-affected contexts because they can foster rapid micro-level reconstruction and recovery.

This is a point also emphasized in **Haider's (2009) review of community-based approaches to peacebuilding**, which notes that the lower levels of bureaucracy associated with community-based approaches allow for speedier decision-making processes than a more centralized approach. Haider (2009) also cites a number of studies that find that staged financing with gradual increases in funding can provide time for systems of transparency and accountability to be developed.

This report highlights the importance of other key features of the process approach in conflict-affected contexts. These include the importance of iterative adaptation, facilitated by ongoing monitoring and evaluation, which allows for 'improvements to continually be incorporated into projects, and for lessons learned to be transferred to other projects in the same or other community sites' (Haider 2009, p.21). Such an approach can be 'complemented by a phased-in scaling up of funds' (p.21). The review also provides evidence that programmes where small community-based initiatives have been gradually scaled up and have proved successful. The gradual process of scaling up 'gives time for communities to be willing to work in partnership with local and national governments. In some conflict-affected environments where national or local administrations were actively involved in the war effort...communities are likely to be reluctant to partner with government' (p.26).

**Zakhilwal and Thomas (2005) review the National Solidarity Programme, an \$800 million IFI-financed programme in Afghanistan established in 2003.** The programme involves a number of process approach dimensions including a participatory planning process, a gradual scaling up of funds to community development councils, a focus on capacity development, and activities designed to facilitate links with government institutions. They find that by 2005, the programme had successfully established 10,000 elected community development councils (CDC), and approved 14,000 village projects. The evaluation found a number of issues with the programme, including a lack of CDC linkages with other CDCs in the area and the need for more rigorous monitoring and evaluation. Since the review was conducted two years after the initiation of the programme, it is not able to provide any indication as to the programme's long-term impact.

#### **4. Tensions between long-term and short-term goals**

As noted in section one, a key tension surrounding the process approach concerns its implementation in contexts where there are strong political imperatives for quick and large-scale action. This issue was partly addressed in the last section, which highlighted that certain aspects of the process approach support the successful implementation of short-term goals that can satisfy strong political imperatives for action. This literature nevertheless highlights that where it is politically feasible to implement, a gradual approach was likely to be the most effective (Haider 2009). This section presents some additional findings on this key tension.

There seems to be some consensus in the literature that while it is often necessary for donors to pursue large-scale development programmes quickly in fragile states, this approach carries more high risk. Batley and McLoughlin (2009), in a study on the role of non-state service providers in fragile states, argue that a process approach based on 'an incremental process of dialogue, leading to the design of legally and financially supported policy frameworks, and the step-by-step development of capacity to contract and regulate' (p.30), poses less risks and is therefore preferable. They also suggest that it may be beneficial to pursue different approaches in different regions and sectors depending on capacity. This could 'reduce the strain on government, for example of having to manage dialogue, regulation or contracting on a uniform national basis' (p.36). Batley and McLoughlin (2009) argue that it is not possible to resolve this tension between short- and long-term goals in fragile states, but suggest that donors should select programmes primarily on the basis of their effectiveness in improving service delivery, rather than on their potential contribution to statebuilding.

Chandy and Linn (2011) address this tension in a paper assessing the prospects for 'scaling up' development initiatives in fragile contexts. They argue that the more organic process of scaling up where successful approaches create spill over effects 'whereby key actors elsewhere recognize the utility of those approaches and replicate them – occurs less readily in fragile states, if at all' (p.5). They cite evaluations of interventions in Timor-Leste and Bosnia-Herzegovina where the pressure to demonstrate quick impacts undermined the sustainability of development programmes. The report nevertheless cites some examples of programmes that were able to combine quick impact and sustainable scaling up. These include the case of 'Basic Packages of Health Services' in Afghanistan (p.49-50), where success was underpinned by rigorous M&E.

In recent years, development and military agencies have sought to build trust and confidence either in intervening powers or a new government in conflict-affected or post-war environments. A sizeable literature has grown up surrounding **quick impact projects** (QIPs), which are usually short-term, small-scale initiatives designed to have 'an immediate impact contributing to post-conflict stabilisation or recovery'. DFID notes that 'they may also have an impact on longer-term development, and this should be taken into account in the planning stages' (DFID2006).

GSDRC (2010a) reviews the existing evidence of development assistance and stabilization. It finds that the vast majority of literature emphasizes that there is little evidence that aid is contributing to sustained perceptions and support for government and international forces, undermining one of the key assumptions of 'quick impact projects' in contexts such as Afghanistan where international military forces are supporting statebuilding processes. Berry and Ogboemeka (n.d.) highlight a potential problem with implementing quick impact projects, citing evidence from Nepal, Afghanistan and Burma. They note that '[t]here may be quick gains in delivering basic supplies through government channels but the difficulty of sustaining provision could in the long run provoke tensions' (p.9). Slaymaker et al (2005) note that a useful way of alleviating this tension is to use an emergency cycle of small grants. They argue that these should not include revolving funds and should be based on a more limited menu of physical reconstruction options than long-term projects, to minimize the need for complex technical verification.

Slaymaker et al (2005) note that 'demand-driven, community-based approaches' are considered most suitable in post-conflict settings because they 'seek to mobilise communities to contribute to rapid rehabilitation of basic services resulting in 'quick wins' and high visibility 'peace dividends' designed to reduce the likelihood of return to conflict' (p.15). They cite the example of the Community Empowerment Project (CEP), designed by the World Bank in East Timor, which 'while initially well

integrated with local government administration systems, failed to adapt with subsequent changes of government and abolition of different tiers of administration' (p.31).

There has been growing emphasis in the recent literature on the importance of approaches that focus on concrete problems that deliver noticeable improvements. This approach has recently been championed by **Tony Blair's African Governance Initiative (AGI)**. Booth (2011, p.11) describes how this programme closely targets 'releasing specific bottlenecks in performance at the centre of government, rather than supporting comprehensive reform. The programme targets areas where it can be shown that there is likely to be a worthwhile political payoff to a powerful actor, which helps to guarantee seriousness in implementation and some measure of sustainability'. Since the AGI initiative is relatively new, its effectiveness has not yet been assessed.

## 5. Studies That Assess Other Key Aspects of the Process Approach

This section presents a selection of key findings from literature that focuses on particular aspects of the process approach. The extensive literature on scaling up contains a number of successful cases, but also highlights significant possibilities for failure. The most successful cases appear to be those where key aspects of the process approach are applied. A number of studies are highlighted that demonstrate how incremental capacity building can lead to improved developmental outcomes. The evidence for the effectiveness of participatory monitoring and evaluation and political economy analysis is less conclusive. This section also details some key studies such as Grindle's (2007) work on 'good enough governance' and Easterly's (2006) work on development 'planners' and 'searchers', which although not focused on assessing the effectiveness of a process approach, nevertheless make a general case for approaches to development that promote greater understanding of the political context and greater scope for innovation and risk-taking.

### Scaling Up

A large literature has grown up surrounding the potential to scale up development interventions, since Korten (1980) and other authors first raised this issue in the 1980s. Hartmann and Linn (2008) provide an overview of the literature on scaling up development interventions. In many cases, 'scaling up' efforts have not followed a process approach – implementing agencies have simply tried to expand programmes to new areas, to increase the scope of a programme's activities, or expand a programme by seeking to influence the political process, without using mechanisms necessary to encourage an incremental approach such as pilot projects or beneficiary feedback. They argue that seven common 'building blocks' of successful scaling up (which resonate strongly with the process approach):

- Applying leadership, vision and values
- Managing political constituencies
- Ensuring supportive policies
- Developing institutional capacity
- Creating incentives and accountability
- Practicing evaluation, learning and feedback
- Planning for success

Hartmann and Linn (2008) critique Easterly's call for an individualistic approach to scaling up where governments simply support 'searchers' to find solutions to development problems. They argue that 'the proponents of the individualistic approach do not effectively address the need for collective action when development programs are taken to scale' (p.12). They examine the case of the *Progres*

*Oportunidades* programme in Mexico. Easterly argued that the programme's leader Santiago Levy was a 'searcher par excellence', but Hartmann and Linn (2008) argue that Easterly neglects the fact that he 'took a long-term view, engaged in a carefully planned process of preparation and deployment, and chose a centralized, top-down method of implementation' (p.13).

Hartmann and Linn (2008) cite a number of case study examples of successful scaling up that reinforce key aspects of the process approach. One example is the case of BRAC, also discussed by Korten (1980) and Uphoff et al (1998). BRAC's success is attributed to their focus on staff capacity development and a 'devolution of decision-making to the local level, which created a learning and scaling up culture in their institutions and allowed continuous improvement, adaptation, expansion as well as replication' (p.17). Hartmann and Linn's (2008) study also highlights the importance of rigorous monitoring and evaluation for achieving effective scaling up. BRAC's Research and Evaluation division helped to facilitate scaling-up by producing 'quick turnaround' assessments (p.32).

Other key examples from this study include a pre-school education programme for Roma in Serbia, a participatory education programme in Ecuador, the PROGRESA programme in Mexico, a women's empowerment programme in Kerala, and a political scaling up programme in Cameroon.

A more recent study by Chandy and Linn (2011) examines these issues in fragile and low capacity environments. The study assesses over 100 evaluations of development activities in fragile states and found 17 that involved some degree of successful scaling up. Again, successful case studies tended to be those that adhered to some of the key features of a process approach including a degree of flexibility in preparation and implementation, the importance of M&E, continuity of engagement, community demand, and providing space for learning and experimentation. Successful case studies include examples from World Bank, UNDP and USAID supported programmes in Afghanistan, Timor-Leste, Kenya, Tajikistan. Another case assessed is the Seila local development programme in Cambodia (p.60-61), which was funded by the UNDP. The programme's success in scaling up was attributed to a number of factors including the fact that the programme created space for learning and feedback, allowed space for flexibility and experimentation, and the focus on capacity building.

#### *Incremental capacity development*

Uphoff & Wijeratna (2000) examine the case of the Gal Oya irrigation scheme in Sri Lanka. The scheme established farmer organisations and institutional organisers in the early 1980s, and adopted several dimensions of a process approach. The farmers' organisations began informally and were only formalised once farmers decided they were ready. The scheme supported several larger bodies at the area level, and a coordinating body for the whole programme. The scheme produced measurable improvements in system performance and efficiency over the long term. In the 1997 dry season, 'after farmers were told there was not enough water in the reservoir to grow a rice crop, they achieved through their organizations a better-than-average harvest from 65,000 acres by efficient and equitable distribution' (p.1875). The scheme also contributed to improved inter-ethnic relations between upstream Sinhalese famers and downstream Tamil farmers.

Plummer and Armitage (2006) have assessed the usefulness of 'adaptive co-management' approaches in natural resource management, which share many of the key features of a process approach. Co-management emphasizes that responsibility for allocating and using resources should be shared between a number of parties. Adaptive co-management is 'a process by which institutional arrangements and ecological knowledge are tested and revised in a dynamic, ongoing, self-organized process of trial-and-error' (p.63). They note that the approach is relatively new and that there is a 'lack

of evidence from consistent evaluation' of the approach (p.63). They argue that new approaches to evaluation would be needed to assess the effectiveness of this kind of approach, which is based on complex systems theory. They cite Connick and Innes (2000, p.178) who argue that 'many evaluations of collaborative policy making miss the mark because they come from the perspective of an older, modernist paradigm of policy making predicated on the assumption that policies can be designed to produce predictable outcomes, even in very complex settings'. Plummer and Armitage (2006) conclude that the solution lies in incorporating evaluation systematically into adaptive co-management.

Land et al (2008) report on a wide-ranging research programme on capacity development that draws on sixteen case studies from around the world, including a local hospital in Uganda, the tax authority in Rwanda, and the education system in Pakistan. The research draws lessons from the case studies and concludes that the most effective capacity development strategies are those that are closely aligned with the process approach. The case studies suggest that the most successful capacity development strategies are those that are those that are carefully tailored to local context. The research also suggested that 'smaller, more manageable interventions can have a better chance of success in the short term, and can even lead to bigger capacity gains in the medium and long term. Small interventions can be appropriate when absorptive capacity is weak and demand uncertain. In particular, small interventions can deal directly with what is perhaps the biggest constraint on capacity development – the implementation gap' (p.6). The research also advocates an approach that is long-term in orientation, but that invests in 'quick wins'. Finally, the research advocates an emphasis on learning and adaptation. These findings are developed in a later Policy Management Brief (Land et al 2009), which encourages donors to 'approach capacity development more as a process of experimentation and learning than as the performance of predetermined activities', to 'take a more evolutionary approach to design', and to 'invest more in understanding context in terms of the political, social and cultural norms and practices' and to 'be prepared to accept a higher degree of risk and failure as a means of encouraging learning and innovation'. Although this research did not undertake a rigorous evaluation of various approaches to capacity development, its findings are based on in-depth analysis of several case studies.

#### *Incrementalism and feedback*

Several key aspects of the process approach are captured in calls for participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E). PM&E plays a critical role in ensuring a more iterative approach to project design and management, where programmes can be adapted based on beneficiary feedback. A beneficiary feedback system is a 'systematic approach to collecting the views of...key stakeholders about the quality and impact of work undertaken by a development agency, generating quantitative data' (Jacobs 2010). A review of the literature on PM&E and beneficiary feedback, conducted by the GSDRC (2010, p.2) finds that 'there is evidence to suggest that beneficiary feedback mechanisms can improve impact, enhance local ownership and prove more cost-effective than other forms of M&E'. The Listening Project concluded that beneficiaries of aid felt that aid agencies should 'invest the necessary time', 'go more slowly', and 'listen to people' in order to 'learn about the real circumstances', 'get to know people', and 'show respect for people's ideas and opinions' (Brown 2010, no page number). The review concludes that the benefits of PM&E techniques and beneficiary feedback mechanisms remain 'largely unproven' (GSDRC 2010).

#### *Understanding the political environment*

The importance of integrating political economy analysis has been widely accepted amongst development practitioners (Duncan and Williams 2010, Unsworth 2008), and the importance of understanding the incentives and constraints that shape the implementation of development programmes has also been increasingly recognised. Political economy analysis has been seen as particularly important in conflict-affected regions. Booth (2011) has recently called for political economy analysis that focuses on collective action problems and places a greater emphasis on the short-term political incentives shaping leaders' actions, which often ensure that they do not adopt a long-term perspective that is requirement for effective developmental leadership.

Duncan and Williams' (2010) review of the literature on political economy analysis (PEA) and assess the experience of the UK and the Netherlands governments' approaches to PEA. They conclude that 'there are good reasons to expect that these changes brought by the use of PEA will increase aid effectiveness. However, the evidence to support such a claim has not yet been gathered. We are not aware of any wider review of the impact of PEA on development effectiveness and aid effectiveness' (p.15).

A more gradual, iterative approach that acknowledges the political economy constraints facing development actors has been advocated by Levy (2010) in his work on economic growth. He argues that major reforms are not needed in order to facilitate growth and that 'just enough' governance may be sufficient: 'With a just-enough-governance strategy, the goal is not to anticipate and address in advance all possible institutional constraints. Rather, the focus is on addressing specific capacity and institutional constraints as and when they become binding'. He notes that Bangladesh provides a good example of the relevance of a 'just-enough governance' development strategy: 'Over the past decade, Bangladesh has made major gains in development performance. In the three decades following the country's independence in the early 1970s, per capita income more than doubled; the poverty rate fell from 70 percent to 40 percent; child immunization rates rose from negligible levels to close to 80 percent; life expectancy at birth went from 45 years to 63 years. But over the same period, the country rated consistently among the most corrupt countries in the world; other governance indicators also rated poorly. Key to Bangladesh's paradoxical achievement were a series of just-enough development reforms: good macroeconomic management, targeted trade policy reforms that provided just enough openness to enable the garment export sector to take off...plus an unusually strong role for the country's well-developed nongovernmental institutions in the provision of public services' (p.4). Levy goes on to explain that this 'just enough' approach may only work in certain political settlements – those that are competitive, clientelistic – and may be less successful in contexts where there is a dominant party or leader.

This message has featured prominently in the literature on governance. Grindle's (2007) call, for example, for thinking about which governance reforms might be 'good enough' to get development started, has been widely accepted by policymakers. A number of authors have encouraged donors to pay more attention to what governance arrangements already exist and to avoid judging developing countries by the standards of OECD countries (Shivakumar 2005, Unsworth 2009).

### *Innovation, risk and experimentation*

Easterly's (2006, 2006a) wide-ranging critique of existing approaches to development, draws on a broad range of examples of development interventions, focusing in particular on efforts to foster growth in developing countries. He argues that 'planners' have been much less effective than 'searchers', who use feedback to modify and adapt development strategies. He cites examples of programmes that have worked well but have not been based on a broader development plan such as

cash for school programmes in Mexico and Bangladesh. He also uses examples from the private sector to make a similar point, including the Hindustan Lever Limited's promotion of soap and its impact on reducing diarrheal diseases amongst the poor.

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