Concept and Values of NGO-IDEAs
An Introduction to all NGO-IDEAs Publications

"NGO Impact on Development, Empowerment and Actions" - NGO-IDEAs

… is a cooperation of 40 African and Asian and 14 German non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the field of development cooperation. It is a unique concept as it intends to identify and develop, jointly with all partners, some genuine concepts and tools for NGOs in for monitoring effectiveness and making people aware of their own capacities to influence change.

NGO-IDEAs is not just another study evaluating the outcome and impact of NGOs' work – it combines research & development, knowledge management, learning & training and advice & coaching to trigger a collective learning process for all partners involved. Additionally, NGO-IDEAs intends to create a valuable resource base for use by NGOs and community based organisations (CBOs).

What is the intention of NGO-IDEAs publications?

The NGO-IDEAs publications are addressed to practitioners in development organisations (here addressed as "NGOs") searching for concepts and tools focussing increased effectiveness. They show possibilities how primary stakeholders and staffs can get better aware of their own effectiveness, and how they can analyse it.

Five publications are at present being drafted for NGO-IDEAs:
- **NGO-IDEAs Impact Toolbox:**
  It is designed to enable NGOs and CBOs and the primary stakeholders involved with simple tools to steer a project to enhance positive outcomes and impacts, and reduce negative ones.
- **NGO-IDEAs Tiny Tools for Impact Assessment:**
  It is designed to enable NGOs and CBOs and the primary stakeholders involved to apply simple and easy tools to identify important changes and their causes.
- **NGO-IDEAs Manual to Strengthen Outcome and Impact Oriented Project Management: „Monitoring Self-Effectiveness":**
  It is designed to support an organisation to trim its planning, monitoring and evaluation procedures towards increased outcome and impact orientation.
- **NGO-IDEAs Examples of Impact Assessment:**
  It is designed to give examples of simple ways of impact assessment that can be replicated.
- **GrafStat Guide:**
  GrafStat is a simple software to collect and analyse quantitative (survey) data: www.grafstat.de. The Guide explains how the software can be applied for the Impact Toolbox tools.

These five publications have specific answers to one question they have in common: "How can we understand the difference we make?" Or: "How can we see to what extent our own actions bring the desired effects?"

Who are the main stakeholders?

"We" includes the following main stakeholders:
- the primary stakeholders who take action to improve their own living conditions
- their representatives in their community based organisations (CBOs)

- the staff of the intermediaries who support the primary stakeholders in their self-help action (like local development NGOs)
- the staff of the development organisations (funding organisations) who technically and financially support the intermediaries

By <u>*primary stakeholders*</u> *we understand the persons who shall be the ultimate beneficiaries of a development intervention (programme or project), including their groups and organisations.*

By <u>*intermediaries*</u> *we understand the persons (including their organisations) who shall support the ultimate beneficiaries to get the best benefit from a development intervention (programme or project); frequently, programmes or projects address them, too, to enable them to do this supportive work.*

Why look at the difference we make?

In recent years, international discussion about the effectiveness of development assistance has motivated many funding organisations to look more closely at the effects (outcomes and impacts) of their development action. Specifically, NGOs feel challenged to reach optimal results with their funds. The public who funds this work with donations increasingly expects the projects to have relevant effects on the lives of the people living in poverty or distress.

But specifically the NGOs know that their development action cannot be successful unless it is an ignition spark to the primary stakeholders' self-help activities. All these persons who strive to improve their living conditions need to know which action is bearing fruits, and what other consequences it brings about.

<u>All the NGO-IDEAs publications are written with the conviction that awareness about the effects of the primary stakeholders' own action is empowering!</u> The publications shall support the primary stakeholders, CBO representatives and NGO staff to observe outcomes and impacts of their work, to analyse them and to draw conclusions on how to continue their development actions.

Why is there a need for additional guides to outcome and impact assessment?

There are numerous publications on similar topics like those described in the NGO-IDEAs documents and the authors have continuously screened existing guidebooks in order not to "re-invent the wheel". Indeed even with the vast number of excellent ideas and presentations which have inspired the authors, a focus on a combination of the following aspects has been missing so far:

- a monitoring concept suitable for everyday use of NGO staff and CBO representatives regarding "the difference we make", i.e. the question of how to observe, measure and describe change, combined with the analysis of what has contributed to this change, and to what extent our own action has consequences;
- an outcome and impact assessment which can be carried out by the actors themselves: by the primary stakeholders, their CBO representatives, and the NGO staff who support them;
- tools and procedures which contribute to awareness creation and empowerment;
- participatory tools for monitoring change not only qualitatively but also quantitatively.

The uniqueness of all the NGO-IDEAs publications is that they focus on these four aspects simultaneously.

What are the linkages between the NGO-IDEAs publications?

With the above mentioned aspects in common, there are distinct purposes and contents in each of the publications.

<u>NGO-IDEAs Impact Toolbox</u>

The *"NGO-IDEAs Impact Toolbox"* offers a combination of four tools for outcome and impact monitoring that are linked to one another, as a support to project management. The tools are directly linked with the CBO's and NGO's planning and monitoring, too:
- PWR (Participatory Well-being Ranking): situation analysis focussing on determinants for poverty and discrimination
- SAGE (Situation Analysis and Goal Establishment): setting of goals for individuals and monitoring their achievement
- PAG (Performance Assessment by Groups): setting of goals for groups / CBOs and monitoring their achievement
- PIAR (Participatory Impact Analysis and Reflection): a guide to analysis, reflection and action.

The instruments of the NGO-IDEAs Impact Toolbox are simple and participatory. Simple means: setting out from people's knowledge and know-how, easy to learn and efficient in terms of the time and financial effort required. Application can easily be fitted into the "normal" activities of the NGOs or grassroots organisations. The participatory character contains democratic elements promoting a "Culture of Continuous Learning" that the people can assimilate.

However, some restrictions have to be mentioned:
- The introduction of new practices is an investment: they have to be adjusted with some trial and error to the organisational practice, and the training of staff and CBO representatives takes time.
- If systematic monitoring of change has not been practiced before, this takes more time than sporadic monitoring. Especially the documentation and periodic reflection take time.
- If NGO and CBO representatives are not used to work with numbers, the part of the NGO-IDEAs tools which build on quantitative indicators requires new skills. An easy to use and robust software can help. GrafStat and the Guide can be one way to deal with this issue.

The other NGO-IDEAs publications can be used to complement the Impact Toolbox:
- <u>Tiny Tools:</u> These tools help deepening the analysis of change and the relevant influences.
- <u>Manual:</u> The Manual helps to setting the context with the complete monitoring and evaluation system of an organisation.
- <u>Examples of Impact Assessment:</u> The publication illustrates some application examples of the Impact Toolbox.
- <u>GrafStat Guide:</u> This guide shows the ways how to use the GrafStat software to analyse quantitatively the monitoring results obtained by Impact Toolbox application.

<u>NGO-IDEAs Tiny Tools for Impact Assessment</u>

The *"Tiny Tools"* suggested in this publication shall <u>help to get systematic insights on change in a short session</u>. They can be applied by field staff and project officers during field visits, or by evaluation and study teams, and they all are designed so that communities can apply these tools independently after some exercise – without specific knowledge about statistics. They do not just serve "data collection" but they are appropriate to be used to create awareness on change and how it can be moulded by the stakeholders. Experience shows that these, too, mobilise enthusiasm and increase the capacity of communities to bring about further change.

In this sense, they will contribute to sensitising NGO staff and primary stakeholders about "the difference we make". Unforeseen outcomes and impacts which may not have been seen at the beginning, or underestimated, are made apparent. The Tiny Tools can be used as elements to enrich the information and analysis offered in the Impact Toolbox. Single changes can be highlighted, measured and described; they are followed by an analysis of what has contributed to the observed change, and what the stakeholders can do to influence it still more in a positive direction.

NGO-IDEAs Manual to Strengthen Outcome and Impact Oriented Project Management: "Monitoring Self-Effectiveness"

The *"NGO-IDEAs Manual"* presents a rich choice of options to upgrade a funding or implementing NGO's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system to increased outcome and impact orientation. Step by step, these elements suggesting participatory and awareness creating options can be configured according to the individual organisation's needs.

While the Impact Toolbox offers a set of procedures and tools which lead to a "ready made" outcome and impact oriented monitoring system, the Manual offers a more systematic approach to combining various – existing or new – elements to shape a "tailor made" M&E system.

The Tiny Tools can be used as a complement for information collection, analysis and dialogue with concrete proposals for awareness creation.

NGO-IDEAs Examples of Impact Assessment:

This publication demonstrates good practice examples of simple ways of impact assessment that can be replicated. It is mainly, but not exclusively, a collection and analysis of NGO-IDEAs partners' experiences with outcome and impact analysis.

GrafStat Guide

The GrafStat Guide explains the use of the GrafStat software with many concrete examples from the Impact Toolbox application.

What are the pre-requisites for applying these procedures and tools?

The four publications offer well-proven suggestions on procedures and tools around outcome and impact assessment – but after all, as tools they don't work by themselves. The application of a tool is an art! It requires some practice and creativity!

Regarding the NGO,
  – the staff should be used to participatory work with the communities, i.e. to respect the community's autonomy, and to empower the primary stakeholders to improve their living conditions according to their own needs;
  – the staff needs good facilitation skills – for <u>all</u> the presented procedures and tools! – in the sense that they are enabling the primary stakeholders to take responsibility for themselves, skilfully reducing the top-down approach in the decision-making process for the communities;
  – the NGO management needs to support the idea of participatory outcome and impact oriented project management; i.e. make sure that achievement of benefits for the primary stakeholders is the ultimate purpose, and not just achievements of targets for outputs;

- hence, the NGO-IDEAs publications shall primarily serve "improving": learning, awareness creation and empowerment of the primary stakeholders; practice has shown that useful data for "proving" are a by-product of .of this approach; even if social scientists may have different methodological standards for their work, depending on what disciplinary school they are from, the monitoring data obtained with NGO-IDEAs tools provide an excellent reference for external evaluations.
- For the introduction of these tools, additional requirements are
   o open communication with primary stakeholders, CBOs and funding agencies;
   o in-depth understanding of the subject, if necessary with technical support;
   o have access to additional funds for translating and producing the manuals and for conducting trainings;
   o have an appropriate software[1] and computer literate staff for recording and analysing the monitoring data.

Regarding the CBO,
- members (and especially their leaders) should strive for democratic structures and for internal participation, and be inspired by solidarity and mutual trust;
- especially, the CBO should strive for increasing gender equity and the promotion of the households living in extreme poverty;
- the CBO and its federative structures have to be trained and progressively enabled to manage these tools independently;
- at least a few literate members should participate and ensure documentation of the results;
- the primary stakeholders have to be committed to the project objectives;
- the primary stakeholders should be willing to analyse their own action openly;
- ideally, some group members should be literate.

Regarding the individuals,
- they need a certain level of self-awareness and openness;
- they should be convinced of the benefits of the project and therefore contribute time and willingness to participate.

Regarding the funding organisation,
- it should be willing to support monitoring approaches that are primarily empowering, i.e. be flexible and accept the NGO-IDEAs tools for monitoring purposes, and it should accept that reporting against pre-determined indicators may be secondary;
- it should be interested in information about outcomes and impacts that are outside the limits of the agreed plans;
- it should be willing to provide support where additional resources are needed.

Who may use this information for project management?

First of all, outcome and impact monitoring is done by primary stakeholders and NGO staff primarily for the former's benefit. This implies that
- information is not collected for the primary purpose of reporting, it is basically confidential;
- information has to continuously be fed back to the stakeholders concerned, be analysed and lead to decisions;
- information which is relevant for decision making for the NGO's and funding organisation's management has to be shared with them.

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[1] At present, good experiences have been made with GrafStat, www.GrafStat.de, and specifically prepared Excel sheets.

At what stage in the project cycle can the NGO-IDEAs publications be applied?

It is possible to start with the application of the procedures and tools described in these publications <u>at any time of the project cycle</u>:

– It makes sense to start <u>during project implementation: for testing</u> single new methods and tools in parts of the project, i.e. in some components or in a few villages or groups.
– It makes sense to start an <u>improved and modified M&E system at the beginning of a new project</u>, i.e. when planning and budgeting the future project, and when training the personnel. However, this can only be done when the organisation and the primary stakeholders have tested and adapted the new elements.

In which sectors can the NGO-IDEAs publications be applied?

The NGO-IDEAs publications are meant to serve all kinds of NGO work. All the tools are meant to be used with all kinds of stakeholders, selecting and adapting what is most appropriate in the concrete situation.

- The **Impact Toolbox** is meant for projects which are more specifically designed to strengthen self-help activities of primary stakeholders living in poverty or other distress. Mainly, it had been designed for projects addressing the primary stakeholders by using a group approach, at present further trials are made with using it with individuals, too. Originally it focussed on projects in the livelihood sector. In the meantime it is being adapted for projects in education, primary health care, disability and human rights.

- The **Tiny Tools** and the **Examples of Impact Assessment** could be used in any sector, independent of the approach (whether addressed to groups or to individuals). Future experience will show which tools suit which target groups best.

- The **Manual** "Monitoring Self-Effectiveness" is meant to be applied for any kind of development organisation in all typical sectors of development assistance.

Resources required

Experience shows that an outcome and impact oriented M&E system requires more resources in time and money[2] than a conventional M&E, especially at the beginning. It takes time for discussion and learning to define the modifications in the M&E system, and usually more new aspects are added to the M&E than what can be left away

However, if outcome and impact monitoring – with awareness creation purposes – is built into the regular field work of the NGO, it may not require additional work for collecting information. The field staff's regular work always includes questions like e.g.
– How is your situation at present?
– To what extent has it been changing since our last meeting on this topic, and since the project started?
– What has contributed to this change, what has hindered this change?
– What can we do to improve this change?

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[2] See a case study in the publication: **NGO-IDEAs Examples of Impact Assessment**

But even if these questions are asked regularly as a routine by the project staff, it remains a challenge to document the answers. If the development of the monitoring results shall be compared in the course of time and with different reference values, then this will be almost impossible without appropriate software.

Which terminology is the most adequate?

It is not easy to agree on a common terminology around outcome and impact assessment. Different languages and different understandings on how "development works" are hampering a joint definition. In many countries, development organisations are trying to find their own understanding of the terms and to discuss this with their partners.

The norms for procedures and terminology in development cooperation are generally set by OECD-DAC[3], specifically in monitoring and evaluation. For a number of reasons explained in the "Manual" NGO-IDEAs is suggesting to modify slightly the definitions of "impact" and "outcome" for the common work.

The following terminology has been proposed to partners and has been accepted as working definitions. It is consequently built on causal links in the results chain, avoiding time-related definitions (the terms differing from the DAC definitions in *italics*):

Results Chain

| Term	NGO-IDEAs terminology	
Impact	*Any change in the situation of the persons the project addresses to,* – *to which the outcomes have contributed* – *that can only partially be attributed to the use of the project outputs or to the outcomes.*	**Effects** / **Results (in OECD-DAC definition)**
Outcome	*Any change in the situation of the persons the project addresses to, which can be attributed plausibly mainly to the use of the project outputs.*	
Use of outputs	*The application of the outputs (e.g. products, services or acquired knowledge or skills) by the persons the project addresses to.*	
Output	The products, capital goods and services which result from a development intervention; may also include changes resulting from the intervention which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes.	
Activity	Actions taken or work performed through which inputs, such as funds, technical assistance and other types of resources are mobilized to produce specific outputs.	
Input	The financial, human, and material resources used for the development intervention.	

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[3] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Development Assistance Committee: Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management; Paris 2002; Weblink: http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/29/21/2754804.pdf (07 September 2009)

What does participation mean?

Participation is a wonderful-sounding term which is notoriously likely to be misunderstood. No management tool can be participatory in itself. Participation requires special attitudes and these participatory attitudes can be learned! Also, participatory monitoring is not participatory per se. The tools have to be adapted to the conditions of the users. This will require appropriate methods.

In the context of self-help promotion, the word "participation" does not only mean "to take part in a joint activity". It means more: there should be a continuous increase in empowerment of the primary stakeholders, going hand in hand with a continuous relinquishment of competencies by NGO and funding agencies. Participation also implies an empowerment of the NGO vis-à-vis the funding agencies.

There is no absolute measure for participation. Sometimes a small range of autonomy of primary stakeholders may be appropriate at the beginning of a project, if it corresponds to their capacities and needs. But it is crucial that the NGO supports the growth of this level of autonomy of the primary stakeholders, and that it assures that it will not reduce autonomy. At the same time, the NGO has to continuously reduce its influence.
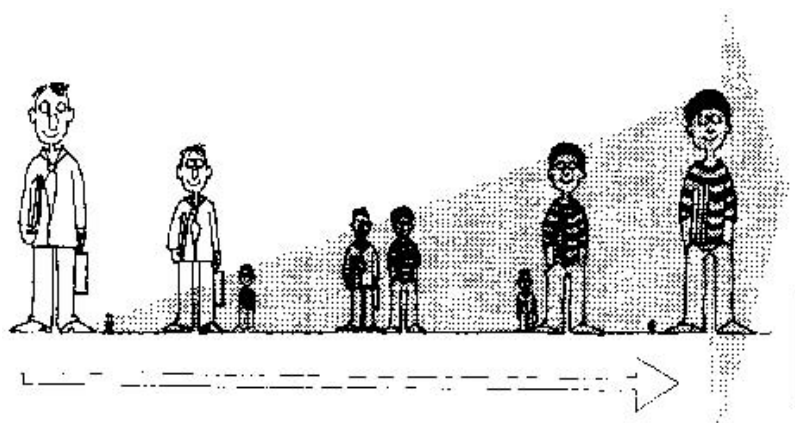
Participation is an ongoing process where one side learns to act increasingly autonomously, and the other side learns to hand over responsibilities and power.

Participation means continuous empowerment: it is an ongoing process of capacity-building which requires ongoing changes. Therefore, a participatory management concept serves to develop management tools which can be applied to increase the primary stakeholders' independence of NGO and funding agencies, and NGO independence of funding agencies.

What are the trade-offs in participatory outcome and impact assessment?

Participatory outcome and impact assessment is a balancing act between conflicting objectives and practices:

−   Extractive data collection vs. empowering data collection and analysis:
Frequently in the context of M&E we talk about "data collection" or "information system". We should refrain from just collecting information without returning a benefit to the people later. The NGO-IDEAs approach is promoting methods and tools that do not only serve for collecting data, but already in the moment of asking questions and of documenting graphs this shall serve for empowerment. Even more, when sharing the results and analysing what has con-

tributed to change, and what could contribute in future, the approach intends to be empowering and motivating for action.

– <u>Accurate measurement vs. focus on understanding of relevant context:</u>
The NGO-IDEAs tools emphasise the learning about the context. In the context of self-help, it is often more important that the primary stakeholders seize the relevant trends of development than to get scientifically approved measurement of pre-determined indicators. The NGO-IDEAs tools, nevertheless, also intend to contribute to more accurate measurements of change, also by differentiating the persons who benefited most from it: women and men, household below and above the poverty line.

– <u>Accountability (toward the public) vs. learning (in protected spaces):</u>
In order to promote empowerment, the primary stakeholders and the NGOs need a protected space where they can analyse the outcomes and impacts of their action without justifying themselves for not being perfect or for committing mistakes (if any). Accountability and reporting are always part of cooperation, but in self-help promotion this is subordinated to internal learning. Not all information has to be disclosed, some information needs to be confidential.

– <u>Trend to focus on short term results (output) vs. long term results (outcome, impact):</u>
If monitoring is done during project implementation, it tends to focus on short term aspects such as activities and outputs. NGO-IDEAs is taking up the challenge to monitor outcome and impact, aspects that frequently emerge after some time only. Therefore, it is giving priority to the aspects which refer to a change in the situation of the primary stakeholders.

– <u>Additionally, empowerment and awareness creation mean more than democratic participation:</u>
Although democratic participation is required in the context of self-help promotion, this is not enough! All the project activities should contribute to the empowerment of the primary stakeholders; and specifically the outcome and impact monitoring can and should serve as an eye-opener and create awareness about the results of their own actions, i.e. their self-effectiveness, and help improving it!

So whose perspective counts?
With the tools presented by NGO-IDEAs, clear priority is given to the primary stakeholders' perspective. But with the practice of triangulation, it becomes obvious that this perspective has to be complemented by other perspective, e.g. from the NGO staff and from externals. Only with these perspectives one may get to a sharper "three-dimensional" picture.

Continuous improvement

All these NGO-IDEAs publications are – in April 2011 – still <u>drafts</u>. They will be edited further to build the basis for the common work of the NGO-IDEAs partners during the final testing.

In many steps they shall be reviewed, improved and added on: in the preparation of sector specific handouts; in training workshops, during the application, and when finally evaluating the results of the process. Based on all these experiences, they shall be finalised in September 2011.

These drafts are still lacking some elements that are indispensable for a complete publication in the context of our work: they will be enriched with
– more concrete examples,
– stimulating illustrations,
– attractive and uniform formatting.

The editors and authors hope that these publications will serve the intended purposes and that they may contribute to some practical and new insights.

Feedback is welcome for the further improvement of these documents! Please write to your Regional Coordinator or to Eberhard Gohl gohl@impact-plus.de. Thank you very much in advance!

Eberhard Gohl, Bernward Causemann 26 June 2011

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