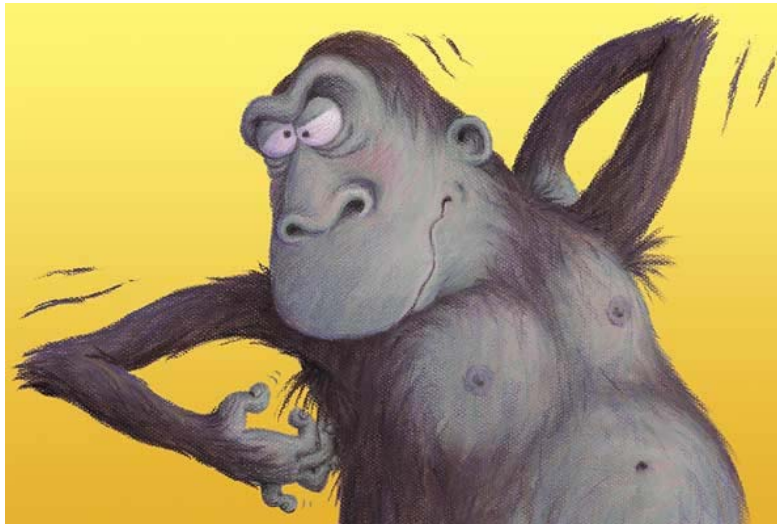**PSO**· *capacity building in developing countries*

We need to scratch where it itches!!

Practices of Dutch NGOs and their partners with programmatic approaches

Roel Snelder
PSO Knowledge and Learning Centre
The Hague, 2006

Contents

Preface

This research paper is part of a PSO guided process called the Learning Trajectory on Programmatic Approaches. The organisations you are about to meet 'belong' to the network of PSO and its members. All have in common that they decided to explore how a programmatic approach can be beneficial to them. To that end they participated in an action learning cycle set up by the PSO Knowledge and Learning centre and experimented with doing new things or doing things differently.

> **What is PSO?**
> PSO aims to contribute to the structural alleviation of poverty throughout the world by strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations[1] in developing countries. It achieves this by supporting its 45+ Dutch organisations and their partners in developing countries. It does so by funding capacity building activities of southern partners, providing human resource services and by promoting learning among the various stakeholders. The PSO Knowledge and Learning Centre supports the latter through developing and implementing learning trajectories on specific issues, such as programmatic approaches and organisational learning. A small quality fund[2] is used to strengthen PSO member capacity.

This paper partly reflects what is happening in these organisations as a result of the learning trajectory. For a large part it is also about what they are going through autonomously as they are positioning and re-positioning themselves

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[1] Go for a short version of PSO's definition of capacity building to
http://www.pso.nl/en/pso/capaciteitsopbouw.htm, or for a more extensive description download
http://www.pso.nl/asp/documentsite.asp?document=199
[2] For examples on how two PSO members, Tear Fund and Freevoice, have used this fund you can download and browse PSO's news letter 7:
www.pso.nl/ftp/newsletter7.pdf.

within the development community. Most are actively re-shaping their role as they go along attempting to deliver relevant services for the less privileged, children in need, people living with HIV/AIDS and (former) refugees.

In this research paper you will find an extensive description of how exploring programmatic approaches has influenced these organisations on various levels. You will find that the experiences differ depending on the perspective these organisations take and the context they operate in, being either a PSO member (i.e. a northern NGO/donor) or a southern partner. Notwithstanding this diversity, a number of general lessons can be drawn, specifically with regards to the roles and relationships between various stakeholders. For instance, on who 'leads and owns' development interventions.

Expectedly many of the processes described will ring a bell with other practitioners. By using PSO's conceptual framework on programmatic approaches in looking at these processes, this paper hopes to offer 'outsiders' a mirror to look at their own experiences.

What is important to emphasize is that through this paper the organisations studied share their struggles and choices. It shows where they are strong and where they are vulnerable. Also it clarifies how they are critically looking at, and strengthening, their own professional competence to work in development, with all the ups and downs that come with it. This means they are serious in being held accountable to back donors and the people they serve. In that way the paper also provides some interesting messages for back donors, such as PSO itself, to reflect (and act!?) upon. Therefore the paper may be useful for many, not in the least for the organisations

researched, which have already advanced further than when these stories were recorded. To be allowed to have a peek into how they succeed and struggle in their work; what motivates them and how their organisations function internally and in relation to others, is something I have valued tremendously. In a way this acknowledges the importance of taking an 'appreciative' approach to guide the research, to which most people interviewed responded positively and very openly.

At the same time the research pointed out that an appreciative approach is not very commonly applied in development work. 'We' tend to be looking for problems and critique, rather than for success stories and opportunities. This seems to be the dilemma for a sector that aims to improve what is not right, to straighten out that which is crooked. For me it has proven to be worthwhile to practise such an approach, as it provides a lot of input to plan for the future of the learning trajectory.

The title of this paper refers to a quote of one participant emphasizing the usefulness of a programmatic approach to development work. 'To scratch where it itches' means, to actually be doing what is relevant. Hopefully this paper will be relevant to 'those researched', and other organisations dealing with similar challenges.

This piece of research could not have been done without the support of the organisations researched. Special thanks goes out to Anthony Poggo of Across, Telay Echano Gaban of Terre des Hommes Philippines and Arie Schuurmans of the Netherlands Red Cross in China, who have made it possible to meet with so many interesting people.

Finally thanks goes out to my colleagues at PSO, and specifically to Daan de Roo van Alderwerelt of PCM-Group who have helped tremendously by commenting on earlier drafts of this paper and have sharpened the reflection in it.

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PSO knowledge and Learning Centre
The Hague, 2006

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Research background

From 2003 onwards the PSO Knowledge and Learning Centre (KLC) has been implementing a Learning Trajectory on Programmatic Approaches (PA). As a first step we organised an analysis and exchange on first experiences with programmatic approaches among PSO-members. Based on this, and on an international peer review[3], PSO re-conceptualised its approach from 2004 onwards.

Programmatic approach

For PSO a programmatic approach is based on the principle of coordinated support of a local programme. Such a programme is more than just a collection of individual projects. To be programmatic in nature the emphasis needs to be on collective analysis and planning, creating synergy between interventions, as well as on linking and learning between relevant stakeholders. In all this local ownership is key. In short when working programmatically four key factors need to be in place:
- ❧ Leadership by (a) local organisation(s);
- ❧ Local participation with respect to analysis, identification, programme design, implementation, management, and monitoring and evaluation.
- ❧ One cohesive programme and budgetary framework;
- ❧ Donor coordination and harmonisation of procedures.

Another important outcome was a felt need by the 'inexperienced' (as some referred to themselves) PSO members to learn the basics of programmatic approaches. To this effect we developed and implemented an Action Learning Cycle. This cycle consisted of three

phases: four day conceptual seminar – three months field practice / experimental application of new concepts – four day workshop on re-examination of practice and programme development[4].

Over the period of June 2004 – June 2005 three groups of a total 35 organisations[5], PSO members and their partners, participated. To get the process running we (supported by PCM-group[6]) offered them the framework for the programme cycle below. This provided a basis to have them examine their own donor – partner reality.
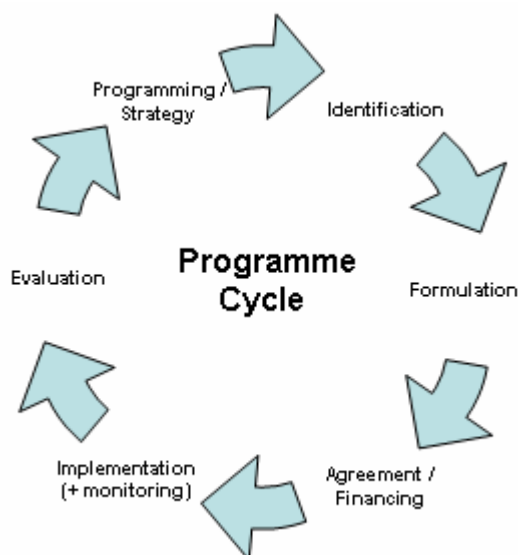
Click on the image for an explanation[7]

The experiences of this process led to some early interesting conclusions[8]:

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[3] The following link takes you to a PSO newsletter containing an article on this peer review http://www.pso.nl/asp/documentsite.asp?document=396.

[4] For an extensive overview of the setup of this action learning cycle you can go to http://www.pso.nl/asp/documentsite.asp?document=105.
[5] Go for an overview to http://www.pso.nl/asp/documentsite.asp?document=691
[6] www.pcm-group.com.
[7] Or go to www.pcm-group.com, services/helpdesk/faq.
[8] For an overview of the workshop cycle experience go to http://www.pso.nl/knowledgecenter/nieuwsitem.asp?nieuws=151.

- Knowledge of basic developmental concepts, such as programme cycle management, log frame analysis and capacity building was rather limited among quite a few participants, even with many years of experience in the 'development industry'.

- Participants had already faced quite some obstacles and opportunities in the first steps of the programme cycle. Eventually most decided to focus their experiments within the preparatory stage, looking at programming and strategy development and identification (see image above).

- 'Changing towards a programmatic approach' has implications on multiple levels of cooperation: between partner and donor, between partner and target group, between partner and other stakeholders (including government and donors), and within partner organisations themselves. Specifically promoting or engaging in stakeholder involvement was one of the issues most organisations decided to go and experiment with.

- Where action plans proved successful, change seemed to be largely dependent on management buy-in. To achieve this kind of back-up support, and to be able to relate to various stakeholders, process management, conflict resolution skills, appear to be as important as project cycle management and or log frame analysis skills / tools.

Research approach

With these early insights in mind we decided to dig deeper into participants' practice. To get a handle on how these members and partners use a PA in their work, PSO performed a small scale field study. Three cases were selected from the organisations which participated in the PSO Workshop Cycle: GZB/Across in Sudan, Terre de Hommes and CPTCSA in the Philippines and the cooperation between the Netherlands and Chinese Red Cross.

The research combined interviews with various stakeholders (staff, target group, board members, local government with real time observation (participating in staff and management meetings), as well as visits to project areas and observation of field activities. Also documents containing valuable information were used as further input.

As a research method we used appreciative inquiry[9] and primarily focused on what makes these organisations successful in moving towards a programmatic approach. Interviewees were approached with questions such as: what is it in your environment that helps; what is supportive in your organisation; what makes you 'tick' to set out on this change process; and what would you do differently in future?

One insight from using this line of questioning is that most interviewees are not used to being approached in such a way. Generally they seem to work from the perspective of problems and challenges rather than from strengths and / or dreams. And at times cultural aspects made it difficult to encourage people to reflect on themselves or on their organisations.

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[9] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Appreciative_Inquiry

Paper's structure

To be able to grasp the essence of their stories it is helpful to have some insight into: who these organisations are, what programme context are they working in, and what has motivated them to set out on this journey. Therefore each case description sets off with an introduction to the 'main players' involved.

In looking at organisations' realities, i.e. bringing their stories to the fore, the paper employs a PA lens. In doing elements of working programmatically are identified. Each case description is therefore loosely structured around the main elements in PSO's PA definition. In that way in each reality the same issues are addressed, looking at:

❧ The wider context these organisations operate in.

❧ Institutional factors including issues of leadership and ownership.

❧ Organisational features conducive to / interacting with a programmatic approach.

❧ The issue of linking and learning among relevant stakeholders.

❧ Local participation in (collective) analysis and planning.

❧ Capacity building and harmonisation of procedures as part of the process of implementing a programmatic approach.

Each case though is a story in its own right, as contexts are extremely varied, ranging from HIV/AIDS in China, to 'holistic development' among Southern Sudanese and Child abuse in the Philippines. Some of the programmatic elements will therefore be more prominent in one case than in another. The aforementioned distinction between 'problems and – success factors', is reflected in all stories.

In the presentation of the cases what came out of the research in terms of facts and observations, reflections by respondents and analysis on behalf of the researcher are separated as much as possible by using different lay-outs. Therefore, reflections are presented as quotes as well as in italics as much as possible. Other actual information is presented in boxes as a background or an illustration to the main text.

Each case ends with a summary about the success factors, as well as on observations and recommendations. Finally this paper attempts to pull the lessons from all three cases together. It that way it provides insight into determining factors for success and lessons learned from the perspective of various stakeholders. Additionally, some ideas will be shared to plan for future learning on programmatic approaches in conclusion.

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[10] Above resources can be downloaded from respectively:
http://www.pso.nl/asp/documentsite.asp?document=107
http://www.pso.nl/asp/documentsite.asp?document=106
http://www.pso.nl/knowledgecenter/dossier.asp?dossier=8
http://www.pso.nl/asp/documentsite.asp?document=396
http://www.pso.nl/en/pso/beleidsdocumenten.asp
http://www.pso.nl/asp/documentsite.asp?document=108

Between emergency and reconstruction: becoming programmatic in Sudan

Click on the map for info on Sudan

Introducing Across and the Reformed Mission League

The [Dutch Reformed Mission League](#) (GZB) is an association within the Dutch Reformed Church, representing around 450 local reformed municipalities. The GZB works closely with churches and Christian organisations worldwide to provide support and deploy staff in areas such as health care and education, as well as missionary work.

Its long standing partner, [the Association of Christian Resource Organisations Serving Sudan](#) (Across), is an interdenominational, international Christian organization focused on Sudan. It was founded in 1972 by four evangelical mission societies (AIM, SUM, SIM and MAF).

Across caters to the Sudanese exclusively, with a focus on Christian transformational

development, mainly through training projects. It has five bases in Southern Sudan. Its headquarters are located in Nairobi, Kenya. Across is active in a number of areas such as Community Based Health Care, Household Food Security, Education, Church Empowerment Programmes, HIV Awareness, relief distribution and re-settlement supplies.

GZB invited Across to explore how to make their cooperation more programmatic. Quotes from participants show diverse motivations:

> Across management: '*I didn't know what a programmatic approach was when I first was informed by our Dutch partner about the PSO workshop cycle. Reading through the documents I recognized things from my work. We had just agreed on a new strategy, involving a thorough reorganisation and relocation to Southern Sudan, which needed to be made operational. Participating in the workshop cycle seemed helpful'.*
>
> GZB: *'A number of things were happening in our relationship with Across. For one, Across needed to re-assess its role in the future Sudan: implementing or advisory. We participated to further professionalize in project management. The PSO workshop cycle was timely in terms of further developing a unified system for our organisation, which we are working with support of PSO's quality fund'.*

Both organisations stress clearly that they participated with an organisational purpose in mind. The entry point of experimenting with the programmatic approach therefore was broad, yet, as will be seen below, focused strongly on extending stakeholder involvement. Research included conversations and meetings with staff and management at Across

Nairobi headquarters and a field visit to Dhiaukuei in Southern Sudan. This provided ample opportunity to meet village leaders, local authorities, health and education workers, church officials and community members. So how have they been able to work with programmatic concepts and how does greater stakeholder involvement pan out given the volatile situation in Sudan?

Wider context

Sudan's reality contains many determining factors when introducing a Programmatic Approach (PA). The important ones coming from the research are:

- ☯ The recent peace agreement with the north has given Southern Sudan new opportunities. While fighting still goes on in various areas some kind of local authority is now establishing itself. The international community has pledged 4.5 billion dollar in aid for the next 6 years. This makes planning for longer term development possible.

- ☯ With many southern Sudanese returning after refugee life in neighbouring countries and further a field, villages are being transformed. Lack of security is high with the integration of former fighters slowly progressing, and with the shadow of the Darfur emergency in the background. As expected the region will be exposed to more trade with neighbouring countries and possibly large scale extraction of natural resources. This poses uncontrollable risks that may negatively impact any programme development.

- ☯ Meanwhile economic life traditionally still centres around livestock and subsistence agriculture. Or as one interviewee stated:

'people's investment is primarily in cattle for marriage'; how can we persuade them to invest in their own development.' This combined with so-called aid dependency challenges aid agencies that want to change their approach from delivering help and services towards development.

Institutional factors

Across management: '*I am not sure what our status is, an NGO, an International NGO, or a S(udanese) I(ndigenous) NGO'.*

As admitted by management: *'strictly speaking Across is not a Sudanese NGO'*. Missions (including GZB) and local churches (22 in total) are on the Across board. All participate in decisions on direction and / or funding. From conversations with the management, board members, and GZB it appears this set-up will (have to) change in the near future. The GZB is very clear on this: *'We have to get rid of wearing two caps. The question is more on how to think along with Across'?*

With the peace treaty signed, Across's challenge is to physically relocate to Southern Sudan and to start a process of thorough Sudanisation, thus increasing local ownership. This means becoming more directly in tune with a broader (as compared to only local churches) section of local stakeholders. To this effect Across is now building the capacity of church relations advisory groups (CRAGs), which consist of a mixture of community members, civil authorities, the chief, opinion and church leaders (of various denominations).

Across management: *'The CRAGs represent our main stakeholders. Through them we can make sure we are working in the right places and to actually scratch where it itches, also in non-church programmes. Already before I participated in the PSO workshop cycle we decided to invest in them. The relevance and urgency of this choice was re-affirmed by looking at Across through a PA-lens'.*

With this changed set-up a new dynamic has developed, challenging Across profoundly. Local stakeholders (*'what is the proof of the peace'*) increasingly formulate their needs in the material sphere (e.g. building schools). With the return of refugees (IDP's), Across staff expects this to happen more often.

Across staff: *'We will be irrelevant if we don't take the needs of the displaced into account'.*

Whether Across should *'go into reconstruction'* is a matter of debate within the organisation, as well as with donors, such as the GZB. In Across's holistic philosophy, taking care of people's material needs (education, health, livelihoods) is important. Yet many staff feel that Across is and should be a religiously inspired organisation, having as its mission, building the capacity of the local church.

The GZB seems to take a wider view. It supports the idea that Across should focus on advising and training local structures, leaving implementation with them. A similar tone comes from the Across-chair: *'If Across doesn't choose to go to scale, reaching out also to IDP's, but remains predominantly on church capacity building, it might not be able to attract funding. Then income might also stay tied with its historical partners'.* Interestingly

'relevance' meets 'credibility' at this point. GZB: 'O*ther local NGOs are coming up, providing relief and doing reconstruction. Even if Across chooses not to enter into such activities it needs to make sure this is understood by its local partners'.*

Across staff from all levels of the organisation, underline this with a fear of *'Islam coming in'.* Apparently a growing number of Islamic organisations are setting up projects in areas Across works in, *'converting people'* at the same time.

Evidently, seeing the historic conflict between north and south, cooperation between these Islamic organisations and an organisation like Across is a difficult issue. However, as this develops the pressure on Across for *'doing something'* is mounting. It will be a challenge for Across to strike the right balance.

'They (Across) *have always stayed with us'.*

From various conversations with local authorities and targeted communities it seems that Across is well appreciated for its work and persistence in serving the Sudanese. An encounter with a group of former fighters proved that expectations are high: *'We are victims; the international community needs to help us get on our feet; to build schools and roads, we also need access to credit, internet …...*

Herdsman in Dhiaukuei

Also, the organisation is, according to various spokespersons, *'still quite invisible to the outside world'* (the broader donor system). So for Across it is not a simple choice between holding on to its former church based identity, and renewing itself into a more generalised development NGO. It is more about how to stay relevant in relation to what happens on the ground.

Linking and learning

To stay relevant means being informed about what is happening and to closely monitor the situation. The latter changes rapidly; new players are coming in. This, according to the Across management, requires a lot of networking and relationship building. It comes down to seeking cooperation where possible, linking up with partners that are working in a similar 'area'.

> Across staff member: *'Among NGOs there is not enough cooperation. What helps us is representation in networks and taskforces'.*

Many interviewees admit this is a relatively uncharted terrain for Across. Sometimes Across has taken a leading role in this. What was emphasized though is that these taskforces do not always function properly. Across local health workers: *'we have an agreement with other NGOs for medical supplies, but of late we don't receive the required amounts'.* And, *'Some NGO's pay better than others, which results in local staff leaving Across'.*

Organisational features

Also within Across itself linking (and learning) has come on the agenda. Until recently Across more or less developed and implemented its

activities per region. Early 2005 an independent consultancy firm (funded through GZB/PSO) looked: into the challenges for Across; at the way various projects are run, and at how the organisation is structured to do so. Interestingly management asserted that the acquired PA skills help to assess the quality and relevance of consultancy outcomes.

In doing so one crucial choice has become clearer: not to organise the Across work per region, but according to various areas / themes such as health and education. Management expects this will provide the opportunity to develop more coherent policies and effective action plans.

Also it will lead to having thematic advisors and, in future, a structure to support exchange and learning within the organisation. From the field visit it was learned that distance and accessibility can easily frustrate communication. So how feasible this will be largely depends on how the peace develops logistically.

> Across management: '*The whole change process Across is going through, brings a lot of apprehension into the organisation.*

One of the more difficult features at the organisational level again relates to ownership, i.e. the planned Sudanisation. Apart from moving the organisation to Sudan (most possibly Juba), this is visible within the issue of staffing. Across' international institutional ties are apparent in the presence and influence of seconded staff throughout its history. It has only been two years since a Sudanese director has been in charge. Now in other coordinating positions seconded staff are being replaced by

Sudanese nationals, either as a result of retirement or as a strategy for localisation. Within the organisation views differ on this delicate process. Some seconded staff say they fear loss of '*institutional memory*', and of '*access to donors*'; some Sudanese staff feel that the transition could have started earlier. At field level local staff view the declining visibility of the internationals as a loss of contact with headquarters.

The Across management at HQ takes a rather pragmatic stand: '*In the end we want people of competence in management positions. In my view it is better to have Sudanese in coordinating positions, and to expose them to positions of responsibility. Seconded staff can still play an advisory, training role*'.

In this transitional process the management is mindful not to rock the boat too much. Across management: '*I am cautious of introducing a relatively new approach at this moment, such as the PA*'.

Still, the basics of programme cycle management are now being introduced in the organisation. Management admits this is new for various work levels. Research points at two factors supporting its introduction:

❧ Many interviewees aspire to work with and for the community. This commitment is voiced in terms of '*how we work*', or '*the Across approach*'. Participatory development - an important principle of working programmatically - has a lot of support within Across, at least at a theoretical level. Practice is a different matter seeing the differing views of Across staff.

> **Quotes on participative content:**
> - *'Until now we were used to starting with the budget'.*
> - *'When identifying and formulating we do it in Nairobi. This is our weakness'.*
> - *'In some areas we're already sitting down with the local stakeholders'.*

❧ Staff (local and international) educated abroad already have some knowledge of developmental concepts and tools such as log frame analysis and planning. Various conversations at field level as well as at HQ showed a definite eagerness to learn (more).

Collective analysis and planning

'Some team leaders now formally report to the CRAG'

A striking feature in staff perceptions and quotes is that the discussion on 'the Across approach' is directly tied-in with the relationship with local stakeholders. Regional team leaders assert that in some areas the aforementioned CRAGs are already formalized and influential, whereas in other pockets meetings are still very informal. This was confirmed by the field visit to Dhiaukuei with the local CRAG only in its nascent stages.
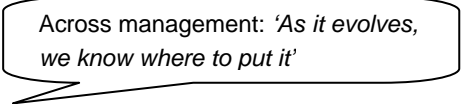
> **Example**
> Across team leader: '*The interaction with the community was not that strong. But after having our first stakeholder meetings we arrived at the conclusion that community members want to participate in services. We have to make sure we understand their abilities*'.

The extent as to the actual meaning of 'collective analysis and planning' in practice is therefore different for every region and seems to be limited to the CRAG. Collective, as in the

sense that other stakeholders are also included, i.e. a broader section of civil society, other NGOs, the international community, could not be observed. With the relocation to Sudan the possibility of a broader interaction will probably increase.

Another issue in terms of planning / programming also needs attention. As mentioned (see profile) Across works on various subjects. With the newly accepted structure, existing projects have to be *'put somewhere in the new* (strategic) *framework'.* In some cases it has happened that a project, such as micro-economic development, is categorized under education or HIV/AIDS under health. Across staff relate this to donor purposes. The same holds true for the areas chosen: as at the time of research there were no funds for agriculture, the area seems to be discarded at HQ level, and household food security put under health.

Interestingly the field visit pointed out the growing relevance of extending agricultural activities with refugees trying to establish a livelihood, and farming practices often only rudimentary developed. Also agricultural instruction seemed to be much sought after by local communities, seeing their active participation at demonstration sites.

> Across management: *'As it evolves, we know where to put it'*

Therefore, how and where to put the various programme elements is a matter of concern. Looked at from the perspective of relevance and impact, as quite a number of staff insist, the strategic programme framework needs revisiting, in close consultation with local stakeholders.

This also raises the issue of how Across's holistic philosophy is actually put into practice. From the research it appears this approach is an attempt to integrate various interventions to include all relevant aspects of human development in a certain region. In that sense Across's philosophy ties in with a PA in which coherence and synergy are generally promoted. The organisation sees itself as being well positioned, increasingly within communities, to establish such a situation. Seeing that Across has identified 'incoherencies' within the programme structure it appears to be wanting to give this some more thought.

Capacity building
So Across is rebuilding its organisational and institutional capacity to fit with the new era. This includes analysis and planning with local stakeholders. Regional team leaders underline that one determining factor for a meaningful dialogue lies with the capacity and level of education of local representatives. With the Across emphasis on training, it will be interesting to see how building the capacity of the CRAGs will be extended to include programmatic principles.

Another important factor for meaningful dialogue lies with the (in)experience of Across staff in leaving the decision making process with the community. According to various Across staff, a lot of work needs to be done here. Across is therefore planning a thorough training needs assessment. Interestingly also at the level of GZB this issue is paraphrased on: *What is needed in our organisation is to invest in facilitation skills, in how to give process support, and in how to talk about problems in a non-threatening way. Through PSO's quality fund we can work on this'.*

Programme support and procedures

So building the capacity of all relevant players to have a constructive dialogue seems to be essential in a programmatic approach. What needs to be resolved for Across is rather mundane though. The training budget only seems to cover 10 % of what is needed.

Management now is looking for seconded staff to support this process: *I will not be able to take direct responsibility, but will need to oversee the process'.* With so many regional consultancy firms around it is interesting that looking outside (in the West) for help is apparently still within the Across genes. The GZB as one of the main donors is convinced that building the capacity of Across should be central in the years to come. In a way this is partly as a result of slowly seeing the advantages of working programmatically:

GZB: *'At first PA was far removed from our reality. Now we see that it gives real meaning for us in terms of capacity building. We want to support Across in its advisory / training role. This will also change our policy in terms of the type of personnel placements we do. By making this explicit towards other donors we hope to develop a united support for Across'.*

It is also worthwhile to see what this will mean in terms of reporting etc, since the organisation has to deal with 21 donors.

Wrapping up

The change process Across is going through is all pervasive: in its client base, its relationships, its operations and in how it wants to present itself in terms of identity and approach. The organisation is therefore going through a fundamental shift in its existence

and it is admirable how professionally management is guiding this process. Difficult decisions are being taken with respect for the historic contribution of seconded staff.

The Big question is how Across will develop itself, as a church based organisation, a local NGO, or something in between. It seems the repositioning process will take some time, as it is not just about funding and all sorts of practicalities, but very much a question of identity and mission. It is interesting to see that the issue of being relevant to local development seems to grow in importance over and above solely 'building the capacity of the church'. With local stakeholders getting more of a say this tendency will expectedly increase. In that sense Across is 'living the PA' as it goes along.

Taking a programmatic approach (*'lens'*) has helped the Across management to identify the highlights of this transformation and the challenges this poses for the organisation. Approaching this with flexibility and caution is wise seeing the impact of the transformation on staff (relations).

So how do you assess the other supporting factors for introducing a PA within Aross's working context? The commitment of local and international staff to be open in discussing the issue of stakeholder involvement is striking. They want it, feel that improvement is necessary and are already experimenting with different behaviour. Consistently building their capacity, as well as that of the stakeholders they serve needs to be central. The planned exchange of experiences will help. As the local situation improves (also logistically) such exchange will possibly become more fruitful as staff of different regions can learn from each other.

This not only relates to learning on the programmatic approach, but on the content within the Across themes as well. The process and support structure for this will of course have to be developed, and also towards including management, which has a vital role to play.

One of the serious challenges is on the programming side, i.e. how to translate the outcomes of stakeholder participation into a more coherent programme framework. *'As it evolves, we know where we to put it'*, needs to become a deliberate strategic process. If followed through with the necessary rigour, it will also help to establish a clear view on what Across's holistic approach means in practice. Lastly and not to be underestimated is the commitment of GZB to actively support the Across change process from a PA perspective. To that effect looking critically at what needs to change within GZB in terms of programme management and skills is already being undertaken and a genuine supporting factor in this process.

Equally important is the resolve of GZB to convince other donors (also in the Netherlands) to take a more programmatic perspective on Across development. It will be interesting to see how that pans out.

Research impressions

On the tarmac in Rumbek, emergency workers queue up in the shade of a Nairobi bound cargo cum passenger plane. Others hammer on their laptops in the international compound bar. Down the road the Sudanese dwell in mud houses and guard their cattle. Local authorities are setting up shop. In the three days I visited the surrounding country side I only occasionally saw these worlds meet. One international: '*we (the donors) have decided to move to Juba, we expect the southern Sudanese government to follow us'*: Maybe I didn't look closely enough, but Across seems to take a more inclusive approach to dialogue.

Roel Snelder, PSO

Working programmatically on HIV/AIDS in China

Click on the map for info on China and its provinces

Introducing the Netherlands and Chinese Red Cross

The [Netherlands Red Cross](#) (NRC) seeks to prevent and alleviate human suffering and to improve the situation of vulnerable people. From that perspective it focuses primarily on victims of war, conflict and disaster worldwide. Assistance is also extended to those in need because of other circumstances, such as HIV/AIDS or lack of water and sanitation.

The [Red Cross Society of China](#) (RCSC) operates in all of China's provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities. Its main task is disaster preparedness and emergency response (e.g. aiding flood victims). In addition to this it also conducts community based primary health care training, a national blood programme and HIV/AIDS programmes.

The NRC and RCSC cooperate in various ways. Two programmes are specifically relevant here: a multi year HIV/AIDS programme spanning three provinces, as well NRC capacity building (CB) support to the RCSC. To support these activities two Dutch NRC delegates are stationed in China: one (for CB support) in Beijing, and another (for HIV/AIDS) in Harbin.

Profile

The RCSC HIV/AIDS programme focuses on:

- ☻ Youth - youth peer education
- ☻ People living with HIV/AIDS - social care, empowerment and self support groups, harm reduction and education
- ☻ Commercial Sex Workers, Intravenous Drug Users, and Men who have Sex with Men - prisoners peer education, condom/needle distribution and social care
- ☻ Greater public: AIDS prevention and anti discrimination campaigns to society, train trips (targeting border commuters), youth exhibition of AIDS prevention, and training AIDS prevention for policemen.
- ☻ Heilongjiang, Jilin and Liaoning provincial Red Crosses - capacity building

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The NRC and RCSC are part of the international Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, with a membership of 181[11]. Relevant in this context is the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; a delegation of which is also present in China. As an umbrella organisation it is supposed to oversee what goes on between (in this case) the RCSC and other partner red crosses.

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[11] Red Crosses from the West donating funds are referred to as Partner Red Crosses, whereas Red Crosses from developing countries are referred to as Operating National Societies. Some of the latter also act in a funding role (see Chinese support to the Tsunami and the South Asian Earthquake).

The NRC invited the RCSC to jointly participate in the PSO Workshop Cycle on Programmatic Approaches. Quotes in the box below shed some light on their initial motivation and objective to do so.

Dutch delegate: *'The context of our work is basically programmatical. We work within the framework of the RCSC. Before we can do anything they have to agree. The choice to do HIV/AIDS in the three northern provinces (Jilin, Liaoning, and Heilongjiang) comes from them. My role is to build the capacity of Chinese staff in project and programme management, and in monitoring and evaluation. I signed up for the PSO Cycle with my Chinese and Dutch colleagues because for one, I believe Chinese staff needs more exposure to western management models. Secondly, NRC needs to change the way it works: we need to invest more in analysis, also in relief'.*

NRC HQ staff: *'We are good at relief. Managing development programmes is rather new for us. I feel we need to strengthen our approach'.*

RCSC-staff: *'For us programme management and design are new techniques. I was asked to participate to learn and improve my skills'*

The research in China and the Netherlands included extensive consultation with Red Cross, staff, both Chinese, Dutch and at Federation level, as well as a visit to one of the provincial Red Cross delegations, and project activities. As HIV/AIDS and capacity building are the central focus in the cooperation between the NRC and RCSC experiences with both issues are used as an illustration. This is all the more relevant as the NRC and RCSC chose reconceptualising the HIV/AIDS

programme – including the related stakeholder analysis - as a central entry point to experiment with the programmatic approach.

So how have the participants faired, and what has made them successful? For this we take a look into their actual experience and views, and into how contextual, institutional and other factors are of influence.

Wider context

During the research a number of contextual factors surfaced which influence the receptivity to the concept of programmatic approaches on the one hand, and its application / embedding in development work in China on the other.

☯ From talking to various respondents it appears that the economic modernization of China brings a tremendous ambition to integrate Western style management techniques. Often these are seen as being more creative than traditional Chinese management processes. These new techniques also generally require a lot of 'thinking for yourself', which seems to be rather alien to the centrally led Chinese system. Interestingly however it also appears that within the command style structure of Chinese institutions, once accepted new ways of working are meticulously followed and copied.

☯ A still common feature in China is the government mobilisation of 'volunteers' to do social works. As there exists a close link between the RCSC and the government, working through community participation – as an important feature op a PA – can be a potential boost the RCSC's capacity, although it is difficult to assess the quality of participation when 'ordered' from above.

☙ Clear figures on HIV/AIDS in China are hard to obtain, but according to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) there were 840,000 HIV-positive people in China in 2004. And the number is rapidly increasing. People rarely use condoms. Many people don't know they carry the virus. Doctors lack experience. And stigma and discrimination are making people scared to disclose their positive status. People are frightened of losing their families, friends, jobs, income and places at university. In such a context it is difficult to develop a common vision among the different stakeholders.

Institutional factors

The programmatic context of NRC and RCSC cooperation is defined by various institutional factors. First of all the RCSC is due to its size a tremendously large partner. Being operational all over China, it claims a total membership of 22.4 million people. This means it also establishes and manages all sorts of contacts with various stakeholders, specifically within the government sphere.

To assess the quality of such mechanisms is impossible within the framework of this research. In terms of HIV/AIDS the Chinese Red Cross relates to and communicates with organisations such as UNAIDS at Beijing level. However, according to various interviewees, this does not appear to have a programmatic dimension as it is often of an *'ad hoc nature'.*

Secondly the RCSC, as an umbrella organisation for 31 Chinese provincial Red Crosses, is in theory responsible for coordinating all support from abroad, and thus in principle able to influence ownership and coherence. In practice this does not appear to be so.

Chinese staff: *'Projects usually start with money from the donor; management is limited in terms of coordination towards the donor*

One reason is that the RCSC heavily depends on outside funding. According to various interviewees many RCSC programmes stem from a donor driven approach: as in partner Red Crosses providing budgets with certain conditionalities. Federation official: *'This is the case with funding coming from the Australian government and USAID who are very project oriented. More flexible, indicative budget, support comes from the Nordic countries'.*

Also, most funds are provided bilaterally for specific provinces and not through the RCSC, although the latter needs to agree first. This kind of behaviour can potentially 'undermine' the capacity of RCSC to coordinate.

Organisational features

Until recently the RCSC did not have a separate entity for project / programme development and monitoring. A new national unit has just been formed to actively take up on coordination. This might be an asset in adopting a more programmatic approach, although the research did not provide a clear picture of what the Chinese have in mind with this coordination. Moreover from various conversations with Chinese staff it appears that basic principles of programme management are more developed at provincial than at national level. Nonetheless Chinese as well as Dutch sources see a need for,this. As Netherlands Red Cross head office staff put it: *'I have some doubts regarding their actual understanding of the concepts of programme management seeing the low quality of reporting'.*

Another factor in terms of the potential for coordination comes in when reflecting on the scale of things. A Chinese province is in size and population comparable to a whole European country[12]. Beijing is literally miles away. *'And it is better to leave the control over the money where it is spent'*, according to one source.

So can a new unit actually be expected to (programmatically) coordinate, for instance, all HIV/AIDS activities delivered through provincial and district delegations? In the view of the RCSC leadership: *'We need to find at least a way between donor requirements and what is relevant for beneficiaries. The challenge is to develop a quality standard on project management'*.

Interestingly the RCSC leadership did not mention strategic policy development as a major task. As this is generally seen as being at the heart of programmatic approaches, various sources voiced some concern about this. For instance, in the words of the NRC: *'the RCSC does have an HIV/AIDS policy. 'Yet it is so broadly formulated that anything, except treatment, fits in it'.* It seems some see a danger in such a lack of direction as it can lead to scattered projects, and opens up the door to donor influence.

Capacity building
To improve management and coordination the RCSC runs a strategic capacity building programme with NRC/PSO support. The programme involves training national RCSC staff in programme management, monitoring and evaluation (M&E). This is done in

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[12] With 41 million people and 150.000 square kilometres Liaoning province is roughly three to four times the size of the Netherlands.

participative workshops as well as on the job. NRC also support provincial and district levels in programme development, design and implementation. According to them the NRC is the only donor willing to invest in this way.

> **Local perceptions**
> In its CB programme various methods are used including PCM and PSO's PM&E framework.
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> Chinese staff: *'At first we found PSO's framework a rather abstract description of our situation. Some concepts were difficult to translate. For instance there is no Chinese word for 'strategic'. It helped us though to look backwards in a logical way, and made us realise that we sometimes just go from one activity to an other. It stimulated us to think about how we spent the money, to develop indicators for effectiveness, for how we have grown. This gave us a sense of ownership.*
>
> Mongolian staff: *'The approach is much different from other donors, in that it focuses much more on results rather than on activities. I believe we got some deeper understanding on our own organisation working with the concept of different capacity dimensions'.*
>
> Both emphasized lack of feedback from the NRC on reports. Sources at the NRC state they themselves need support to be able this work with *'such complex material'.*

Overall training provided through NRC/PSO support does not limit itself to one or two individuals. For instance various staff levels in a district are in some way or another involved as participants in the training, or in the application of its results.

From the dialogue between the NRC and the local Red Cross it appears that in these CB activities (mostly through training workshops) implementing responsibility is largely left in the hands of the Chinese. The NRC provides

some input and (as could be observed) takes the role of critical monitor. Accompanying the NRC delegate on a project monitoring visit to Liaoning province resulted in the following insights as to district level capacity to apply the concepts such as programme cycle management (PCM) in practice.

☯ In the project visited, funds were ear marked for water and sanitation (through the Dutch ING-bank). It was left up to the district and two consultants to come up with a problem analysis and strategy. For the local Red Cross this was a first.

> **Profile**
> The pilot project is set in two villages in Liaoning province, with a target group of about 850 vulnerable households. It is developed to improve community health by introducing clean running drinking water, more hygienic toilet facilities, and promoting healthy behaviour.

☯ The NRC/ING funding was complemented by government and villagers. It was interesting that project activities, much to the surprise of the Dutch delegate, had already started with local seed money before the international support was transferred.

☯ As focussing on the most vulnerable is a new concept for the local Red Cross, they themselves identify some interesting lessons learned:
   - *'To use this approach in the future we need to mobilize more resources'.*
   - 'W*e succeeded in getting local and village committees together because we were able to wield political power'.*

- *'We need to focus on one thing, one priority, and put more emphasis on quality control'.*

Project beneficiaries in front of their house

Linking and learning
As an umbrella organisation the RCSC is, in theory, well situated to support linking and learning on issues of common concern. This is all the more so as many projects and programmes fall in a limited number of categories (with the main four being water and sanitation, health, disaster management, and HIV/AIDS).

Striking is that although the main lines of interest are there, a structured exchange of experiences and learning on the main RCSC topics rarely happens. Yearly the RCSC organises several meetings in which the provinces get together. But agendas seem to be too full to allow for a meaningful exchange on specific programme issues.

And from conversations at the provincial level it appears there are some complaints as to the interest 'Beijing' has in their activities and concerns. So who can stimulate such linking and learning?

According to the Dutch delegation the Federation should strengthen the role of the RCSC in policy development, coordination and linking and learning. The Federation liaison takes a different view (box below).

> *'We don't have the capacity for it. Our role is more in information sharing which is not hugely analytical. Probably in HIV/AIDS there is most potential to capitalize on commonalities. But there is already some sort of interagency consultation in Beijing. Coordination mechanisms should however be put in place for the provinces, probably by the RCSC. Expertise from abroad such as the NRC HIV/AIDS delegate can have a role to play in this*[13].

Notably the Federation emphasizes it a lot of effort in funding specific projects. According to the NRC this draws attention away from adding value, e.g. in terms of linking and learning, to the work of the member Red Crosses. The NRC HIV/AIDS delegate confirms this. *'Exchange among the various HIV/AIDS initiatives sponsored by other donors, is far and few between, and doesn't amount to more than the occasional phone call'.*

Consequently the question came up whether the NRC should take up a more active role with regard to stimulating linking and learning.

In principle there seems to be the feeling that with a programme spanning three provinces with differing learning curves there is a lot of potential for linking and learning.

The NRC view on her role in this is not clear cut and ranges from that the RCSC should do this herself and a possible involvement of the NRC HIV/AIDS delegate. In that sense the choice for the NRC seems to be somewhere between micromanagement or supporting the RCSC at the policy level.

Collective analysis and planning

So the participation of the NRC and RCSC in the workshop cycle on the one hand fits in the framework of ongoing capacity building in programme development and management. What emerges from looking at a more specific programme such as on HIV/AIDS?

Since 2003 the NRC supports HIV/AIDS activities in Jilin and Liaoning with activities focusing on peer to peer education among university students[14]. The programme was formulated from within the provinces which contributed to a sense of local ownership.

The follow-up support starting in 2005 (through the TMF) now extends to Heilongjiang province and focuses on vulnerable groups such as prostitutes and drug users, and treatment. For Heilongjiang Red Cross this was the first foreign funded programme ever. The origins of the follow-up support are much different though seeing the following observations.

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[13] Interestingly the Federation's HIV/AIDS resource person (since 8 years) remains unmentioned. Rumour has it this is due to differences in personalities, which rank high in whether things get done or not in China.

[14] Although according to various sources, *'the concept of peer to peer education needs some serious redefining'.*

Dutch delegate: *'The continued HIV/AIDS support was a blueprint coming from The Hague. It falls under a larger framework, called the NRC TMF HIV/AIDS programme which comprises of seven country programmes. They maybe used ten sentences of our input, and met with resistance from the Chinese.*

Chinese participant: *'As the proposal of the HIV/AIDS programme 2005 - 2008 was formulated in The Netherlands, the information and programme plan contained in the document cannot reflect the real needs and problems of the Northeast China on HIV/AIDS.*

> Dutch delegate: The PSO workshop cycle came just in time to force a decision in the HIV/AIDS programme'.

Participating in the PSO Workshop Cycle provided the NRC and RCSC with the opportunity to re-assess the HIV/AIDS programme. Chinese participant: *'After the first workshop we concluded that we had not followed a programmatic approach. It was agreed upon to do a problem and stakeholder analysis as part of the second phase of the workshop cycle, before implementing any new HIV/AIDS programme'.*

So the RCSC and the NRC agreed on a new analysis and subsequently redefined the programme. As a result, as can be read from internal reports: *'the problems are formulated and do fit within the framework of the proposed goal and objectives as formulated in the Netherlands. Target groups have been expanded to prisoners (male and female) and Men having Sex with Men'.*

> NRC-staff: *'Although this was not a free exercise I believe that defining the exact stakeholders and target groups was actually a Chinese thing'.*

From various conversations it appears that the problem and stakeholder analyses were done through the 'lens' of the TMF-programme; they did not start from scratch.

The funding is appreciated, yet the Liaoning leadership emphasises that this programme brings them in a difficult position towards the authorities. Working with prostitutes and drug users is illegal. And 'Greater Involvement of People living with HIV/AIDS' (a criteria of the programme) is a major difficulty. The NRC realises this: *'We never looked at the fear local volunteers may have in interacting with drug users and prostitutes'.*

Interestingly, and unprompted, the Liaoning leadership mentioned they are now facing serious capacity problems to deliver the intended results. This is both from a perspective of knowing how to deal with the difficult to approach target group, as in terms of basic HIV/AIDS knowledge.

They emphasized that the NRC had neglected to assess the Liaoning Red Cross capacity before starting. The question came up if the RCSC would have chosen this route themselves if not prompted by the NRC. In conversations with the Liaoning Red Cross it proved difficult to get a corroborative view. It seemed almost impossible to phrase a question to find out their perception on how the respective programmes differed in terms of their origin. In a way this points at the difficulty of working with programmatic concepts

Moreover from their reactions there appeared to be some apprehension on behalf of the local partner to state the obvious towards their donor, that they felt pressured in accepting the terms of reference for the extended programme.

Programme support and procedures
As part of the action plan the NRC and RCSC had developed in the first PSO workshop, they succeeded in convincing NRC-management to fund additional capacity. The aforementioned HIV/AIDS delegate was recruited to work with the Chinese partners on a new problem and stakeholder analysis.

In that sense the programme was further developed locally. Nonetheless the delegate apparently spent a considerable amount of her first months in collating and reworking local material into detailed planning to be communicated with the NRC-back donor (the Dutch government). Both NRC delegates independently confirmed that this is contrary to programmatic principles of leaving planning with the local partner.
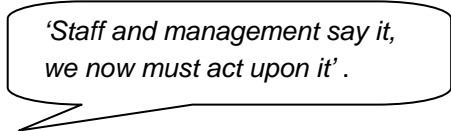
Also, from various conversations with NRC staff the question arises whether developing detailed plans beforehand is really helpful when taking a programmatic approach. Generally in a PA flexibility is called for.

There seems to be no evidence that the back donor actually requires the detail to the extent that it was developed. And on another procedural note, recent changes in reporting requirements (down from 6 to 3 months) at NRC heard office are not seen to be a positive development (as voiced by various NRC staff) in this respect. It is also noteworthy that the HIV/AIDS expert is formally a NRC employee. Reporting and prioritising on activities is done

in very close communication with 'The Hague'. In various conversations with NRC-staff it was questioned whether a number of these processes fit well with strengthening local (at Beijing and provincial level) capacity to strategically develop a Chinese owned programme.

Recently the NRC has started on a learning process to strengthen their 7 country HIV/AIDS programme in terms of content and programme management. A separate programme coordinator was appointed, taking charge of the learning process. Fuelled by an independent evaluation of this overall TMF programme it became clear to NRC staff that the China experience is not unique. The other six countries experience similar challenges with issues of local ownership, linking and learning etc.

In a series of workshops (facilitated by PSO) country desk officers, delegates and in the near future partner representatives are supposed to exchange ideas and plan for change collectively. So far achievements are the planned ambition to co-define (with the local partners) a number of basic working principles around HIV/AIDS. The NRC hopes this will strengthen the local ownership of strategic choices within the programme. Also a number of programmatic principles will be collectively operationalised.

'Staff and management say it, we now must act upon it' .

The NRC is aware this will not change overnight. Major challenges within the NRC (as heard from various sources) are:

- ☯ Being predominantly a relief organisation.
- ☯ A strongly embedded project approach to planning, management, and financial reporting.
- ☯ A culture of accountability for monies spent.
- ☯ Little room and support for experimentation and exchange.

Wrapping up

From the research it appears a lot of the HIV/AIDS work undertaken within the framework of the RCSC is scattered and lacks a strategic view. Scant investigation suggests that neither the donor community, nor the provincial Red Crosses are coordinating their HIV/AIDS efforts in any meaningful way. Quite a number of stakeholders interviewed are convinced that working programmatically (although this is not always articulated as such) is the way forward in terms of development management. Nonetheless working with such concepts proves to be difficult, as it is relatively new in the Chinese context, and will not be achieved overnight.

Some factors can be made to counteract this. In a general sense capitalizing on the overall 'hunger' for new management tools, and using existing feedback mechanisms to push the agenda.

Moreover the position of the RCSC and its newly developing programme unit are a definite asset. These need to be strengthened to counteract donor driven priorities, and be able to develop strategic policy, among which on HIV/AIDS.

The approach which is promoted theoretically and practically by the Netherlands Red Cross delegation in China is largely 'in sync' with

programmatic principles. Much is left in the hands of the Chinese partner and the process to rework the HIV/AIDS programme has promoted local ownership.

Nonetheless the reworking of the HIV/AIDS programme was exactly that – a redesign to fit a foreign idea which was already there on paper. It seems obvious from the 'self critique' on behalf of the NRC that this process will (have to) be changed when future programmes are developed. This needs to be complemented by a strong and consistent sense of direction at the level of the office in The Hague (both policy and programme desk as well as management).

A number of interventions and procedures coming from the NRC HQ in The Hague seem not to be in line with managing the HIV/AIDS programme programmatically. This refers for example to the detailed planning. And some thought needs to be given into what the position of external capacity, such as the HIV/AIDS expert, will be: micro management or wider policy support.

More generally working programmatically within the TMF programme needs some serious re-assessment from the perspective of the NRC The Hague, as the document itself has not been co-developed with the local partners. Also, as can be deduced from the Chinese experience (and from the recent programme evaluation) the internal consistency and strategic direction (as well as opportunities for increased synergy) of the TMF-programme leaves room for improvement.

In a way this also poses questions as to the quality of the decision making process on behalf of the back donor. The assessment of

the programme document at DGIS was seemingly not guided by programmatic principles. From the learning process initiated to strengthen the TMF-programme it appears there is a genuine interest at the NRC to adapt and change to a different mode of working. Participation of the operating national societies is crucial to make this a stakeholders' inspired and driven process. For the China case it will be interesting to see and exchange how other operating national societies address similar challenges.

Finally, participation of the NRC and RCSC in the PSO workshop Cycle on programmatic approaches has already strengthened their HIV/AIDS programme. In terms of individual capacities, it has aided the participants to revisit earlier decisions and gradually adopt a new way of working. It can now be taken a step further towards colleagues and their respective organisations.

In China this can be part of the already embedded capacity building initiative. This can be further strengthened by linking up existing initiatives through guided exchange within the framework of the RCSC. In that respect there is an opportunity for NRC support provided it decides on its role vis-à-vis the federation (who takes responsibility to promote exchange?).

In the Netherlands it can be followed up by building the internal strategic capacity of NRC-staff. This is already on the agenda, as part of a reconfiguration of the overall TMF HIV/AIDS programme. To make this successful, NRC-management needs to be on board every step of the way.

> **Research impressions**
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> Doing research in China involves meeting lots of officials, ranging form mayors to vice presidents, and chairmen. Also it involves being invited to sumptuous diners at which toasting to each other is treated as an Olympic discipline. All this is an experience in itself for which I was not always prepared. Wearing blue jeans at an unexpected formal visit flanked by the Chinese and Dutch flag made me feel a little bit self-conscious. And dealing with translators is not always easy when speaking Western developmental language. So for all the confusion resulting from this I apologize to my host, who made me feel most welcome.
>
> Roel Snelder, PSO

Taking a programmatic approach to child protection in the Philippines

Click on the map for info on the Philippines

Introducing Terre des Hommes and CPTCSA

[Terre des Hommes Netherlands](#) (TdHN) is a child rights organization that supports organisations in developing countries. It works in East Africa, South America, and in South and Southeast Asia. It also supports Humanitarian and reconstruction projects.

Their Philippine partner, the [Centre for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Sexual Abuse](#) (CPTCSA) aims to increase the awareness of child sexual abuse, its causes, victims, effects, and strategies for prevention within the Philippines. It seeks to create an understanding that child sexual abuse is not only a problem for the victim, but is also a problem for the entire community. Furthermore it provides direct prevention and mental health services to children and/or victims and their families.

TdHN, their Philippine office (TdHP) and CPTCSA, joined up to learn about programmatic approaches. The box below feautures quotes on what motivated them.

TdHP-staff: '*For us the PSO activity was a great opportunity. Our relationships are often fund driven and scattered. Engaging with partners at a larger scale through focusing on a specific theme, is one of my dreams. In that way we might be looking more at impact rather than output*'

'*We are used to funding many small scale projects, which increases our workload at headquarters, especially since we receive more government funding. So maybe this programmatic approach could help to devise a more integral scheme, to change things at HQ. Participating in the cycle has actually become a trigger to change things',* according to the Dutch TdH participant.

CPTCSA-staff*: 'We were in the middle of reorganising and needed to involve government in our work. So learning more on this topic was timely for us. Informally I was instructed by TdH to participate and could not have said no, as we are more or less a training institute for the TdH network.'*

So all three participants opted to take an organisational approach. Within the framework of the workshop cycle the participants formulated several experiments. Two stand out: improving stakeholder involvement in CPTCSA's work, and convincing TdH management to integrate the PA approach in TdH-policy from a thematic perspective.

Research in the Philippines involved meeting with local TdH staff, CPTCSA management and workers, government educators, as well as other partners and contacts of TdH working on child protection. Also a visit to TdH partner, Cebu Hope, a shelter for abused girls, was included. This provided the opportunity to look at programmatic issues from a more or less thematic angle.

Now what have they learned and how have participants been able to use this in influencing / adapting their environment? What has helped them in their efforts?

Wider context
The context of the Philippines is an important factor in applying / embedding a programmatic approach (PA). The research points at a number of underlying traits of Philippine society in this respect.

☾ Historically the Philippines have been under Western influence for a long time. A dominant feature is its dependency on the United States of America, culturally and economically. This also involves adopting Western style management approaches, which in turn is helped by the fact that many Pilipinoes are fluent in English.

☾ Another trait is the 'ambition' of many Philipinoes to work or study abroad. For a large part of course inspired by the basic need to earn money to remit to family back home, this also infuses Philippine society with intellectual capital and 'foreign' ways of thinking.

☾ Lastly, Philippine history, specifically the period of people's resistance to government oppression under the Marcos-regime are still very much felt in everyday life. As a consequence relationships between the NGO-sector (formerly identified by the dictatorship as belonging to the resistance movement) and government are *'very politicized'* and there seems to be a reluctance still to solve problems collectively.

Institutional factors
Various institutional factors influence the programmatic context of the relationships of TdH with their Philippine partners. First of all, TdH Philippines falls under the TdHN regional South East Asia desk in Jakarta. Although TdHN is an independent organisation they more or less coordinate with other TdH's working in the region. For instance TdH Germany monitors TdHN's activities in Thailand and vice versa TdHN monitors the Germans' Indonesia programme.

It was interesting to note that in most of the conversations there was not much mention of other institutional relations outside of the TdH network. Apart from '*infrequent*' contact with Unicef and some other donors like Save the Children UK and Liliane Fund it seems that there is no structural coordination with other stakeholders. Input from outside the TdH 'family' in terms of approaches etc. seems therefore to be fairly limited.

TdHN staff: '*many of our partner organisations keep a distance to the government, as they fear they can't work freely when they don't.*'

From the research it appears that also at partner level, wider stakeholder cooperation – especially with government – is a matter of concern. This is confirmed when looking more in depth at developments within both CPTCSA and Cebu Hope.

The latter, a shelter for abused girls, basically acts as a referral centre for the judicial system, but receives no structural financial support from local government. And on a more basic level, according to Cebu Hope management: *'The lease on the location for the shelter is running out, but a council decision on supplying an alternative is being dragged on*[15]. Local staff admit that the financial situation of the organisation will become a matter of urgency soon. They might even have to decide at one point or another to reduce the number of girls in residence. It is striking in this regard that they never really seem to have contemplated advocating locally for a share in public funds[16].

CPTCSA aims to improve child protection through training teachers to educate children on what are safe and unsafe 'touches'. It's ambition is to move from working at the level of a few schools, to implementing a nation wide curriculum This begs a comprehensive

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[15] At work floor level relations are good: police protection against harassment by abusers' families (in the Philippines rape comes with the death penalty) is there when needed.
[16] Recently Cebu Hope is venturing to develop a more community based approach, as opposed to only institutionalized care. Apart from diversifying their role in child protection, this might also be developed as a strategy to deal with the financial sustainability.

approach which involves getting support from parent committees, from the Barangay (the lowest government level), schools, and in fact involves handing over the initiative, to government education structures (click here for a CPTCSA update on this programme).

Street poster asking the public to disclose child abuse cases

Within the framework of the workshop cycle CPTCSA assessed more what was needed to establish this. One action point was to experiment with inviting other stakeholders, i.e. the department of education and two donors (TdHP and Consuelo), for strategic planning.

CPTCSA management: *'we called it strategic planning, but participants had different interests. CPTCSA staff showed quite some apprehension (they will see our weakness) to do this. TdHP interest was on the strategic; Consuelo just wanted a plan, and the department of education initially just seemed to participate from their own business perspective. It wasn't easy levelling off with all the different stakeholders. In the end we didn't visit the first stage (*strategy) *of the programme cycle. It turned out to be more joint planning and assessment'.*

This exercise proved to be quite a struggle, but very rewarding. Going through this planning together helped CPTCSA to convince government staff of the importance of their approach and their own role.

> **Example**
> Government education supervisor: *'we can't do it alone; so I talk to care givers, try to establish links with local government, meet with the provincial level to access funds. Also we try to get permission to use training facilities of other organisations. Our strength is in having established a multi-disciplinary team. Together with CPTCSA we have succeeded in getting a financial share from the department of education to implement the curriculum'.*
>
> From conversations with CPTCSA-staff it appears the process has given them confidence:
> *'We can now make our partners (*government educators*) own the whole process. Little by little we are becoming partners. Before they saw us as the boss. Our role now is to train officers from the department of education in the curriculum and to do quarterly follow-up. It changes our work though. Now we have to wait for each other and appreciate the process'.*

Now local government educators are taking the initiative further, involving other stakeholders, CPTCSA is making a next step. To get the curriculum integrated in the Philippine school system they are negotiating with government officials for a Memorandum of Understanding. Strategically CPTCSA invites local officials it works with to participate in the discussions with higher level officials. Discussions on a first draft seem to be advancing well.

Organisational features
A relevant feature from a programmatic perspective is how TdH has organised its work from HQ-level down to 'the field'. In the

Philippines TdH finances some 25 projects belonging to more or less a similar amount of local partners. These projects are developed and monitored in close cooperation with the TdHP office, consisting of two staff.
They report to the TdH Regional South East Asia desk in Jakarta, which in turn accounts to TdH in The Hague.

Since TdH started receiving more funds from the Dutch government the number of projects financed has also risen and with it the complexity of accounting from HQ to the back donor. As TdH staff sees it: *"In addtion to financial reports TdH needs to give more insight into results rather than mere output. Although at times the back donor suddenly also wants numbers of children reached'.* This apparently has led to an increase in information to be supplied by 'the field'.

> TdHN: *'for instance we ask for detailed budgets. But do we really need that information at headquarters'?*

So desk officers at HQ increasingly spend time on monitoring *'everything'.* This difficulty of being too much involved in micro management is also experienced at field level.

> TdHP: '*For each project we go to the area, engage with the target group and NGO management. Then it takes at least two months to get to the log frame. Additionally there is a 6 month monitoring and a yearly review.*

According to TdH staff there is now enthusiasm to change this system. This however has not come about overnight. A draft policy paper, as well as written and oral

reflections from participants in the PSO PA workshop cycle, first met with unexpected resistance from management. Two factors helped to make *'the winds change'*.

One: from various conversations it appears that TdH is, 'culturally' very much an organisation of doers, also at management level, or as someone stated: *'Most impact on management decisions can be derived from what works, and what is generated from the work floor, rather than abstract concepts[17].*

So both at the The Hague and at the regional level TdH workshop participants chose to sound out the ideas of colleagues on changing towards a PA. Approaching them through online chats and informal meetings proved successful in getting the necessary backup.

Secondly this climate change found a lot of inspiration in a recent meeting (October 2005) of HQ with the various regions. Although the PA was not an explicit subject, it came out as a major policy focus, when discussing *'the (lack of) strategic directions of TdH.'* Apparently the various regions feel that TdH should choose fewer, yet more focused themes.

Profile
In the 'new' TdH strategy it will focus on three themes: child exploitation, handicapped children and children with HIV/AIDS. Each region is allowed one extra specific theme.

TdH believes the PA is a good means to support this, although at the meeting there was quite some discussion and confusion. According to one of the participants: *'One of the regions was not really in favour until they realized from digging into their own practice*

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[17] This might explain management stimulating participation at first but hesitant to take on board the consequences.

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that they already work according to quite some PA principles. Next time round making an inventory of experiences at the regional level will be worthwhile in structuring the debate, and getting support'. In further discussions TdH decided to have a pilot with PA in each region, which will be documented and learned from.

'Some still think it is a question of clustering the existing activities.'

According to TdHN-staff it will be necessary to monitor this process closely. The feeling is that between the regions and among desk officers (miss) conceptions about PA vary.

Programme support and procedures
TdH will support this process by giving some direction as to what is involved in changing towards a PA. An important step is that it has developed its own working definition of a PA.

TdH PA working definition
- TdH is leading in initiating a program (on sector, theme or concentration area).
- All stakeholders decide on: problem analysis, program objectives, activities and implementation and coordination;
- A program has one log frame with one budget;
- TdH is monitoring the results.

Concretely TdH has also defined a number of challenges for itself, two of them being:

- Leaving more responsibility at the local partner level;
- Assessing and if necessary strengthen partner organisations capacities in taking a leading role in a programme.

It appears from the definition that TdH is putting itself very much at the heart of initiating the approach, with a handover to a leading partner along the way. Implicit challenges are how to balance this with establishing partner ownership as well as how to engage with other stakeholders outside the TdH-network. Three other challenges of a procedural nature are explicitly recognized by TdH as being connected with this:

❂ TdH to monitor results (outcome) and effects of the programme rather than detailed data on activity level;
❂ Changing administrative systems to be able to accommodate the involvement of multiple partners in one programme;
❂ Investing more in preparation phases of programmes.

Linking and learning

What does field practice tell us about the feasibility for TdH and its partners to take a thematic, integral approach? For this it is worthwhile to look into how the TdHP programme is developing, and particularly how this relates to the position of and (possible) interaction (linking and learning) between local partners.

> TdHN-staff: *'Anyone with a good story can be eligible for funding'*

Firstly, at present most TdH partnerships are funding related. The process of assessing these partnerships is so far being done on an individual partner basis. This seems to lead to a great variety in partners and projects.

TdHP: P*rojects are categorized into 7 sectors like health and education; 4 themes, such as child traffic and protection, and an x number of target groups, e.g. children with HIV/AIDS, handicapped and street children.*

Both partners visited in the Philippines, CPTCSA and Cebu Hope, are involved in working with and for abused children. Both undertake counselling and treatment. Next to the similarities there are also quite some differences. Cebu Hope is traditionally catholic, whilst CPTCSA is urban progressive in character. Cebu Hope works mainly in service delivery, and is just starting towards more community involvement; CPTCSA works community / partner based focusing on capacity building and advocacy. Cebu Hope mainly gives institutionalized care.

Although both of them being a TdHP partner it is striking to note that there has not been any significant contact between both organisations so far. This also seems to be the case with a number of other partners working in the same field. Nonetheless when prompted both admit that it would be interesting to start a dialogue, to sound out each others complementarities The challenge from a programmatic viewpoint is how to link these and other partners / stakeholders to work towards a common goal.

According to TdHP: '*The office in Jakarta wants CPTCSA to develop a technology on child sexual abuse, which can take the work of other partners to a higher level'.* Interesting in this respect is the perspective given by the CPTCSA board chair.

> CPTCSA-chair*: 'The landscape of sexual abuse, personal safety etc. is much wider than just those institutions working for children. What happens when girls turn 18 where can they turn to? In theory there is a clear link with the women's movement and practically there already is a national taskforce were these institutions meet. CPTCSA has a role to play in not only delivering graded training on abuse, but also to advocate that adequate government systems come into being. Seeing that CPTCSA has recently succeeded in getting more government support, it needs to further strategize on its future role.'*

So CPTCSA could play a central role in child protection in the Philippines, not only according to its own board, but also according to TdH. In line with this, CPTCSA sees its role very much as a catalyst: training trainers, advocacy to the legal system and giving technical support.

TdHP, with support of the Jakarta office, has decided to set out to create some space for interaction. As a first step it will bring all its partners together to sound out common ground. In this *'partners dialogue'* TdHP hopes to lay a foundation for a thematic concentration on child sexual abuse.

Capacity building
As mentioned before, the view at TdH has been for some time to build the capacity of CPTCSA in order to generate more capacity building within the TdH partner network. Or in other words use CPTCSA as a training institute. In theory this fits with the principles of TdH's newly defined PA, which prioritises building the capacity of so-called leading partners.

However, if in the near future CPTCSA is to become a leading partner in a theme based programmatic framework (child sexual abuse) its relationship with TdH and their respective roles need attention.

In the first place what, for instance, does it signify to be 'leading', when a donor can actually 'tell' you to participate in a workshop cycle? It appears CPTCSA's participation has made a positive contribution in this respect. CPTCSA management: *'Participating in the workshop cycle has helped me to be more conscious of the steps we need to take. Instead of leaving the design to consultants, I can see which steps we need to take and communicate more equally now'*. From the conversations with CPTCSA it appears this confidence can be readily transferred to the relationship and communication with TdH.

Secondly, until now TdH only funds CPTCSA's treatment and counselling services. Such a project focus is not a unique approach. Also other donors look for a specific entrance/item within the CPTCSA programme[1]. At the same time most donors want to see the whole picture, including TdHP: *'Although we fund only one part, we don't compartmentalize; we want to see the whole body; take an OD-approach'*. So there is an opportunity for more in depth investment in terms of capacity building. It will be interesting to see how this will translate in specific support. One way to look at this is explicitly voiced by TdHP.

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[1] Unfortunately this does not make life easy in terms of formatting plans and reports for CPTCSA. This in turn has inspired CPTCSA to develop a mother proposal donors can pick and choose from. *'We have tried in getting donors together on this but it didn't work so far'*

> *'TdH should take the role of a process catalyst, ensuring that the target group and different stakeholders meaningfully participate in the process and promote exchange and sharing of literature on programmatic approach. Documentation of the learning and experience is of paramount importance. As this would take time and patience, linking and learning is most significant. Thus, TdH should invest in the capacity building to develop and mainstream programmatic approaches within the organization and its partner members.*

Collective analysis and planning

So when choosing a programmatic focus, assessing capacities of other partners and stakeholders and acting upon that will come into the picture. Getting partners together is of course a necessary first step. The aforementioned partners' dialogue to be set up by TdHP is a good entry point.

The issue of managing interests is tricky. The CPTCSA case already showed how important it is to get expectations clear right from the start among the various interest groups. TdHP for its part is just setting out on this journey. The challenge from a PA-perspective is including other relevant stakeholders along the way and engaging in new partnerships.

TdHP: *'Slowly, in the Philippines we are attempting to explore the entry point for integration of a PA in the sector of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). A gathering of counsellors from different organizations working on CSA will evoke some discussion on the issue concerning their work with children. Issues regarding counselling practices, policy guidelines, ethical standards regarding the care of the children in residential and communities, referral etc. will be the subject of*

discussion and which will be the starting point for identifying common programs. Efforts to involve the different stakeholders in this sector need to be done'.

A second challenge remaining unsurprisingly unresolved (because always difficult) in various conversations, is the issue of exit strategies. TdHP is aware of the fact that expansion in one area will entail dis-investment in other areas.

Example

Recently TdHN has taken over from the Germans in leading a regional anti child-traffic campaign. Various sources mentioned this as a possibility to develop a more thematic focus rather than the 'TdH project approach' followed so far. An ongoing summative evaluation of the Anti trafficking campaign will gather the input to be utilized to develop a common programme within the programmatic approach framework.

This involves saying goodbye to 'old' partners. As TdH(P) is now thinking of developing quite a number of programmes, exit strategies will expectedly come centre stage.

Also, managing a multi stakeholder programme takes time, especially when capacities have to be built along the way. However relevant any programme is, it appears from various conversations that managing this new workload will be a matter of concern.

Wrapping up

Introducing a PA is very relevant to the TdH's working reality, which participants have basically deduced for themselves in conscientiously following up on learning from the workshop cycle. Being essentially a one issue (child protection) organisation presents TdH with manifold opportunities to link

likeminded partners and others together within a thematic programmatic framework. It requires TdH to open up to new partnerships (not only funding related) and step outside its own network.

Evidently this change process is already on the move. It has shifted from the individual (workshop participants) to the (TdH, CPTCSA) organisational level. A policy change to this effect has been formalised and a rudimentary plan to implement a set of regional pilots with the PA is in place. This being achieved within 6 months may certainly be called a landmark. Important factors at play here are persistence and motivation among TdH staff to actually change their working process towards a PA.

Getting management buy-in for this decision through mobilising various layers within the organisation proved also successful. Nonetheless this will require a number of changes. One is that the rather cumbersome, project, way of working at TdH headquarters and down to the field, needs to be fundamentally changed from micro to macro management. Experience shows that often such systems are as difficult to change as anything else, being often part and parcel of the history of an organisation. The phrase: 'this is how we do things here' springs to mind. For an organisation of doers it will be interesting to see how this will evolve.

Also other questions remain: which specific themes to take, which partners / stakeholders to include, who leads, etc, etc? The biggest question of all: Now that TdH seems to be convinced, how about its partners, what are their views? In other words one of the crucial elements to establish a genuine PA is to further local stakeholder participation to develop the regional pilots. Experiences in the

Philippines show that a lot of groundwork needs to be done in this respect. Within the TdHP network cooperation among partners (and other institutions / organisations) is not a common feature. Apparently this varies across the TdH globe. In that sense it will be interesting to critically follow how these experiments with 'partners dialogue' are taking off in order to exchange experience and good practice.

The dynamic and good practice developed already by CPTCSA is encouraging. It shows relevance and impact of working programmatically at the context of a singular partner. Inclusiveness seems to be key here. Or in other words: getting stakeholders on board to develop and serve a common agenda. Learning how to dialogue with these stakeholders and exploring a shared understanding take time and need good facilitation. It seems obvious that capacities to interact differently, i.e. programmatically with and among various stakeholders, are key. These capacities need to be built at partner and at TdH level.

> **Research impressions**
> Billboards are everywhere and caught up in the congestion of Manila traffic there is ample time to find out which toothpaste to use, how to get life insurance, and *'what women really want'*. But also, as I read on a faded street poster: '*Children are everyone's concern'*. In Manila and on Cebu I met many committed educators, activists and government workers who seek to attest to this statement every day. And to have 7 catholic sisters take me on a 'road trip' to see how they try and influence a child safe atmosphere in communities, was a privilege and a lot of fun.
>
> Roel Snelder, PSO

Pulling it all together!

Obviously all three cases are context specific and should not be compared in terms of what is better or worse. At any rate passing judgement is not the intention of the research. What it set out to do was to look at the experience of PSO members and their partners in moving towards a more programmatic approach. What can be learned from their practice, what has helped and hindered them, where and why are they successful? And which questions can be derived from this to steer further learning?

This concluding chapter will pull the experiences together in order to be able to share them with others (members and partners) as well as to derive some input for further learning. Below the main issues / factors coming out of the research are used as headlines to reflect on. Questions for further learning are highlighted in grey.

Personal motivation
What hits home from all three cases is the fact that most participants have shown (and still do) a strong commitment to the change process of moving towards a programmatic approach. During the research, sometimes explicitly or in subtext, participants emphasized they were already (before the workshop cycle) inclined to transform their approach. From many conversations it appears that personal motivation in terms of having a knack for working in 'participatory development' is the underlying factor. This has helped to become change agents and 'push' the agenda (to become more programmatic) towards management and colleagues.

So it appears that they did not solely participate as individuals in a 'fly-by-night' training, but set out with some kind of organisational purpose in mind. Interestingly many admit they benefited from this learning process in such a way that they are now better able to articulate (to others) what needs to change, and with which priority.

A question for further exploration is how to find change agents within an organisation and which mechanisms are helpful in supporting them?

Organisational relevance
During the cycle various participants emphasized that a PA is not an end in itself, but that it needs to improve the work of an organisation(specifically their own) in delivering its mission. By going through the action learning cycle participants took time to jointly (as donor and partner) reflect and experiment on how a PA relates to their organisational purpose(s).

For participants this has meant working at a relatively high level of organisational complexity with underlying questions such as: how does the practice of my (and my partners') organisation relate to the approach, and what are the implications of such an approach for our organisations?

Despite or maybe even due to this complexity this change process has continued after the cycle in all three cases researched. It can therefore be concluded that participants, after having gone through this process feel more strongly as to the relevance of this change for their organisation. Of course this conclusion cannot be transferred automatically to all other organisations that participated, although evidence points in this direction (see also

overview of Daan de Roo)[1]. Nonetheless it may be assumed that any (PSO member) organisation stands to gain from going through a similar setup.

A question that arises for future learning processes is: which features of the process have helped most in instilling future 'participants' with an organisational perspective when 'adopting' a programmatic approach?

Focus on beneficiaries
Field research shows that traditional project approaches are actually limiting the organisations researched in thoroughly analysing and addressing what ultimately matters at beneficiary level (see for instance the experience of TdHP and of Across). In experimenting with and using a PA participants' methodological scope has expanded at the level of analytical capacity. What is happening on the ground, which factors and actors are important, what are their views and roles; what are beneficiaries' needs? These are questions which using a PA has stimulated participants to consistently ask themselves.

So it appears that by applying programmatic principles beneficairies are put more central at the beginning of the programme cycle. This is to some extent already translated to the level of planning interventions (from projects to programmes): a PA helps organisations to extend / scale up the intervention areas they operate in (see for instance ACROSS's and CPTCSA's experience). Ultimately (and hopefully) this will open up new, more grounded possibilities for development, and better results.

A question that surfaces is: how to make sure the beneficiary level becomes part and parcel of the whole programme cycle. What can organisations do to actually make this happen?

Getting management on board
When taking an organisational approach the role of management becomes all important. A contributing factor in deciding on integrating a PA is management buy-in, which is confirmed throughout all stories. In both organisations (Across and CPTCSA) where management directly participated, the agenda was pushed deliberately, but prudently. From a strategic angle this supports the theory that deliberate attention needs to be given to the inclusion of management in learning processes.

Taking this a bit further, management may buy-out, especially when those promoting a PA do not generate sufficient peer backup within the organisation. Managers are generally hard hit when it comes to staff asking for rather fundamental changes. Logically they want to understand the benefits before experiencing the disadvantages. At the same time managers are often too busy to go through lengthy learning processes.

The question that results is what helps to get and keep managers involved in changing to a PA throughout the whole process?

Experimenting and exchanging
Designing and monitoring experiments can be a useful strategy to overcome such hesitation. Although this is only explicitly planned in one case (TdH), research points out that implicitly most favour a gradual change process with trial and error as an ingredient. Also exchange

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[1] For an overview of the workshop cycle experience go to http://www.pso.nl/knowledgecenter/nieuwsitem.asp?nieuws=151.

as to what happened, and why and how to improve things, rings through in most organisations at a theoretical level. The difficulty seems to lie in a limited kowledge of how to design and guide such processes (TdH en Across) , and who should take responsibility (NRC).

It will be interesting to explore how the capacity of organisations can be enhanced in order to practice, learn and reflect more systematically. Or in other words how can organisations be supported in designing their own smart learning processes

Interaction with ongoing processes

The move towards becoming more programmatic is underlined and reinforced by ongoing processes in the organisations researched. These processes take different shapes and forms, and can be seen as catalyst or entry point for promoting a programmatic approach. To recap:

- ☙ Processes of internal professionalisation in terms of revamping programme management, and internal procedures (GZB).
- ☙ Using regular consultation between HQ and field to strengthen focus and staff interaction (TdH).
- ☙ Enhancing 'soft' skills among staff such as facilitation, next to technical PME skills (almost all organisations researched).
- ☙ Strategic repositioning which sets the agenda for changes on various levels (Across, TdH).
- ☙ Creating a learning environment (NRC HIV/AIDS).

Interestingly many of these processes also show interaction with PSO on another level as compared to the workshop cycle. All these

processes are part of some sort of wider cooperation with the PSO programme department (M&E, consultancies, multiple year committments), or with the knowledge centre (quality fund, advisory services, other learning trajectories). Only in some of these cases this interaction is being consciously directed by a clear and agreed upon (between PSO and member organisation) agenda. Mostly the interaction is quite coincidental and is surfacing now that they are looked into more systematically.

Naturally from the perspective of capacity building it is important that various organisations are investing interventions in their own capacity building in the first place. However this might be more effective if the interaction between seemingly diverse processes would be more strategically articulated among the various stakeholders (PSO, members and partners).

The question here is: how to generate a more comprehensive dialogue between PSO and its members on combining various efforts in one strategic capacity building process?

Stakeholder involvement is key factor!

Most participants and interviewees have quite a lot of experience in development work already. Also they work in organisations with a long track record and, at least in words, with a positive view on the value of participation. Nonetheless one of the main (programmatic and developmental) issues they are all struggling with is stakeholder participation and local ownership. It seems therefore that cooperation with 'others' does not always come naturally. This relates especially to those 'others' having a large say in whatever development intervention is to be developed / implemented.

In a way this relates to organisations being inward looking and / or part of an established process that works against opening up towards others. In the cases researched a variety of reasons for this comes to the fore. It might be connected to having identities that don't easily fit together (NGO's versus government); diverging agendas, or on a simpler basis, a wealth of procedures (how we do things) which are obstructive. For many it is also a question of dealing with the 'unknown' and with 'what others may think'. Importantly most participants admit they have gained more insight in the importance and value of dealing with stakeholders by looking at their own reality through a PA lens.

It is also clear from the research that the complexity of stakeholder involvement manifests itself in 'all walks of life'. It may concern the relationship between a northern NGO (donor) and a southern partner, or between southern partners and beneficiaries or with other local stakeholders. The lesson here is that wearing a PA lens is a useful tool in managing change at the level of relationships. And more specifically it can be used to rethink 'old taboos', such as government – NGO cooperation. Although contexts differ, all three cases have in common that government cooperation (local, district or national) is now sought after or extended for a variety of reasons, such as scaling up (CPTCSA) or for gaining 'political' support (RCSC, Across). In that sense attitudes seem to have changed.

The question is how to trigger such attitudinal changes in terms of relationship building more systematically and through that to promote wider cooperation with other 'players' in the same 'system' and synergy?

Redefining partnerships / role change
What is striking from the research is that partners seem to be more willing to explore such an upgrade of stakeholder involvement than donors, even when it involves government. Evidence suggests this to be due to the fact that partners experience the benefits of cooperation more directly as they are 'closer to the fire'. Rethinking 'partnership' (and therefore a change in attitude) seems to be easier at the 'field level' as it can be made practical and its usefulness is very visible (see CPTCSA).

Another reason may be located in the perception of what partnership actually means. Northern donors refer to relationships with southern organisations as partnerships. The research points out that, being at the top of the money chain, some donors have a tendency to behave in 'authoritative isolation'. They take their own policies as a starting point, rather than consulting (the analysis of) local stakeholders. In those cases partnership is a bit of a hollow phrase as it is not a two way street but 'only' defined by money (downwards) and report transfers (upwards).

In principle there is nothing wrong with such an agreement. It however does not merit the term partnership. For the cases researched investing in a PA appears to provide / promise benefits over and above a mere contractual relationship (see below under impact). It requires donors to 'leave their ivory tower' and develop strategies and programmes in closer cooperation with partners and others.

In all three cases donors acknowledge the above tendency in one way or another, with TdH and NRC being most clear about it. Both have a wide span of 'partnerships'. Both seek

some sort of thematic specialisation. They now face the challenge of developing strategies grounded in thorough consultation and coordination. This will most likely lead them away from their 'traditional' role as funder, and open up the possibility to explore other roles. It requires thorough reflection on their role and position within the development community.

A question emerging here is which balance to look for between having (and developing) your own believes, ideas and views, and the fit with priorities of others (be it partners or beneficiaries), and what kind of process will be helpful in this?

There is no one size fits all PA!

Looking at the cases researched the practice of PA differs, depending on where it originates (or who is the primary owner). In this research two 'types' have surfaced, with variations within each type.

A PA originating at partner level:
- ☻ is either expressed in a clear one issue based analysis at a more or less confined geographical level (CPTCSA);
- ☻ is multidimensional but aimed at a specific target population (ACROSS).

Cooperating partners are the stakeholders directly involved with the issue or beneficiaries thereof. Main challenges seem to be on how to sit together, levelling the playing field in terms of how the issues are perceived, and come to coherent arrangements in terms of planning and implementation.

A PA starting from existing donor portfolios:
- ☻ manifest itself at a national level with clustering existing similar projects and / or certain target groups

☻ is expressed at supranational level starting from a (new) singular issue based policy framework.

Challenges for both are in establishing a clear strategic framework with parties involved. The emphasis will be on looking for new and redefining old 'partnerships'; establishing synergy between these various players (including government structures) and building on existing networks. Specifically with regards to the supranational level the *c*hallenge is how to make sure coherence and learning between various country programmes is established.

Looking at these types there is no standard rule of thumb regarding where a PA can originate. What does matter, as appears from the above, is the involvement of stakeholders. Depending on the starting point participation levels of stakeholders (who sits with whom, when and with which intent?) will vary.

The question is which quality criteria to apply for participative content when engaging with programmatic approaches from various perspectives?

Hard and soft skills capacity building
So working more programmatically opens up a whole variety of possibilities and difficulties. To prepare for that organisations often resort to training staff in all sorts of development management techniques (PME, PCM, LFA). Many of the participating organisations have at one time or another invested in such capacity building. For an important part the PSO workshop cycle has also offered and leaned on such techniques. As was learned[20] this was needed to help participants with understanding the 'ins and outs' of a PA.

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[20] Ibid

The research however points out that this does not mean these techniques are always fully understood or applied correctly. This was already apparent from participants' basic understanding at the start of the workshop cycle. From the field research it also was confirmed that local programme staff struggles with applying such techniques.

In addition the research points at the need to invest in softer skills when adopting a PA, such as managing interests, conflict resolution and facilitation skills. In many interviews this surfaced as an important area to invest in. In practice it appears that in all three cases a deliberate choice has been made by participants to take an open mind towards cooperation. At the same time some sort of 'apprehension' can be felt as to what this attitude will bring about. All in all, this dynamic underlines the need to invest in so called soft skills.

So a complementarity exists between the use of 'hard' skills and the introduction of 'soft' skills when applying a PA. It also seems that where 'hard' skills have been used this has not directly led to a PA. And at the same time, although most mention participation as a (soft) value, skills in managing such participation are still underdeveloped.

The question is therefore how to 'marry' soft skills with the more technical ones without losing the benefits of one or the other?

From control to trust

Finally becoming more programmatical involves getting rid of all kinds of procedures and certain standard ways of working. Also it implies harmonising demands between donors. The latter is conspicuously absent in all instances. This underlines 'the ivory tower'

syndrome mentioned before, although a lot of lip service is paid to the importance of changing this dynamic.

Losing cumbersome ways of working is also a difficult process. This is a phase which will come sooner rather than later, provided partners feel free to insist on adapting instruments. Interestingly the argument of the back donor requiring more and detailed information is really not very valid. Cases researched suggest various organisations are not sure what is actually required.
It might be a good idea to inquire first before bothering partners with new formats and requirements. In that sense the whole idea that programmatic means flexibility needs more promotion, also among those organisations that clearly opt for the PA.

So with regard to procedures it comes down to moving from control to trust. Within the development sector this is an ever challenging / frustrating issue. The more control 'we' encounter from higher up the money chain, the more 'we' seem to translate control downwards. Trust seems to be a function not only of how organisations structure their relationship on a bilateral level, but also of how 'we' can defend and promote these choices upwards.

An important question that arises here is who needs to know what at which time, and which procedures - that are being projected downwards and reflect negatively on the possibility to apply a PA - do we need to challenge?

Results, effects and impact
In conclusion it is interesting to see that organisations can work against their gut feelings for such a long time. Actually investing

in relationship building has contributed a lot in a relatively short amount of time; on a sliding scale:

- A sense of urgency to engage with stakeholders at a very early (preparation) stage of programme development.
- Actual consultation with stakeholders in terms of problems and interventions to be planned.
- A shift of responsibilities in terms of preparation and implementation.
- A genuine feeling of more ownership of the programme.

Hopefully these first results will lead to the implementation of more relevant and effective interventions with greater developmental impact. Lessons learned show that working programmatically involves many things at various levels of complexity. It is also clear that most organisations already have certain aspects / processes in place that fit with a PA. These can be used to build on.

It becomes clear that depending on where you come from (donor, partner, beneficiary or otherwise) a PA will take its own specific form. Ultimately it all revolves about involvement combined with what you want to achieve. What matters is that applying a PA is predominantly a multi stakeholder process which needs to be followed through consistently. Along the way organisations need to revisit 'old and established' ways of working and 'taboos'.