

Power analysis and evaluation

The case of Norwegian development support to Zambia

In 2007 Oxford Policy Management undertook an evaluation for the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs of its development aid programme in Zambia, 1991-2005. The terms of reference for the evaluation took as its starting point the general perception that aid, including Norad assistance, had been used ineffectively in Zambia to reduce poverty. The evaluation team was asked to explain whether power relations within Zambia and between Zambians and donors might have been responsible for this ineffectiveness. The team assessed the scope for achieving pro-poor outcomes using aid and how power structures within Zambia and internationally affected the potential for reducing poverty. The assessment framework combined DAC evaluation criteria – relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability – with political economy analysis of formal/informal power and political relations, and critical-discourse analysis.

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Political Economy (PE) analysis digs beneath the visible interactions of leaders, donors, and citizens and the formal institutions and structures. In the late 1990s, donors began developing PE analysis to explore the underlying drivers of poor governance and underdevelopment in aid-recipient countries.

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This was in response to earlier experience where aid had proven to be ineffective and poverty had worsened in many countries. For instance, the DFID Drivers of Change approach directs researchers to look at agents, institutions and the underlying socio-economic and political structures that influence poverty.¹ SIDA's Power analysis is similar. It focuses on formal and informal power relations and structures, and how these factors affect and are affected by development policies at the macro-level.²

The Netherlands' Strategic Governance and Corruption Assessment (SGACA) highlights 'foundational [contextual and

historical] factors', institutions ('rules of the game') and 'the here and now' (current events, including key actors and socio-political and economic forces).³

This approach helps to explain what 'logics' really frame attitudes and behaviours and what gives rise to them. PE analysis aims to explain why power relations change and how new institutions arise that reflect the needs and compromises of the elite. Determining how strong various civic organisations are and the constraints they face in their struggle to change the constitution and halt corruption is equally important.

Discourse analysis of aid documents was also used to identify the underlying, often unstated, assumptions that appeared to govern donors' and specifically NORAD's aid policies. This was especially pertinent given the nature of economic and political reform in Zambia. The analytical framework was based on the view held by critical-discourse analysts that language is a form of social practice and that social and political domination is reproduced in text and talk.⁴

This type of PE research is highly dependent on the participation of

local researchers. In particular, those who are well-informed about the interests, relationships, and motives of key actors and how these change over time are of great value. In addition, researchers with knowledge of behind-the-scenes negotiations and compromises that lead to formal pronouncements and visible actions are also important contributors to PE analysis. Finally, the ability to locate and access key local informants and 'grey' literature that provide deeper insights into decisions and events is also very valuable. The OPM evaluation team had a number of such Zambians on the team. In addition, other team members included expatriates with an understanding of evaluation techniques, donor aid policies, critical discourse analysis, African neopatrimonialism, and political economy analysis.

PE analysis and Norwegian aid to Zambia

In the assessment period three different presidents governed Zambia - Kaunda, Chiluba and Mwanawasa. Each had different economic policies – though at some level all supported neoliberal reforms – and varying formal political structures. Nevertheless, while regimes changed the underlying thrust of national and local politics remained much the same throughout. This is because power in Zambia is used, acquired and distributed largely along deeply rooted vertical socio-political relations rather than weaker horizontal class ties. Other key factors to maintaining loyalty and power include patronage and clientelism (and at times, nepotism). In addition, the President (the office

and the man) is far stronger than the parliament and the judiciary, citizens, organised civil society, political parties and politicians. For example, decentralisation has been a stated policy objective for some decades, but the process has stalled. This is due in part to neopatrimonialism – a concentration of power in the hands of the president and close associates over decision-making and resources.⁵ Democratic constitution-making has been undermined by Zambia's leaders who remain intent on preserving the power of the presidency.

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At the local level, chiefs still retain authority and legitimacy. Therefore, they can still determine how power and resources are distributed to smallholders. This is despite the existence of formal village and district structures which are meant to represent citizens and ensure the delivery of public goods.

An understanding of basic drivers can also help explain certain behaviours of the three presidents. For instance, Kaunda's centralisation of power reached all the way down to the local level. Chiluba's reign was marked with persistent corruption, impunity, and third-term bids. Mwanawasa vigorously stated, but less successfully implemented, a range of anti-corruption policies. The evaluation of accountability institutions noted that there currently exist government

bureaucrats with real desire to adopt formal, rational processes that improve transparency and end corruption. Assessing how strong these actors are and what constraints they face is an important part of PE analysis.

A dozen desk reviews of Norad programmes were done, and three specific field studies were undertaken by the team, including:

- Norway's long-term variable support to strengthening management of Luangwa wildlife park and the surrounding game-management area;
- Norwegian support to transparency in financial management that focused on the effectiveness of government reforms aimed at fighting corruption; and
- Norad aid to agricultural reform in Northern Province, especially its support for government's attempt to transform the slash-and-burn system (*chitemene*) into permanent and settled farming practices.

The team assessed technical aspects of Norad programmes and evaluated their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. It also considered the way power relations affected these issues. For instance, the team found Norwegian support unwittingly entered into a contested political area when it assisted in the move away from *chitemene*. The local and central government, and the villagers, had differing interests which Norad had not considered. The team reported 'there is no indication that the Programme designers understood and took into account this political dimension of *chitemene*. Both the Norwegians

and their Zambian counterparts readily accepted the arguments put forward by the authorities who emphasised the negative aspects of *chitemene*. The advantages that *chitemene* had for cultivators... were not given due attention... farmers felt that [the Norwegian programme] was aligned against them'.⁶

In evaluating Norad's multi-staged game-management programme, the team went beyond assessing the technical aspects of the programme and analysed informal political processes. First, the team looked at the profit potential for companies selling hunting licenses and catering to tourists in Luangwa valley. It then considered the corruption that this potentially spawned both locally and centrally. Finally, the team looked at the impact of financial incentives on politics at both district and national level. This included villagers, entrepreneurs, chiefs, NGOs, and a number of politicians, government and parastatal officials.

The need to consider power relations influenced the way the team assessed the NORAD programmes' impact, relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability. Changes to the design of programme management structures had a major impact on community livelihoods and empowerment. For instance, the reduction or strengthening of the chiefs' role in Luangwa valley affected the disbursement of resources arising from the wildlife programme and park.

In analysing relations between donors and Zambians, discourse analysis of donor documentation was particularly useful. It supported

the report's general findings that donors, including Norway, were comfortable advocating the neoliberal economic approach (referred to as the Washington Consensus) in Zambia between 1991-2005. Disagreements rose about implementation as donors accused the government of lacking the 'will' to reform. There was, however, little discussion about whether the reforms advocated were in fact the right ones. In addition, although donors understood that government's will was weak, that lack of will (demonstrated by a failure to implement policies) was not analysed politically. It was instead addressed in documentation in an apolitical, technical manner. At best, failures were blamed on poor governance. However, these governance assessments were themselves without political content.

Lessons learned from using a PE approach

It is not surprising that this innovative approach to formal evaluations ran into some difficulties. By and large these were structural, and need to be addressed in any future research. Specifically:

1. Whether donors (like Norway) took underlying structural features and power relations into account in the past is difficult to assess. Either they were unaware of politically important constraints on development, or they did not write about them. Perhaps their understanding of 'informal' politics was confined to the realm of anecdote-swapping or more formally, to closed-door political briefings. These would have likely

focussed on who was corrupt, how politicians were related, what impact tribal affinities had at local level, what power chiefs retained, etc. It is difficult to assess retrospectively the impact such understandings had on policy formulation and action because very little is documented. It is clear that donors not using PE analysis were less aware of the systematic nature of informal power relations. These donors would have had difficulty determining how power relations arose and were changing, and their impact on the implementation of programmes and government policies.

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2. PE studies are relatively new, and many analysts and evaluators are unfamiliar with PE frameworks and their content. Thus, when undertaking an evaluation of this nature it is best to employ staff who are familiar with or trained in PE analysis. These individuals should inform all phases of the evaluation, not confining themselves to country analysis or individual PE studies. This would ensure better, deeper and wider analysis across the whole range of programmes being evaluated.

3. Combining the traditional OECD evaluation framework with PE analysis is difficult. It requires a flexible evaluation-specialist/team leader capable of identifying less technical or more informal/political reasons to explain the causes of

differential impact, effectiveness, sustainability, etc.

4. Finally, PE analyses are noteworthy in their inability to provide simple programming advice to donors about what to do next. This is because of the nature of PE studies and their findings. Specifically, western development programmes can pull reforms from a 'tool box' of technical and institutional changes. These are based on normative designs produced in London, Oslo, Washington DC, etc. PE studies identify the local constraints to development, which are deeply rooted, historical, and pervasive. Each context (country, programme area, etc) differs. Constraints won't disappear unless there are major changes to incentive structures. The underlying structures are generally beyond the influence of foreign development practitioners. Thus most change is grindingly slow ('tectonic'), internally driven (not by donors), and dependent on structural changes. Change also requires the emergence of key actors with a personal interest in pushing reform. Such structural conditions and 'developmental states' take a long time to emerge. The most donors can do then, is to identify key drivers of positive change at all levels and support their development.

Conclusion

The Norwegian government should be commended for taking the initiative to evaluate socio-political constraints to delivering development assistance to Zambia. PE and discourse analyses as analytical tools have much to

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offer evaluators and donors. It helps answer the important 'why' questions – why aid is ineffective or non-sustainable – that are the bread-and-butter of evaluations. Finally, it looks at the political factors which lie beneath lack of 'will' and can help link unwillingness by those in powerful positions to invest in new capacity- or institution-building to longer-term, systemic and embedded social and political processes.

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The main report, and the report on the case studies, Norad Evaluation Report 4/2007. Evaluation of Development Support to Zambia (1991-2005) can be found at <http://www.norad.no>

Endnotes

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