Dilemmas and paradoxes in Results Based Management (RBM) and Capacity Building

A Case Study of RBM and Capacity-Building Programmes in a Non-Governmental Organization

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List of acronyms, abbreviations and special terms

Back-donors: funding institutions like Norad, Sida and ECHO

BRC: Burundi Red Cross

CB: Capacity building

C-BAR: Capacity-Building Assessment Rubric

CSO: Civil society organization

ECHO: European Community Humanitarian Office

IFRC: International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

LFA: Logistical Framework Approach

Logframe: short-term for Logistical Framework Approach

MFA: The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

Norad: The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation

NS: National Society (a Red Cross society)

OD: Organizational development

PA: Participatory approach

PNS: Partner National Society (referring to a funding Red Cross partner)

PMER: Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

RBM: Results Based Management

RC: Red Cross

SIDA: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WFP: World Food Programme

Acknowledgements

After several years of professional experience from strategy work, results management and quantitative analysis, I wanted to take a more philosophical perspective on results management. Moreover, I felt that my year and a half of anthropological studies was dwarfed by my four years of economics and business administration studies and, not least, I sought to do something out of my comfort zone, while still building on my interest in results management and development. Indeed, I have learned a lot from dedicated, interesting and skilled persons I have met. This thesis would not have been possible without their contributions.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Having entered the aid sector in 2007 with an optimistic attitude, I was surprised to come across a book published in 2009 in which it was stated 'Aid has helped make the poor poorer, and the growth slower' (Moyo 2009:xix). Two years later an audit report was issued with the headline 'Lack of results orientation in Norwegian long-term development aid' (Office of the Auditor General of Norway 2011). In general 'results and risk management are identified as "weak spots" in Norwegian development cooperation management' (Norad 2008:5). Such criticisms made me want to explore why. Quite contrary to what I read, I saw my colleagues in the Norwegian Red Cross overloaded with writing reports that predominantly showed good results. There had to be a gap somewhere. I wanted to find the underlying reasons – and thus began the journey that has resulted in this thesis.

Capacity Building is recognized as important in achieving aid effectiveness and sustainability (OECD undated b). Norwegian development aid strategy highlights the need to build institutions and organizations that are capable of leading their own development based on national and local needs. A substantial share of Norwegian aid is directed towards Capacity Building of NGOs (Norad 2010:1). For the Red Cross globally, it is an overarching strategy to 'build strong National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' (IFRC 2010a:22). The objectives are to build up expanded, sustainable capacity, with greater participation in community affairs and scaled-up services (IFRC 2010a:24). However, in general, 'successful and sustainable capacity development has remained an elusive goal' (Fukuda-Parr 2002:vii). In particular, it has proven difficult to measure the results of capacity building (White Paper no. 13 2009:97).

I have worked with Results Management most of my professional life, documenting the results of complex processes. The challenges of Capacity

Building caught my interest. I wanted to use the Red Cross as the main object of study; moreover, the Red Cross could give me unique access to data.

I wanted to explore a paradox: although the Red Cross has worked intensively on Capacity Building (CB), results seem to be lacking in NGO aid. Exploring the intersection between Results Based Management (RBM) and CB could shed light on whether the problems are related to the methodology employed.

1.1 Research question

The main objective of this thesis is to explore why Capacity Building seem to remain an elusive goal despite huge efforts of Results Based Management.

Despite all the hype surrounding Capacity Building (CB), the concept remains elusive, ridden with conceptual and methodological challenges (Fukuda-Parr e.t al. 2002). Further, it has been claimed that Results Based Management (RBM) is counterproductive (Ebrahim and Rangan 2010:12). This thesis examines how RBM contributes, or does not contribute, to better results in CB.

In recent decades, there has come greater pressure on proving the results of aid. I will try to shed light on the reasons for this increase in general, and critically discuss the consequences. My business background has led me to appreciate the saying ‘if you can’t measure it, it you can’t manage it’. I enjoy measuring, numbers, matrixes and reports, and believe they are all worthwhile. On the other hand such efforts are worthwhile only if they contribute to better results.

Drawing on a case study of capacity development projects at the Norwegian Red Cross, I will discuss some of those challenges and seek to provide a partial explanation for the elusiveness of CB success, despite greater RBM efforts.

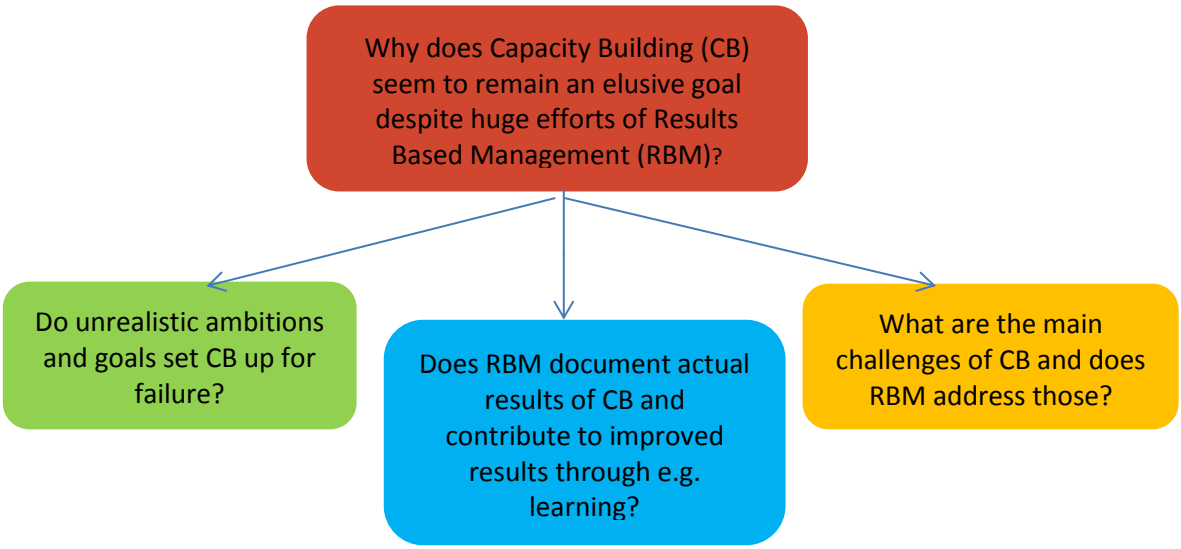

Figure 1: The research question with three sub-questions

My analysis is structured around three sub-questions (see Figure 1). First, setting realistic goals is a part of RBM. However, the apparent or real lack of results might also stem from setting goals and ambitions overly high.

My assumption was that each and every project and each and every programme coordinator has to deal with a plethora of demands, goals and guidelines formulated by the international community, national politicians, as well as the ambitions and expectations of the organization in question. Series of such over-ambitious goals can explain the lack of results, whether perceived or real. It is disputable whether aid has *not* brought results. I will argue that the impression has been crafted that aid has failed in delivering results – an impression I suggest is overwhelmingly incorrect. This thesis highlights that results are understood in many different ways. Whether or not results are achieved depends on which level we are looking at – the organizational or societal level.

The second question concerns whether RBM contributes in documenting actual results, enhancing learning and promoting better results. It is often held that weak results in the aid sector can be traced back to the lack of Results Management. I will challenge this diagnosis, asking whether the methods and focus of RBM

contribute to better results. The literature concerned with RBM in the aid sector gives the impression of a methodology that draws an extensive amount of resources without contributing to the overall development goal (Policy and Operations Evaluation Department 2011, Ebrahim and Rangan 2010, Eggen 2008, Natsios 2010, Mikkelsen 2005). Ebrahim and Rangan claim that RBM is counterproductive (2010:12). Especially criticized has been that RBM focuses on quantitative results, short time-periods, planning matrixes and assumptions of linear causality. The methodology basis of RBM might be ill-suited for documenting results of complex interventions like CB.

Critics have claimed that some of the best and most sustainable development projects get forced off the priority lists, replaced by projects that can document impact in quantitative terms within short timespans (Eggen 2008, Fukuda-Parr e.t al. 2002, Natsios 2010, Hulme 2007, Ortiz and Taylor 2009:14). For instance, it has been claimed that important goals never reached the list of the UN Millennium Development Goals 'for reasons derived from the RBM principles' (Hulme 2007:16).

The third question is whether RBM sufficiently addresses the main challenges of CB. My assumption was that capacity development is linked to good governance, which has been largely criticized for basing development approaches on the premise that 'the others' lack something that 'we' have (Taylor 2004, Howell 2002, Solli 2011), and that RBM does not sufficiently address this paternalism. The normative imagination might contradict the locally-based approach as well as local identity ownership efforts, leading to weak development results.

Thus, judging from the academic literature, I expected to find counterproductive RBM and distortion of projects, ill-suited methodology, too many goals and guidelines, and development projects mirroring our self-image. If confirmed, these elements might explain the apparent or actual lack of results from CB projects. However, based on my knowledge of the Red Cross, I had a feeling that the scholarly criticism did not cover the whole picture.

Throughout this thesis, I hope to show that there is no single reason for the impression of elusiveness of Capacity Building. Mono-causal reasons are often cited to explain the lack of results. For instance, corruption is often held to be a main impediment (Banik 2010). I will argue that the reasons for any weak results are multifaceted. Further, I will demonstrate that the impression is partly only that – an impression. However, partly there are also substantial challenges making results less achievable. Drawing on researchers' criticisms, I investigate and discuss whether RBM is a part of the problem in creating and showing results.

1.2 Rationale

On behalf of taxpayers and intended beneficiaries, it is a commitment for all development actors to allocate and use resources in the best possible way. Parliaments and the public call for justification for aid expenditures (Klingebil 2011). Evaluating and documenting achieved results is important for the intended beneficiaries as well. Importantly, RBM is practised not only for retrospective use and documentation, but also for informing practitioners to make the best decisions: to improve the aid practice. That is the overall reason why research on this topic is highly relevant

Because considerable resources are spent on monitoring, evaluation and reporting, it is important to make this as useful as possible. How can evaluation and RBM help us understand, change behaviour if necessary and perform better? Monitoring and evaluations should provide the basis for understanding what works and not, and why (Ortiz and Taylor 2009:12).

'There is a strong link between institutional development and sustainability' (Kruse et al. 1998:7). Hence, Capacity Building is important. However, as the objectives seems to remain out of reach, there is a need to investigate what kind of CB works and how we can achieve a better focus and priority on this topic

when it comes to funding and in NGO strategies and activities. To discover what kind of CB works, we must learn from successes and mistakes in that field. Then we need RBM to lead us in a productive direction. As Denmark's official development agency Danida states:

> While capacity development support is an important element (…) it is generally recognized that the knowledge about how best to deliver the support and how to measure the results of this key type of assistance is limited. (Danida 2005:3).

By studying the reporting and evaluations practices in the Norwegian Red Cross, the aim of this thesis is to contribute to this debate.

1.3 Definitions

Capacity is 'the ability to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives' (Fukuda-Parr et al. 2002:8). Capacity Building is done to enhance 'the ability of individuals, organizations, or systems to perform their functions more efficiently, effectively, and sustainably' (Bohwasi et al.1998:13). This may take place at three levels: the individual, the organizational and the state level. This thesis will concentrate on capacity at the organizational level, more precisely: civil society or non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

The Red Cross uses the term 'Organizational Development' to describe the strategy and programmes within this area (Norwegian Red Cross 2012c:4) The aim of Organizational Development:

> is a major increase or improvement, often requiring a transformation. The result is a new quality (from weak to strong NS[1], from dependent to sustainable), a modification of structures, delivery systems or services; or a dramatic increase in key numbers (incl. the adaptation of the organization to new situations). (Norwegian Red Cross 2012c:4)

This definition of Organizational Development is similar to how the academic literature defines Capacity Building. Worth noting is that the Red Cross uses the

[1] NS: National Society, a term often used to describe Red Cross organizations that Norwegian Red Cross or other actors support

term Capacity Building to describe ‘work done within a National Society to improve what already exists’ (Norwegian Red Cross 2012c:4). However, as the way the Red Cross uses the term Organizational Development is very similar to the way that most of the aid sector and academics use Capacity Building, I have chosen to use ‘Capacity Building’, or ‘CB’, as the main term in this study.

Throughout the thesis, I refer to the different actors in the aid chain using various terms, which may need some clarification.

The aid chain:

Local branch -> National Society -> Partner National Society -> Norad, MFA or another back-donor

A local branch is a part of a Red Cross National Society (NS). The term NS is often used to describe those Red Cross societies that implement development activities. Sometimes I also use the term ‘implementing’ or ‘receiving’ NS to be explicit about their role. Partner national societies (PNSs) is used to describe those Red Cross societies that contribute with funding. For instance, the Norwegian Red Cross and the German Red Cross often act as PNSs, while the Burundi Red Cross is a receiving and implementing National Society (NS). The term ‘back-donors’ refers to development agencies like the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA).

All Red Cross Societies are members of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Sometimes I refer to the IFRC as the Federation, and sometimes all Red Cross Societies are referred to as the Movement.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The emergence of Capacity Building

Institutions re-entered the development agenda after a period of being ignored (Bohwasi et al.1998:11). Following the collapse of communism, trade and neo-liberal thinking dominated the 1980s, with structural adjustment programmes and deregulation (Banik 2006, Mosse 2005). In the 1990s, experiences with the Asian Tigers and analyses of their states' features placed both institutions and the importance of 'good governance' on the agenda (Banik 2006:41, Bohwasi et al. 1998:11, Howell 2002). Institutionalism became a part of the new aid architecture. Strengthening civil society was a part of the effort to overcome the failings of regimes (Mosse 2005:3-4).

The heightened role of civil society came about because the challenges of poverty and development could not be solved by the existing theories and solutions. The new ethic came to focus on local populations and what development meant to them – as with social movements and landless people's movements. In general, 'civil society' was the panacea of the 1990s, inspired by the idea of 'social capital' that encompassed norms, networks, cooperation and trust (Banik 2006:46). NGOs were seen as more reliable than states and more connected to the grassroots level (Banik 2006:260). Also self-organization, re-organization of society, partnership and local ownership became the new strategies (Mosse 2005:5).

This led to a greater role for the NGOs in the 1990s (Howell 2002 and Banik 2010). The number of registered NGOs in OECD countries doubled between 1980 and1993. Norwegian aid amounted to NOK 28 billion in 2012, of which 3.7 billion went to NGOs.

The three areas dominating the NGO channel in the periode 2000-2012 was good governance (28%), emergency assistance (25%), and health and social services (18%) (see Figure 2).

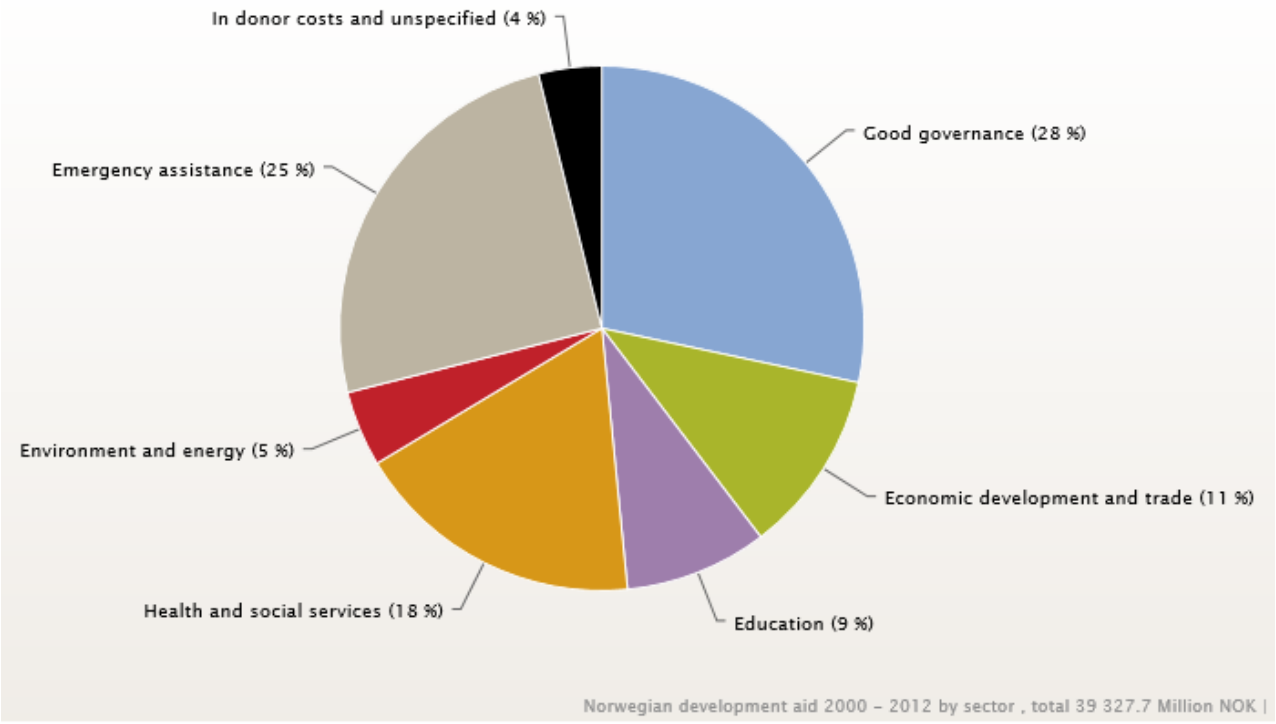

Figure 2: Aid budget through NGOs split by areas in the periode 2000-2012 (Norad 2013d)

The support for good governance increased steadily from 2000 to 2009, thereafter levelling out. 'Good governance' includes support to civil society. In total, good governance through NGOs amounted to NOK 1.2 billion in 2012, accounting for 4% of the total budget.

Development as enhancing skills

The main tasks of Norwegian development policy are to fight poverty, to contribute to the fulfilment of human rights, and to help countries and people gain control of their own development and their own lives (White Paper 2009 no 13:5 and 10). A main impediment to development was understood as weak institutions. Capacity Building (CB) in these institutions, thus, became *the* new and right thing to do (Riddell 2001).

2.2 History of the growth of Capacity Building (CB)

CB emerged as a reaction to technical assistance (TA) that emphasized knowledge transfer through experts. 'There is growing consensus that TA (…) has largely been a failure' (Riddell 2001:203).

According to Kuramoto and Sagasti:

> The development cooperation experiment in general, and technical assistance programmes in particular, were devised and put in practice at a time when the productivity-increase approach – embedded within the larger paradigm of modernization – dominated development thinking and practice. (...) Traditional ways, knowledge and beliefs were generally seen as a hindrance to modernization and economic growth. (Kuramoto and Sagasti, in Fukuda-Parr 2002:215)

Donor countries or agencies thus sent their experts to train their counterparts in developing countries, or only to fix problems, like constructing a water-hole, building schools, developing various systems, etc. This proved to be expensive and yielded limited results. When the experts left the country, the expertise left with them. Riddell (2001) argues that sufficient knowledge was not transferred and thus sustainability was severely hampered. Moreover, technical assistance was often conducted by experts who had either the wrong skills or little pedagogical insight. Nor did they see themselves as mentors. Instead of sustainable capacity, parallel structures were often built, and those lasted only as long as the expatriates' contracts lasted (Riddell 2001, Bohwasi et al.1998:16).

Due to the critique of TA, the new role for donors was envisioned: they should contribute to development of local skills, via CB based on a long-term and involving process (Riddell 2001).

Also in Norwegian development policy, institutional development and CB gained importance throughout the 1990s (Kruse et al. 1998: 8–9). Civil society and CB become key areas:

> Measures to strengthen important social institutions and organizations will be key areas of long-term cooperation (…) Cooperation will not be limited to strengthening public institutions, but will also include institutions in business and civil society. (White Paper No. 19, 1995–96:42–43, in Kruse et al. 1998:9)

Subsequent White Papers have followed this new strategy. The White Paper on Climate, Capital and Conflicts (no 13, 2009) focuses on civil society as important for voicing the interests of marginalized people, securing a free press, and enabling organizations to supplement the public services, which often are below a minimum standard (White Paper 2009, no 13:25–26). According to the Norwegian government: 'Organizations have become a significant channel for Norwegian public aid'(my translation, White Paper no 13, 2009:96). Both the White Paper on Global Health (No 11, 2011–2012), and White Paper no 14 (2010–2011), 'Towards a greener development', emphasize the role of civil society.

CB is on the one hand seen as both important and a major step forward from Technical Assistance (TA). On the other hand, it is also perceived as yet another 'buzzword' which hides more than it reveals (Banik 2010:23). CB and good governance have many similarities: both are about management and efficiency. Good governance also has (or had) the same positive aura as CB enjoys today, for as George and Sabelli put it: '[B]eing against good governance is like being against motherhood and apple-pie' (George and Sabelli in Taylor 2004:134).

2.3 History of Result Based Management (RBM)

In recent decades, there has been tremendous pressure to show results (Ortiz and Taylor 2009, Klingebil 2011, Hulme 2007). RBM became popular within the government sector, the civil service and the aid sector. Business schools educated their students in the concepts, which, with their common-sense nature and linearity, proved attractive (Hulme 2007:18).

RBM became influential also in Norway (Hulme 2007:6). The idea of RBM and setting targets resonated with Norad, as well as with the development agencies of the USA, the UK and Germany (Hulme 2007:18). As a response to criticisms of RBM as a weak spot, Norad developed 'Results Management in Norwegian Development Cooperation: A practical guide' (Norad 2008) for NGOs and other development agencies. From being an underperforming sector, the aid sector was now expected to achieve better results with this new toolbox (Hulme 2007:18).

Earlier it was enough to document that resources had been transferred and activities carried out according to plan. Today one is expected to show what change those activities have led to at a higher societal level (Eggen 2011:68). Donors want to know if X leads to Y, where Y often is at a national and overall development level. This implies or assumes that there is a direct cause-and-effect relationship, and that it is possible to isolate this relationship so as to attribute impact to programme activities.

In 2006, a committee headed by Rattsø conducted an appraisal. The conclusion was quite pessimistic regarding the possibility of positive results from Northern support to strengthening civil society in the South. Also, the report stated that evaluations of CB were mainly impression-based rather than based on systematic collection of empirical data (Rattsø 2006:96). The report led to more thorough evaluations of the development activities of Norwegian NGOs (Norad 2011b:36).

2.4 Recent assessments of development results in civil society sector and use of RBM

'Did the strengthening of civil society organizations in East Africa lead to poverty reduction among women and children in the areas where the organizations operate, according to the objectives set?', Norad asks (2012a). This Norad report, like several others, states that not enough is known about the

results of Norwegian development interventions. For the year 2011, Norad concludes, regarding evaluations in general, that data or systems are lacking and that the outcomes or impacts could not be satisfactorily assessed (Norad 2011b).

In the next annual report, Norad asks if Capacity Building is about to become the new ‘white elephant’: huge, costly and ineffectual (Norad 2013a:9–10). Does CB require too many resources, and is it inefficient? The same report also concludes that insufficient attention has been paid to learning from evaluations within the organizations (Norad 2013a:23).

2.5 Case presentation: Organizational Development in the Red Cross

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement consists of 189 national societies (NSs) – the world's largest humanitarian network. Each NS provides a range of services, from disaster relief to first aid training, based on the needs of the country. NSs are independent units and set their own priorities. All NSs are made up of volunteers and staff, and all NSs are members of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC).

2.5.1 Organizational and financial development

The Norwegian Red Cross is associated with emergency relief operations. In fact, however, disaster preparedness and long-term development have long been important the Red Cross. Just as there is a tendency for most people to react to sudden crises instead of chronic situations, there was a tendency within the Red Cross for long-term development work to be overshadowed by work with relief operations (Nord/Sør konsulentene 2011:1).

The Norwegian Red Cross strategy is to contribute to strengthening other national societies (NSs) – because they are closest to the needs and solutions on the ground, and because strong national societies can reduce the risks of severe

consequences of acute and silent crises alike. The strategy of the Norwegian Red Cross for the period 2009–2014 highlights Organizational Development, or Capacity Building, as one out of six main objectives:

> National societies that are priority cooperation partners for the Norwegian Red Cross are more capable of dealing with humanitarian and long-term development challenges using their own resources (Norwegian Red Cross 2009:13).

Internationally, the Red Cross/Red Crescent Federation has selected Organizational Development (OD) as one of three main strategies in its 'Strategy 2020' (IFRC 2010a). The Norwegian Red Cross supports other Red Cross NSs bilaterally or through regional or global programmes. Capacity Building, or OD, may be organized as separate projects or programme or as part of other programmes – like the HIV/AIDS programme.

Although OD is a part of Strategy 2020 for the IFRC globally, there seem to be two different schools of thought. The Norwegian Red Cross represents one school with both financial and professional support. Financial support may involve covering core costs for administration and management; and professional support may concern competence building and system development for volunteer recruitment or Financial Development (FD) (Norwegian Red Cross 2012c). Members of the other school are reluctant to cover core costs and support professionally. As one informant explains:

> *[That is]one school that operates unilaterally (…) They build up parallel structures, and when the funding period is due, they withdraw and leave no capacity enhancement behind* (Red Cross informant 2)

As we will see later, the disparity in the approaches of these two schools of thought is one of the obstacles to achieving better results as it leads to uncoordinated management and governance.

The Norwegian Red Cross concentrates its support to CB efforts on building local networks of volunteers, FD, and governance and management (Norwegian

Red Cross 2012c:10–11). In this thesis, I will use examples from some of the Organizational Development (OD) and Financial Development (FD) programmes, mainly from Burundi.

2.6 Outline of the thesis

This study consists of eight chapters, including the introduction and background chapters. Chapter 3 reviews the literature on conventional and alternative results management approaches. I present New Public Management and Results Based Management (RBM), as these provide the foundation for today's Results Management. Participatory Approaches (PAs) will also be presented, as an alternative. As there is no such thing as a perfect methodology, criticisms of both approaches exist, and will be presented. Chapter 4 describes how the study was conducted and the rationale underlying the choice of research methods.

Chapter 5 to 7 form the discussion part of the research question: why Capacity Building (CB) seem to remain an elusive goal despite the massive RBM efforts. The structure follows the three initial questions.

In Chapter 5, I discuss whether unrealistic ambitions and goals may set CB up for failure. The distance between politicians' goals and NGO project goals will be presented, and it will be asked if there is a gap in levels here that sets aid projects up for failure. Aggregation challenges will be discussed, as will the interpretation and consequences of the impression that results are lacking. By taking a closer look at ambitions and goals, what might appear as lack of efficiency in the aid sector might actually prove to be lack of capacity. I will argue that there is a huge gap between the ambitions of Norwegian development policy and the Norwegian Red Cross and what can actually be achieved at the project level. I will also examine various interpretations of the term 'results'.

In Chapter 6, I present the main theme of this thesis, – the issue of methodological choices. The assumption is that the RBM approach is inappropriate for the field under study due to the shortcomings outlined in Chapter 3 – such as control focus, the accountability structure, use of indicators, assumptions of causality and so forth. Inappropriate methodology might lead to insufficient learning or insufficient documentation of results. It might also be that RBM is appropriate, but has been poorly or wrongly applied. I will argue there are challenges in both categories. In part, RBM does not create necessary learning and does not allow CB results to be shown, while more might have been learned and showed through more correct use – for instance by including beneficiaries and heeding local voices. Evaluation and reports are used to show how results are documented. Interviews are used to show shortcomings and challenges that the Red Cross encounters. I also present some positive experiences with RBM as highlighted by the informants themselves, in order to provide a more nuanced picture than the most critical voices.

We then turn to the alternative – the Participatory Approach (PA), asking if it is used and what experiences the Red Cross has with using it. I will demonstrate that on the one hand, PA contributes to learning and motivation. On the other hand, it does not sufficiently address the root causes of the challenges to CB – such as lack of coordination and local ownership.

Central here is the content of CB projects. If the most appropriate methods for monitoring and evaluation are in use and are used correctly, and there still is a lack of results, then the content of CB might be at fault. Lack of results might of course be due to weak projects. In Chapter 7, I will take a look at the challenges, how they are perceived by different actors, and whether RBM can help to reveal the causes of the elusiveness of CB results. The scope of this master thesis does not allow for a thorough analysis of the CB concept in general. I seek to provide some insights into the challenges and results as perceived by the Red Cross. Drawing on the literature as well as interviews, the dilemmas of local ownership,

equality, resources and coordination will be debated. Finally, Chapter 8 summarizes the thesis and discusses some implications.

3. CONVENTIONAL AND PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

The aim of this thesis is to examine how evaluations and Results Based Management (RBM) of Capacity Building (CB) projects are conducted and how the Results Management actually affects CB. On the one hand, there is a need for autonomy and local ownership to achieve results. On the other hand, there is a need for control, short-term results and visible results. This is a dilemma.

In this section, I present the ideas behind New Public Management (NPM), which has dominated the public management systems of recent decades. Today, NPM is seen as the conventional approach, and RBM is a part of NPM. Alternative methodological approaches have also emerged that are critical of the NPM and RBM technologies. One dominant voice is that of Robert Chambers, who argues for a Participatory Approach (PA). However, also PA has been subjected to criticism.

My intention here is not to repeat old criticisms of the 'audit culture'. Rather my aim is to take a closer empirical look at how RBM is used in the Red Cross, analysing how this approach influences CB projects as well as the consequences its use might have for long-term development goals; and finally, whether the criticisms that have been expressed are relevant.

3.1 NPM and RBM – Conventional approaches: SMART framework?

In Norwegian public management policy, one of the most central components has been goal- and Results Management (Christensen et al. 2007:100). The concepts and ideas of New Public Management have been developed for the public sector in general, not specifically for the development sector. Therefore, the general theory will be referred to here.

3.1.1 Theoretical perspectives and operationalization of NPM and RBM

RBM is defined as a 'strategy aimed at achieving important changes in the way government agencies operate with improving performance (achieving better results) as the central orientation' (Binnendijk 2001:3 in Hulme 2007:2).

The purpose of applying RBM is twofold: management improvement, and performance reporting (Ireland 2003, and Binnedjik 2000 in Vähämäki et al. 2011:8). Management improvement includes planning, decision-making and learning. Performance reporting concerns accountability, measuring and evidence.

The IFRC defines RBM as 'an approach to project/programme management based on clearly defined results, and the methodologies and tools to measure and achieve them' (IFRC 2011b:9). This definition is mostly in line with the 'performance reporting' purpose defined above. However, the Federation states clearly that learning and reflection are essential parts of evaluations.

Norad defines RBM as an approach that 'involves shifting management attention away from a focus on inputs, activities and processes to a focus on benefits (…) Results Management also focuses on using information on results to improve decision making.' (Norad 2008:9). This definition covers to some extent both 'management improvement' and 'performance reporting'.

Both Norad and the IFRC use a project approach which runs from assessment and planning to evaluation and learning (see Figure 3). The project management model used by the Red Cross and others can be said to be an operational layer of NPM thinking.

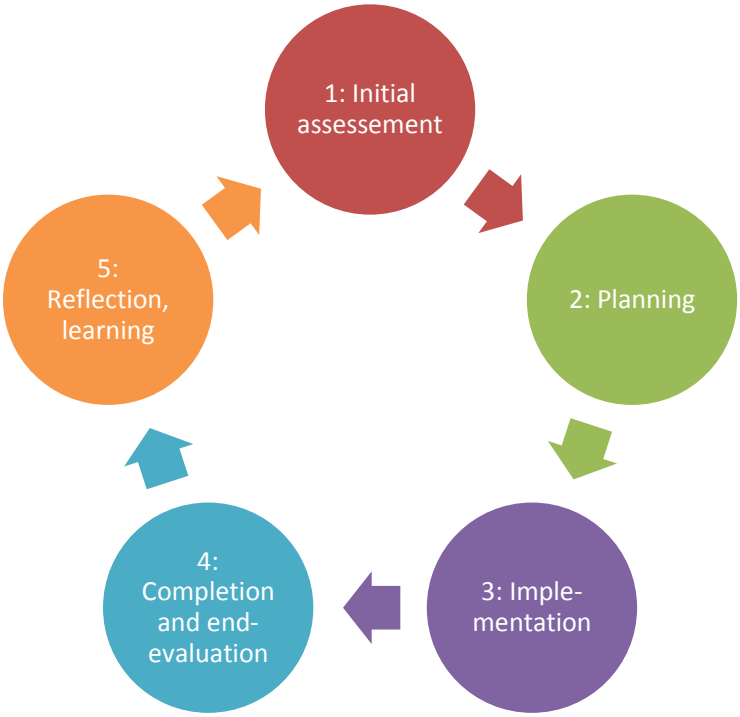

Figure 3: Project cycle (based on Norad 2008:23–28, IFRC 2011b:10 and Red Cross informant 6)

Measurement of results is shown through logical chains from activities to impact. Development problems and solutions are translated into a logframe model.

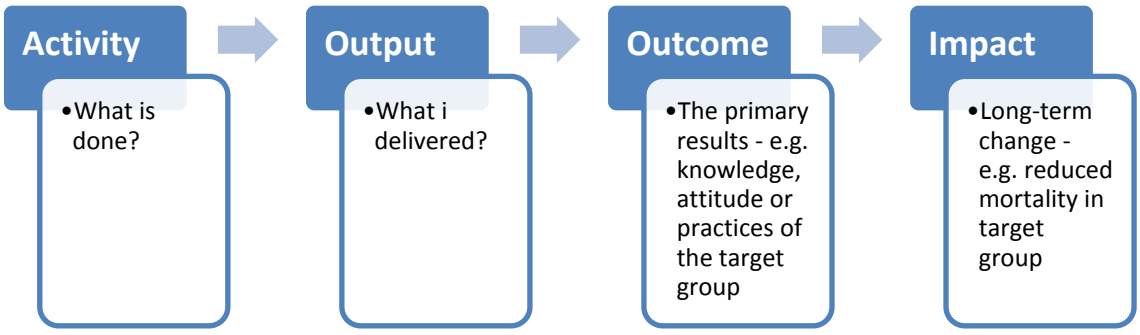

Figure 4: The result chain/logframe model (based on Norad 2008 and IFRC 2011b)

Norad's practical guide on Results Management (2008) highlights the importance of clear objectives by the use of logical planning models, using indicators, result chains and baselines (Norad 2008:1–2). Indicators are used to measure progress

towards a predefined goal that should be 'SMART'– **s**pecific, **m**easureable, **a**chievable, **r**elevant and **t**ime-bound (Norad 2008:15). Aid actors should use logical planning models, indicators and baselines, establish monitoring and evaluation (M&E) plans, and projects should report on outcome level (Norad 2008:1–2).

Norad underlined in 2008 that '**outcomes represent the most important result-level in results management**' (Norad 2008:10). This summarizes the main point of RBM compared to earlier types of reporting. The focus was no longer to be solely on activities and output. As we will see later, reporting on outcomes was both difficult to report on and not seen as sufficient. Despite this, only one year after launching the handbook, Norad removes the requirement of 'only' outcome levels and expects NGOs to report on impact level (Norad 2009:15–16).

The underlying assumption of the project cycle, and logframes, is that organizations can be changed and used as instruments for achieving societal goals (Christensen et al. 2010:23 and 33). But is this management theory or concept useable in practice in the aid sector? My own experience from working with projects in other sectors is that projects are easier to plan and implement if the circumstances are quite stable. Then it is possible to use the resources you have planned for throughout the project period, although often with some adjustments. In such a stable environment, it is possible to predict the outcome of a project fairly well. However, in the settings that have the most pressing need for well-functioning humanitarian organizations, there is a very high probability of encountering profoundly unstable environments. The planned project outcome is not always achievable when context changes dramatically – when a refugee situation emerges, or when there is a coup.

Although the RBM concept often includes objectivity, linearity, measurements and SMART criteria, there are different understandings and applications of the concept. There is no such thing as a 'singular RBM model' (Vähämäki et al. 2011:10). In this thesis, I use the Norad handbook (2008) as a basis, but

explicitly draw attention to the various interpretations of the terms ‘results’ and RBM.

3.1.2 NPM and RBM criticism

In searching for literature on RBM, I was struck by how the literature was divided in two categories: either the ‘how to go about’ literature from the project management and business segment, or critical literature from the social science segment. This chapter is mainly based on negative criticisms of RBM.

Critics of NPM claim that the approach has resulted in too much bureaucracy, too much of a focus on control and too much complexity, and has acted to raise costs (Christensen et al. 2007:99–103).

Criticisms of the conventional approach can be summed up in five main points: (1) control, (2) indicators, objectivity and measurements, (3) linearity and baselines, (4) the accountability structure and (5) lack of autonomy and local ownership.

1) Control

The essence of the criticism about control is that it is not really results that are measured, but tasks and activities – hence, more control of behaviour than results (Christensen et al. 2007:102). The intention was to move from rule-orientation towards goal-orientation. ‘It’s the results that count’ (my translation, Christensen et al. 2007:78) became the new slogan. In fact, this has led to both goal- *and* rule-orientation, which means that more requirements have emerged to be fulfilled. With control comes priority accorded to easily measureable activities, and less interest in broader frames of reference, such as human rights, participation and democracy, that are more difficult to measure, it is claimed (Hulme 2007:2). This in turn would lead us to expect distortion of projects as well as distortion within a given project: more focus on counting vaccines or workshops, and thus a

prioritization of such activities, instead of focusing on and giving priority to trust, autonomy and sustainability.

In fact, in many places Results Management has developed into a system dominated by control, attention to details and formalization. It has led to more activity and behaviour control than result control – contrary to intentions. In general, however, the concept has been adjusted somewhat, and one has realized that the RBM system has to be tailored to various organizations in order to be relevant (Christensen et al. 2007:100–102). Despite criticism of the dominance of control, in what known as the post-NPM period the control aspect has actually been reinforced (Christensen and Lægreid 2010:408).

2) Indicators, objectivity and measurements

RBM focuses on objectivity and measurements through use of indicators. It is important to establish the causal relationships, conduct a baseline study and measure progress (Norad 2008). Drawing on Chambers (2008) and the Norad handbook (2008), we can derive three questionable preconditions for conducting result assessments of this type:

- the facts have to be specific, standard and verifiable
- external conditions should be constant (at the time of baseline and progress measurement, or for treatment and control group)
- there should be a verifiable link between cause and effect

(based on Norad 2008, Chambers 2008:16–17).

The expectations of verifiable facts, constant context and causality give the impression of wishing to emulate the experimentation and tools of the natural sciences, with experiments and control of effects. Naturalists, or positivistic science, use observation, experiences, logic and reason (Knutsen and Moses 2007:8) and prefer experiments in controllable environments and statistics.

Naturalists perceive phenomena as existing objectively, whereas constructivists believe that all phenomena are interpreted through the lenses of the observer

(Knutsen and Moses 2007). Is there a truth out there to be recorded and analysed objectively? Or is all truth subjective? That is one of the main questions and differences between two methodological traditions – where the naturalist and the constructivist tradition constitute the extreme points of a scale (Knutsen and Moses 2007:7). While perhaps not incompatible, the underlying philosophy is the main battle in today's social science (ibid.:3).

When subsequently analysing evaluation reports, we need to understand such foundational theories of science, as what constitutes rigour is not an agreed point. Neither is there agreement on what is considered valid knowledge. Power, authority and rhetoric play important roles in the debate on what constitutes sound knowledge (Knutsen and Moses 2007:2).

Using a constructivist perspective and methodology makes it difficult, of course, to measure the progress of an intervention because we 'allow' the method to influence the results. The question is whether it is possible for evaluation methods *not* to influence results.

Feelings of trust, involvement and dignity are influenced both by the way questions are framed and by the RBM practice. If the main purpose of Results Management is control (or is perceived to be), this is likely to influence feelings of mutual trust and of dignity in a negative way. And conversely, if the main purpose of RBM is learning and the approach is appreciative, then this will influence trust and dignity in a positive way.

3) Linearity, baselines and causality

The use of baselines and indicators rests on some tacit assumptions of linearity and causality, which also can be said to be a legacy from the natural sciences. Baselines are required by back-donors and are seen as a prerequisite for documentation of progress. Lack of baselines is one of the main criticisms repeated in Norad's evaluation summary for 2011 (Norad 2011b). However, baselines might be less relevant for complex programmes, as the constraints in

for instance a CB project are moving targets (Riddell 2001, Ortiz and Taylor 2009). When development projects start up, the most relevant obstacles to be to overcome during the CB process might be unknown or non-existent. This adds to the criticism of treating development from a purely instrumental view, as CB is not a linear process (Ortiz and Taylor 2009:9). 'In brief', describes McNeill, 'the problem is that LFA is ill-suited to be applied to "soft" sectors, which are, in fact, becoming increasingly dominant in aid' (McNeill 2012).

4) The accountability structure

The essence of this criticism is that the dominant control focus in RBM skews the direction of accountability. It seems that the RBM system asks the lower parts of the system to document, aggregate and visualize results to higher parts in the system. By lower parts, I mean those closest to the beneficiaries; and higher parts refer to the funding end of the value chain. Responsibility for achieving the objectives set is at the lower parts of the system. At the same time, ambitious goals are decided at the top of the system – politicians and the public management system. There might be large gaps between politicians' goals and what is achievable, especially within time-bound limits and in terms of single projects. This can explain the increased pressure on documenting results and control. A repeated criticism of the RBM practice is that the predominant upward accountability at the expense of beneficiary accountability and learning is due to how NPM is constructed (Ortiz and Taylor 2009:30). 'Politically formulated goals are then to be realized through a process of administrative implementation' (my translation, Christensen et al. 2010:111). The premise is 'administrative implementation' of politically-set goals, based on a top–down approach which goes counter to the sense of local ownership that is so central in CB.

How goals and indicators are set and the inclination for accuracy might also reflect an audit culture with a preference for upward accountability instead of trust, complex programmes, learning and accountability towards beneficiaries. The use of indicators itself might hinder the flow of more relevant information

from the field up to the relevant decision-making boards. As will be shown later, a conventional evaluation of a programme in Sudan showed good results, whereas a participatory workshop some years later gave both a somewhat different and more relevant in-depth understanding of both results and challenges. Thus, it might be that learning, and hence necessary adjustment of programmes, fails to occur because the most relevant information is not asked for, or does not fit into the reporting system, and thus does not become visible. As we will see later, CB projects might help building streamlined organizations, but it might also be that something gets lost by the NPM influence. It is striking that few of the evaluation reports examined in this case study have included beneficiaries. Does this mean that public management simply does not ask about the impact on beneficiaries?

Likewise, how are the beneficiaries' interests and needs heard when the objectives of the projects are set? '[A]id beneficiaries have limited influence of how results are defined in most development programs' (Vähämäki et al. 2011:9). According to NPM, political goals are to be based on the interests of the population. Normally politicians' goals are based on the needs of their domestic constituencies. For the aid sector, the needs of vulnerable populations in poorer countries are what should be guiding the policies and priorities.

5) Lack of autonomy and local ownership

The final point of criticism here is that NPM is a hybrid with various elements, often pulling in different directions. One tries to achieve autonomy for the lower parts in the system and more control at the same time (Christensen et al. 2007:99). Management through goals, and not management through detailed descriptions of how tasks should be performed, should secure increased autonomy. However, RBM has led to increased control, which goes against increased autonomy. This is one of the inconsistencies in NPM (Christensen et al. 2007:102–103), and it seems to affect how the CB concept is conceptualized and practised.

As will be apparent in Chapter 7, project coordinators and Organizational Development experts in the Red Cross highlight the importance of autonomy and local ownership. Implementing NSs are 'in the driving seat', and the importance of not forcing 'our' solutions on implementing NSs is consequently highlighted. Without autonomy and local ownership, fundamental sustainability cannot be achieved. Sustainability is the key for Organizational Development. At the same time control, short-term results and financially sound management are preconditions for support and seen as preconditions for confidence among funding partners, and thereby for sustainability for the local organization. Hence, both autonomy and control are perceived as necessary for success and achieving long-term development goals. That is a dilemma. In the ensuing chapters, we will see how this dilemma manifests itself in reports as well as in practice.

To transform development issues into logframe models with a logical chain reflects an *instrumental view* of complex processes (Mosse 2005:2–3). This instrumental view can act as an explanation and summary of the challenges. An alternative perspective on organizations is the *cultural view* that problematizes rationality and emphasizes the traditions, cultures and informal elements (Christensen et al. 2010:23 and 52).

3.1.3 A need for alternative approaches?

Critics of the current practice of Results Management recommend greater use of Participatory Approaches, emphasizing qualitative approaches, storytelling, observation, reflections on 'whose theory?', appreciative inquiry and focus on learning aspects (see Chambers 2008, Mikkelsen 2005, Ortiz and Taylor 2009).

Mikkelsen (2005) focuses on flexibility and participation, as opposed to stringent logframes and detailed planning. Logframes are, she argues '(…) based on the assumption that, inadequate planning is a persistent fundamental problem in international development aid' (2005:38). Furthermore '[d]etailed planning (…) has tended to counteract flexibility and people's participation' (ibid.:35).

‘Logframes’, Chambers concurs, ‘(…) stifle creativity’ (Chambers 2008:182). As we will see later, the two different approaches, conventional RBM and PA, influence motivation and energy in different ways. As will be demonstrated, logframes tend to drain energy, and harmonization of indicators risks having the side effect that motivation is lost. By contrast, an alternative participatory workshop, without logframes and with only limited resources spent on written reporting, gave new energy and motivation for improvements.

The linear focus of logical framework models ‘causes organizations to overlook the complexity’ (Ortiz and Taylor 2009:30) as well as leading the Results Management frameworks to be modelled on the same, false premises (Ortiz and Taylor 2009:31). Since organizations are complex and many intangible elements influence the processes, Ortiz and Taylor claim that we will never have the full overview of the system, or of how cause and effects are related. ‘Small “butterfly” actions may have a major impact and big ones may have very little impact’ (Eyben, et al. 2008:203–204 in Ortiz and Taylor 2009:27)

As a result, valuable resources are used for tracking outputs – instead of discussions of the complex processes, learning and relevant adjustments. The best we can do is constantly try to understand what is happening, which means a greater focus on the learning aspect. The more complex the project, the more relevant are Participatory Approaches (Chambers 2008). The question is *how* this can be done in practice.

3.2 Participatory Approaches (PA)

As a reaction to the ‘technocratic’ approaches and top–down and centre–outward approaches, Participatory Approaches (PA) have evolved and spread (Mikkelsen 2005, Chambers 1995, Chambers 2008, Ortiz and Taylor 2009, White 2009). PA tries to address deficits in current accountability structure:

> Participatory approaches originate from a political perspective which claims to empower the excluded and to ensure that the last are put first (...) Participatory approaches aim to ensure that the 'voices of the poor' are heard across development's organizations. (Green 2009: 407)

There are three main approaches within the PA family: rapid rural appraisal (RRA), participatory learning and action (PLA) and participatory rural appraisal (PRA) (Chambers 2008:85). I will refer to all three approaches as 'PA'.

To get an idea of how this approach can replace or complement the more conventional approaches we need to examine the differences between what Chambers calls 'contrasting paradigms' (Chambers 2008:173):

Paradigms:	**Conventional**	**Participatory**
Planning	Top–down Centralized	Bottom–up Decentralized
Priority given to	Plans Procedures	People Processes
Methods	Standardized Universal Questionnaires Randomized control trials Logframes	Flexible Contextual Participatory
Causality	Linear Controllable Predictable	Non-linear Uncontrollable Unpredictable
Rigour and quality	Precision Measurement Statistical analysis	Fitness Judgement Triangulation

Table 1: Characteristics of the two paradigms: Conventional and Participatory approaches (based on Table 9.1 in Chambers 2008: 173)

Table 1 shows that the two approaches differ in important ways. The theoretical underpinnings of more PA entail a change from 'things' like the outputs from logframes, reports and infrastructure, to a focus on 'people,' referring to outputs such as relationships, processes and capabilities (Chambers 2008:172).

3.2.1 PA Operationalization

PAs explore the unexpected, build on and allow more contact with the people involved. The methods are observation, shorter semi-structured interviews, and contact with the local population, for instance through small groups who map and discuss a project plan. Reflection is a central part of the methodology (Chambers 2008:94). Data collection and processing occur at the same time through joint reflections and intense interaction. In the more conventional approaches, data collection is conducted 'locally' and in the first phase, whereas the processing often occurs at another place – in an office at headquarters and in a distant country, even by other people than those who collected the data – and this is done in a separate phase. With PA, data gathering and processing are often done simultaneously and by the same people (Chambers 2008).

Flexibility and triangulation allows for several perspectives from various sources and different angles of approaches to the same topic. Reading of previous reports and statistics can be supplemented by interviews and observations. Interviews can be done one by one, supplemented by small-group discussions. These methods and approaches combine to create greater rigor, it is argued (Chambers 2008), while validity is ensured by coming closer to true statements from participants and stakeholders. Often in quantitative surveys, people may answer a question although they do not fully understand the content. This leads to 'findings' that are not valid. Reliability is ensured by joint discussions, reflections and also by using several methods.

In order to emphasize and take into account the fact that perspectives often depend on one's background, position and viewpoint, as well as to question underlying assumptions, Chambers asks 'whose problems?', 'whose realities?' and 'whose logic?' (Chambers 2008:148). NPM and logframes build on the assumption of cause–effect links, and survey content frequently has an academic bias (Chambers 2008). Often there is a lack of assessments or explicit uncertainty

linked to these underlying assumptions. In order to increase understanding and reduce the risk of errors, more attention should be paid to the underlying assumptions of the linkages between causes and effects (Mayne 2008, Reeler 2007, White 2009).

Asking 'whose theory?' might show that there are differing perspectives on how things work. Such questioning includes asking how the local people perceive the project, understanding context and anticipating heterogeneity, careful selection of beneficiaries and definition of target groups, exploration of complementarities, use of counterfactuals (control group, or before and after) to verify impact, and the use of mixed methods (White 2009). Also, in order to dig deep into the 'why', observations over time are necessary, as well as involving actors who represent various viewpoints and hold different positions in a society. It is essential to understand the processes that reinforce or obstruct change. Which factors in a context contributes to change, and which factors do not? The important thing is to understand the internal dynamics of the processes as far as is possible.

3.2.2 PA as both a means and an end

Apart from being a more cost-efficient method (Chambers 2008:15) and having instrumental value, PA also has an immanent value. As its methods are democratic, bottom–up and flexible, the methods themselves have the potential to contribute to empowerment and local ownership.

As a bottom–up approach, PA releases people's creativity and energy, as well as enhancing learning (Chambers 2008:176). At the core of Chambers' theory is also the embracing of complexity, diversity, respect and a profound belief in local capacities. Participatory methodologies make use of people's own capacities and help to release potential. Participation can also change power relations, as with participation follows a new accountability. In this way participatory methodology is not only about ways of inquiring, but is also 'an

entry point and means to transform power and relationships (…) [and] seminal points of entry for good change' (Chambers 2008:189) – and positive changes are what results are all about.

According to some scholars (see Mikkelsen 2005, Knutsen and Moses 2007), methodological choice can influence the results. Strengths are not necessarily taken as 'something out there', something static or objective, but can be reinforced through inquires. We create our own world by what we anticipate (Mikkelsen 2005:245–248). By focusing on strengths, strengths can be created.

'[C]onstructivists recognize that people may look at the same thing and perceive it differently' (Knutsen and Moses 2007:11). PA and appreciative inquiry resonate with this. Constructivists prefer interpretative methods where narratives play an important role (Knutsen and Moses 2007:16–17).

3.2.3 PA challenges and criticisms

It is also important to examine the PA aim of bringing in the voices of the marginalized and the vulnerable. In this way, local needs and priorities are be ensured, and their evaluation of any intervention is to be heard. Beneficiary participation is expected – but there are reasons for caution here.

Maia Green (2009) raises an interesting criticism of PA. First, participatory knowledge is opposed to expert knowledge, but the former cannot find its way to project documents without the facilitation of 'experts' (Green 2009:407). Secondly, participatory or local knowledge is categorized as more morally valid than other knowledge, as beyond criticism. 'Evaluations of participatory knowledge accept this ring fencing of locally produced knowledge, assessing the process of knowledge production, not the quality of knowledge produced, which in being local is morally unassailable, literally beyond criticism', states Green (2009:408). The process becomes more important than the quality of the information.

Third, PAs are criticized, both by Mosse (2005) and Green (2009), for being empty rhetoric because the poorer are not always represented and hence 'participation' has little practical implications, they claim. Moreover, according to Mosse, the approach 'does not reverse or modify development's hegemony so much as provide more effective instruments with which to extend technocratic control or advance external interests and agendas (...)' (2005:4). Participatory methods are embraced by the established system, and the risk is that little is changed apart from the rhetoric and packaging/wrapping. If that is the case, it could mean achieving the same weak information basis as with the conventional methods, while also maintaining basically unequal relationships. According to Green, ensuring the voices of the poor is no longer the primary objective of the approach:

> Participatory methods and knowledge they generate are no longer the preserve of populist movement which claimed to speak with or through the 'voices of the poor'. Participation is institutionalized across the majority of what are perceived to be credible non-governmental organizations (…) (Green 2009:404).

Fourth, and linked to the second point, is that communities can be presented as defined entities without wider links, and hence politics becomes insignificant. (Green 2009:408). Chambers mentions some challenges related to representation, but does not problematize local power structures or the inherent power structure in the link between the donor on one side and the receiver and implementer on the other side. The funding part of the link still has the power to say no to projects, to stop the funding and to impose conditions.

As a fifth point, I will add that PA also risks being 'conventional' and taught in a top–down manner, with use of manuals which in reality standardize procedures instead of keeping flexibility. The quest for aggregation has a tendency to create standardization. Limited time schedules do the same. The reason is obvious: 'The less standardized it is, the harder the outcomes are to analyze', states Chambers (2008:129), but if we fall for the temptation to standardize then we lose the

desired empowerment and contact with local realities and priorities (Chambers 2008:128–129).

A further point regarding dilemmas and challenges is the issue of costs. Facilitating PA, being flexible, using several methods and allowing time for reflection might give an impression of a costly and resource-demanding method. Although simultaneous data gathering and processing might save time, and although immanent empowerment and local ownership might raise the cost-effectiveness of the development project, it might not be perceived this way by donors responsible for allocating budgets. The number of days a project coordinator from a donor is spending on a participatory process 'in field', being away from his or her office at headquarters might be perceived as adding costs, not reducing it. If the evaluation makes use of external evaluators, the cost of the evaluation will increase by several days 'in the field'. As we will see later, one of the Red Cross evaluations was restricted and sufficient time 'in the field' not possible due to cost and time restraints, and Norad displays scepticism towards using funds for personnel 'in field'.

Lastly, it might be that the criticism of NPM and the need for an alternative approach is exaggerated. PAs are based on a premise that NPM is a one-way management approach. However, as we will see, people do pick and choose, interpret and adjust (Mosse 2005).

3.3 Concluding remarks on theoretical frameworks

New Public Management, with RBM, and PA can be regarded as two separate ideologies with fundamentally different values. The purposes of the methodologies are different, and that can create a dilemma. As we will see later, some of my respondents consider indicators with 'objective' content to be both necessary and meaningful. The current RBM system is needed for following up projects, documenting history and for reporting progress.

One question must be asked: do we grasp the most relevant information by recording the 'objective' facts? Does use of naturalist methodologies give the information that is most valuable for achieving development goals? If we do not use objective methods and comparable indicators, if 'anything counts' and if what is perceived as relevant varies not only from person to person but also from one time to another – then is it possible to report anything meaningful regarding the progress of a project?

CB is based on the same ideas and values as PA: empowerment, local ownership, local capacities, people, processes and learning. I would even claim that PA is quite widely used in the Red Cross partly because it reflects the organization's deeply rooted values. The organization's perspective is that Capacity Development can never be achieved without confidence and autonomy on the part of the beneficiaries. At the same time, there is a need for control, which risks undermining that confidence. That is a dilemma. PA is an alternative, but might have an important weakness in not being able to document progress objectively – at least not in a legitimate way, as will be discussed in Chapter 6. In order to be a part of the aid system, to be deemed accountable and trustworthy, NGOs need to make use of the NPM and RBM systems. NGOs are expected to demonstrate progress, to show objective results, to follow a certain reporting standard. And so, PA might prove not to be a feasible alternative after all.

In view of the criticisms of RBM, we may ask: has control of activities become the most relevant focus – even more important than actual development practice? The need for control, audits and being accountable to Norwegian taxpayers might direct the focus away from development praxis.

The choice of NPM and RBM concepts is based on Norad's Results Management requirements. As to PA, my choice is based on the fact that its ideas have gained ground, in general and within the Red Cross. Especially relevant is the use of PA as a methodological framework for assessing complex development processes such as CB and Organizational Development. The higher the complexity, the less

relevant are data accuracy and pre-determined categories, Chambers claims (2008:19). ‘[T]he more complex the issues and causality, the harder they are to unravel and understand through the crude standardized template of a questionnaire and correlations’ (ibid.:21).

I would hold that both approaches are used to some degree and they are both relevant, but for different reasons. Both approaches contribute to a certain extent to fulfil expectations and requirements, but both also have their shortcomings.

Being torn between two such fundamentally opposed logics is part of the daily life of development workers, also in the Red Cross. The organization and the project coordinators must act as intermediaries between funders and implementers, and between two inquiry approaches. They have to negotiate, balance and find middle paths, for relying on only one of the approaches will not fulfil all expectations and meet all needs.

4. METHODOLOGY

The case chosen for study is Capacity Building (CB) within the Red Cross, with a particular focus on Financial Development (FD) and the Burundi Red Cross. Burundi is among the poorest countries in the world. After the devastating civil war which ended in 2006, the Burundi Red Cross (BRC) set about rebuilding and re-establishing itself. This was a National Society with a broken back at that time. Both during and after the conflict, there was a huge need to rebuild and to support vulnerable people throughout the country. From 2006 onwards, the BRC has both taken part in broad CB programmes of the international Red Cross Movement and in the FD programme of the Norwegian Red Cross (IFRC 2011A, Norwegian Red Cross 2012a, Bensky 2011). This case and four evaluation reports concerning the BRC will be a part of the present case study.

In addition to Burundi, there will be examples from Sudan, Pakistan and Madagascar, as my respondents have used their own experiences when exemplifying issues. I will also draw on my own experience from monitoring and evaluation from Lesotho, Russia and Vietnam.

4.1 Case study as method

Case studies are linked to historians' methods of using reputable sources, systematic doubt, referencing and processing data (Knutsen and Moses 2007:116–125). 'Case studies are generally strong precisely where statistical methods and formal models are weak' (George and Bennett 2005:19). The case study presented here is specific, and cannot be generalized to other cases. However, it might create insights of broader value, helping to explain the perceived lack of results of aid and how RBM influences CB.

4.2 Case selection

A case does not present itself as a neat entity with clearly defined borders. My interest was in RBM and CB. The latter encompasses a range of programmes or is often part of other programmes, so for in-depth information, one obvious choice was an FD programme that the Norwegian Red Cross has supported in several African countries for years. A further criterion for case selection was that there should be material available. The BRC became the natural choice, as there were several evaluation reports as well as several staff persons with experience from the program and BRC.

Researchers have expressed scepticism towards RBM. From politicians and public opinion, however, the apparent impression is that there is too little focus on RBM. I was in a position to analyse the situation based on empirical facts within my own organization, the Red Cross. I had unique access to data, from written reports, meetings and interviews with colleagues. I could also use my own experiences to dig deeper from where I stood, develop questions based on observations I had made and my own experiences from evaluation and monitoring missions.

4.3 Remarks on case selection and methods

Validity is also relevant for qualitative studies. It concerns the extent to which the study can be backed by other studies (Silverman 2001:225) – if the study gives a true reflection of the case. Since the 'truth' in a constructivist understanding lies in the hearts and mind of the observers, they should be open and honest about who they are, their sympathies and antipathies and contextual influences (Knutsen and Moses 2007:12). For this reason I have already in the introduction mentioned my basic preferences for measuring, statistics and reporting. However, from reading the academic literature, discussions with

colleagues and my own experience, I gradually became sceptical to a purely naturalistic use of method.

The approach applied here, with in-depth interviews and open-ended questions, has some shortcomings. An ethnographic study would probably have given both a richer and a truer picture of for instance the case of the FD programme in Burundi. A survey among Norwegian NGOs would have given a more representative picture of how CB is understood and operationalized today.

4.4 On doing research in one's own organization

There is a risk in doing research in one's own organization: 'Handling interpretations or outcomes which would be perceived negatively by the organization is a particularly sensitive issue' (Coghlan and Brannick 2001:53). The considerations of three possibly differing interests have to be balanced: my organization, my career, and contribution to an overall debate on RBM and CB. Balancing these interests is a delicate task.

One advantage of being an insider is the knowledge of people, jargon, taboos, and how the organization works, so that one can see beyond the window-dressing. There are also disadvantages: being close to the data might lead to wrong preconceptions because one thinks one knows the answers. Closeness to data might also lead to superficial knowledge, through denial of deeper access due to crossing ties. Publication is a tricky issue, and the role might be confusing both during the data collection process and after publishing, when an insider is playing the role of an outsider (Coghlan and Brannick 2001:53).

Although being situated within the Red Cross has given me unique access to data, my own work has been in the Communication Department: it is the International Department that runs all aid projects. This means that I have not worked with the colleagues interviewed here on a regular basis, and I have not myself participated in CB programmes. That also means that I have not been able

to do an observational study; moreover, a planned visit to one of the CB projects turned out not to be feasible. Thus I have probably missed some relevant information and perspectives, but perhaps I have also been able to ask questions with fewer initial assumptions than if I had been working closer to the projects.

The obvious methodological difficulty here is that I may have been too sympathetic to my colleagues. During my interviews and analysis, I worried about being too critical towards their work, and also being not critical enough. I hope that the end result is something in-between. Closeness to data and colleagues has also made me want not to bother colleagues by taking up too much of their time for interviews. On the other hand, the amount of data material from interviews proved to be almost too comprehensive to deal with.

4.5 Triangulation

To avoid misinterpretations or skewed perspectives, the researcher may apply different methods or theories from different disciplines. This is called triangulation. The main methods I employed have been interviews, participation in internal meetings and external seminars, and critical reading of documents.

4.6 Interviews

It was essential for me to understand how RBM worked, and why RBM was productive or counterproductive within the field of CB. I wanted to go in depth and understand the on-the-ground implications, choices and prioritizations and the reasons behind them. This I found to be much more enlightening than, for instance, interviewing a representative sample of NGOs to find out what percentage considered RBM to be counterproductive. I chose to interview Red Cross staff, consultants and researchers on aid and RBM, as well as one Norad representative, in order to tap into the experience and perceptions as well as the

'experts' perspectives on the concepts in question (see Appendix 1 for list of informants).

The interviews were based on interview guides. From the very beginning, they came to proceed more like conversations with many interesting discussions. I used open-ended questions, asking for examples and clarifications along the way. My respondents' interests and perception of challenges often guided the conversations, and I let new information from interviews lead to somewhat revised questions for ensuing interviews.

In terms of methodology, my open-ended questions are something in between naturalist and constructivist methodology. According to Wilhite, open-ended questions can be located in the middle of a continuum, with quantitative surveys with structured questions and multiple-choice answers (a naturalist method) at one end, and phenomenology and other constructivist methods at the other end.[2]

I told my informants about the purpose of the interview and their right to remain anonymous. Most had no desire for anonymity, but a few from the Red Cross did. As it would have been a challenge to hide the identity of only a few, I have made all Red Cross informants anonymous, but put most weight on keeping anonymous those who requested it.

It felt rather risky to interview and analyse what my own colleagues had said or written. And here I must underline that any misinterpretation or incorrect translations are my responsibility. The consent the informants have given me does not include my interpretation and the context in which I have placed their responses (see Thagaard 2003:128).

Whatever the method and data material, there are always some aspects that need to be addressed and critically reflected upon. One aspect is looking for data that confirm the reseacher's assumptions (Booth et al. 2008:84). Some of my initial

[2] Lecture by H. Wilhite, 24 August 2010

assumptions were quite strong – for instance, that CB projects would not find their way to the priority list of NGOs and Norad as they are so difficult to measure. That led to my assumption of distortion. Another firm assumption was that RBM is counterproductive. Already from the first interview, I met resistance to those assumptions, especially the one concerning distortion. However, through most of the interviews I continued asking the question, and through document reviews, looking for signs that could confirm my assumptions. In fact, my assumptions were not fully confirmed. It is precisely my initial eagerness to prove the assumptions right that makes me quite confident when I later in this paper disconfirm some of them.

I analysed the interviews in three ways. First, I went through all interviews and searched for statements that confirmed or disconfirmed the theory or criticism thereof. Second, I made lists summarizing the main points on the two subjects: 1) CB achievements and challenges, 2) RBM pros and cons. Third, I looked for informants' own explanations for RBM and CB practice.

One weakness of the interviews is that I spoke mainly with Red Cross staff based in Norway. Some had quite short experience from the field, most had not been involved in the daily activities and result reporting 'on the ground', and some expressed limited knowledge of the particular case I was interested in, FD and/or CB of the Burundi Red Cross. Staff-members work with different countries, different contexts and different thematic areas. All this made it difficult to compare their impressions of the same case. Sometimes I have included staff experiences although they do not concern Burundi or FD, as with examples from Pakistan and Sudan. That, however, means I have only one source for each such case. Despite this weakness, I found it relevant to use the staff perspectives and input from their own experiences to shed light on the general challenges.

4.7 Document analysis and literature review

Both the content of evaluation reports and how they are written have been of interest to me (Thagaard 2003:109). Methodological preferences influence the choice of approach and presentation. Therefore it was relevant to analyse how the writers have understood their evaluation task and which methodological tradition their choices and style reflect (ibid.:110). Some expressions from the evaluation reports might indicate the evaluators' viewpoints. The evaluations and the reports used here are listed in Appendix 2.

I have not validated the interpretations of the texts with the evaluators. That might be a weakness. It might also be seen as an ethical violation, as I thereby ascribe to the evaluator a viewpoint that person might not actually have (Thagaard 2003:128). For most of the documents I use, the writers have not been asked to participate through their text, as the reports are Red Cross property and were provided by the Red Cross or the reports are publicly available online.

I have also used studies, evaluations and research from sources not related to Red Cross to shed light on challenges and achievements of RBM and CB and the relation between the two concepts. Examples of such literature is Riddell (2001) on aid project results, Hulme (2007) and Vähämäki et al (2011) on RBM and various Norad reports on CB and/or RBM.

4.8 Seminars and meetings

I have attended seminars, dissemination of evaluations and Red Cross internal meetings in order to get an idea of the most relevant topics and challenges that are on the agenda. Seminars and meetings were selected on the basis of their relevance for RBM, CB or for evaluation issues related to NGOs. (See Appendix 3 for list.)

Regarding ethics and attendance at internal meetings, I stated my purpose in attending when given the chance to do so. In open external seminars or larger internal meetings, I have not done so. For internal meetings, I was invited by Red Cross staff. When relevant opinions and discussions from those meetings are presented, I have quoted anonymously.

4.9 Explorative approach

My main aim has been to analyse how RBM influences CB. While I had some assumptions that guided my work, I did not start out with a theory that I wanted to test. Instead, I focused on getting an overview of the field and then explored some theories. I do not claim to have an adequate overview of the relevant theory for the field under study here, and defining the borders of 'the field under study' is highly challenging when the effort is inter-disciplinarily (McNeill 1999:318).

This thesis seeks to build on insights from relevant theories in an eclectic way rather than testing one particular theory. The analysis was explorative in the sense that I started out with reading theories, doing some interviews and reading evaluations from the Red Cross and Norad. This guided me along new paths and I repeated the process in an iterative way. In the middle phases of the analysis, I chose the theories that could best describe what I had found so far.

In this thesis, theories are used primarily to understand how result reporting and evaluations are actually conducted and to assess, based on empirical material, how relevant the various academic criticisms of the respective approaches are. RBM was an obvious choice, although it is in fact more of a strategy (Hulme 2007) than a theory. However, it is rooted in New Public Management (NPM) theory. NPM and naturalistic philosophy will be used as explanatory factors.

CB is not only about end results, but also about the process of getting there – ownership, participation etc. This is one reason why RBM falls short of being a sufficient tool for the Red Cross

5. UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS AND MULTIPLE REQUIREMENTS

Do unrealistic ambitions and goals set Capacity Building up for failure?

RBM and project planning starts with defining clear objectives. The objectives and indicators should be SMART (see Chapter 3) – where the 'A' stands for 'Achievable'. The question then becomes: are the desired goals achievable?

The prevailing impression that aid does not deliver results is fuelled by the plethora of complex goals and objectives. Development policy and practice is packed with good intentions, and international guidelines and all projects are expected to follow these guidelines and fulfil the expectations. Also the term 'results' is understood in different ways by different actors. At the global or national level, those in charge of setting the overarching goals often opt for goals that do not match the level where aid practitioners actually work or have reasonable influence. All national societies (NSs) that implement projects, like the Burundi Red Cross, have many partners funding their programmes and projects, adding to the plethora of goals.

Expectations set the measure of success. Consequently, the higher the bar is set, the higher is the likelihood of failure. As I seek to demonstrate, development policy and practice are brimming with overly ambitious goals and multiple international requirements. Expectations about aid are often so unrealistic that it is hardly surprise that aid does not always work. In addition, challenges in aggregating results make it problematic to display results.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, I explore the gap in levels between development policy goals and the actual results of CB projects in the Norwegian Red Cross. I will compare overarching goals with project goals, and discuss whether the impression of a lack of results might depend on which level we are looking at and the challenges of aggregation. Then, I discuss how the plethora of

donor requirements to which projects must conform contributes to setting the bar even higher.

I argue that there are gaps related to how the term ‘results’ is understood, gaps related to objective levels and gaps created based on too many requirements. These gaps, I suggest, can explain the low trust in the ability of aid to deliver and the growing demand for results reporting. The greater focus on results is based on the underlying assumption that the aid sector is not efficient. What is perceived as lack of efficiency may instead be the lack of capacity to fulfil the overall goals and the numerous accompanying requirements.

Next, I note that some aid projects are based on what interests Norway as a country has regarding foreign relations and not only on achieving development goals for those most in need.

5.1 The level-gap

The main task of Norwegian development policy is to help countries and people to get control of their own development and their own lives and to fight poverty (White Paper 2009 no 13). These expectations and desires shaped the main goal of CB in the Norwegian Red Cross’ cooperation agreement with Norad for the period 2009–2011. ‘The overall goal of the cooperation agreement is to – through strengthening the capacity of NSs – respond to humanitarian challenges, and increase the resilience of vulnerable communities.’ (Norwegian Red Cross 2012a:4).

However, there seems to be a huge gap between the ambitions of the Norwegian government, and the results from development projects. For instance, the main goal of the FD project funded and managed by the Norwegian Red Cross was to establish a financial management system that would enable NSs to get their audit reports approved (Bensky 2011:5). Evidently, there are great many steps between fighting poverty and improved Finance Management. This helps to illustrate

what I call the 'level-gap' and indicates that achieving overall development policy goals will take time and require many steps.

The level-gap between policy and project goals becomes also evident in the report of the Norwegian Red Cross to Norad for the period 2009–2011. These are some of the tangible results reported in Organizational Development (Norwegian Red Cross 2012a):

- South Sudan: 'a total of 8 state branches manage their monthly financial reporting through SAGE'[3]
- Somalia: 'all branches in Puntland (three) and Somaliland (six) now use standardized reporting templates' (Norwegian Red Cross 2012a:12–14)
- Palestine and Lebanon : significant growth in number of beneficiaries

The three results above address different levels. An increase in reach (number of beneficiaries) in Lebanon and Palestine may be a relevant indicator of positive development towards helping people to get control of their own lives. The results from South Sudan and Somalia relate to FD projects. If these results are compared to overall policy objectives, it is not difficult to understand why politicians and the media question the results of Norwegian development policy. There is a significant gap in levels, and many steps to go between using standardized reporting templates and, for instance, the overall goal of helping countries and people to get control of their own development and lives and fighting poverty (White Paper 2009 no 13).

This is not to say that FD is irrelevant in achieving development goals for a country. As one of my informants noted:

> *[Financial development can] strengthen a National Society's ability and capacity to become an important actor, a more trustworthy actor. Receiving funds has to do with trustworthiness. If partners perceive them*

[3] SAGE is an accounting software system

> *as a trustworthy actor, then they will have more partners, more projects, important programmes and perform better*. (Red Cross informant 2)

Despite a plausible link between audits and development goals, audits and similar achievements as main results of FD programmes are not easy to communicate to the media – avid for pictures, beneficiaries' stories or impacts on a society.

UNDP (2006) and Fukuda-Parr et al.'s (2002: 9) layered understanding of CB can help to explain why there is a gap between policy and project goals. In their views, CB takes place at three different levels:

- individual – enhancing knowledge and skills, and enabling environment for learning
- institutional – supporting, modernizing and encouraging existing institutions to grow and develop sound policies, organizational structures, effective management and methods for control
- societal – creating opportunities for the society as a whole, and developing accountable public institutions.

The Red Cross's CB projects promote change at the institutional level. However, Norwegian development policy goals are set at the societal level – hence the gap. It will probably take a long time until results can be perceived at the level of society (if at all), since many institutions and individuals would have to enhance their capacity. Thus, the question becomes: do CB projects have the potential to promote change at the societal level? If so, is it possible to show any indications of such impact?

5.1.1 The aggregation problem

Showing how project results trigger societal level changes is the holy grail of Results Management in most NGOs. This is not a coincidence, as more and more donors want NGOs to report on the impact level. 'The ultimate evaluation-

question is whether programmes contribute to the overarching aims of Norwegian development assistance, namely sustainable development and poverty reduction' (Kruse et al. 1998:33). Norad wants more impact evaluations (Norad 2009). In 2012, Norad's civil society panel (Norad 2012b) called for aggregated impacts at the national level. Politicians seem to look for results at the national levels. Aggregation becomes necessary.

In fact, some 60 to 90% of all NGOs aid projects actually achieve their immediate objectives (Riddell 2001:269–270). Looking at CB, Norad concluded in 2010, 'Norwegian aid has succeeded in building important knowledge, competence and institutions in various sectors of society' (my translation, Norad 2010:1). There are, however, practical challenges in aggregating projects results. As one respondent noted:

> *We can report on our mobile health clinics: how many patients, how many shelters etc. The hardware is easy to report on. Everything on preparedness is very challenging to report on. When it comes to issues like reduction of measles and malaria – the large programmes where we cooperate with WHO and such organizations – then WHO report on reduction in child mortality. They are able to report on an overall level, at impact level. Fewer children die. We are unable to do that. Earlier we had such overarching goals, like reduction of mortality. That does not make sense at all*! (Red Cross informant 1).

After the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) many projects were given national-level goals. Nevertheless, it is unrealistic to assume that a single project will have an impact on national statistics. For instance, the Norwegian Red Cross has supported 4,000 to 8,000 highly vulnerable children per month for the past 14 years in northwest Russia. Given the size of the Russian population, it is unlikely that this project alone will reduce child vulnerability at the national level. The Norad representative I interviewed, Ivar Evensmo, doubts the possibilities of aggregation:

> *If you start at the grassroots level with a million activities, and then aggregate to next level – say meso-level – and then a national macro-level, how can all the project activities influence the national statistics? I don't believe that we can go about in that way.* (Ivar Evensmo, Norad representative)

Aggregating project results may also be inconsistent with the requirement for projects to be contextualized and based on needs – and this is even more so for Capacity Building projects. As the Red Cross puts it in their report to Norad on 16 programmes conducted between 2009 and 2011:

> To report on achievements in 16 different programmes in four distinct regions as well as results achieved in the global programmes is a challenging task. Capturing common trends and comparing the achievements across the regions is demanding as each National Society has its own strategic plan and priorities, reflecting and responding to country-specific contexts and need. NorCross firmly believes that its support to national societies has to be based on the priorities and plans set out by the Society themselves. Although this makes it difficult to convey a comprehensive picture of results across regions, it does ensure the relevance of the programmes. (NorCross Norad report 2012:4).

The same applies to the FD Programme. What is relevant intervention depends on the situation in each context. Then results will also differ. How to aggregate 'satisfactory audit reports' and 'increased number of volunteers' into an overall impact on CB?

The aggregation challenge starts already from the phase of funding application. For the period 2013–2016, the Red Cross has built up the application to Norad in thematic areas. To merge goals from different NSs, in different context, on various developmental level and different priorities proved somewhat challenging. Some felt that in lifting context-specific goals to common thematic areas, one loses sight of what the real goals are. The thematic areas are followed by a thematically-oriented logframe which one of my respondents describes as operating at an intermediate level with limited relevance:

> *This intermediary level becomes a lowest common denominator of what we carry out abroad, because the programmes are in reality very different in the different countries. In order to present an application to Norad which presents what we do as something holistic and coherent, in four clear thematic areas and similarly independently of country, we have to make some adjustments. It is a model of 'new way of packaging' more than anything else, which some greatly believe in. Others, with field experience and focus on what is happening in the field, find it difficult to recognize what we do abroad in this intermediate level.* (Red Cross informant 9)

If the project starts with an application that the country responsible does not fully recognize, it is likely to cause challenges for the follow-up phase and reporting. On the other hand, other respondents saw it as necessary to develop common goals with common indicators in order to steer the organization in the same direction. Thematic indicators and aggregation are considered necessary to display the overall results. '*This will give a more holistic picture, not only programme-by-programme results'* (Red Cross informant 11).

It remains to be seen if the new approach will display aggregated results. Up until now, the level-gap between development policy goals and projects results, coupled with the aggregation problem, may have contributed to the overall perception that aid does not work. By promising more than it can deliver, the aid industry has just been setting itself up for failure. NGOs and donors are both responsible for setting the bar high. As one respondent noted:

> *We are very ambitious on behalf of our partner National societies. It is two-sided. We very much want them to become proficient and strong. The other issue is that we have to report results back. We are very ambitious when we write our applications to back-donors, because we need the*

> *funding, and then we add many good arguments. (…)* (Red Cross informant 1)

5.1.2 Multiple agendas

> *Sometimes MFA wants to define what we shall do, but we cannot impose on our local partners what to do. We have to try to match what the MFA wants and what the local partner needs. (…) I don't experience a huge contradiction. It is up to us to explain. Our role is to facilitate*. (Red Cross informant 4)

According to former Norad director, Poul Engberg-Pedersen, aid is becoming more politicized, which means ' there is a willingness from the Norwegian side to take politics and Norwegian interests more seriously' in aid politics (my translation, Bistandsaktuelt 2010). The Red Cross has experienced situations where the MFA is asking Red Cross to accept funds for a certain country in order to contribute to Norway's relationship with that country.

A committee was appointed in 2005 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) with the mandate to evaluate the NGOs as a channel in the aid cooperation (Rattsø 2006). The report points to relevant challenges when it comes to who and what set the development agenda and priorities: 'Humanitarian aid must be prioritized based on needs, not on media potential or foreign policy' (Rattsø 2006:38). The report stated that donor countries have a tendency to prioritize what is important in their domestic public opinion (ibid.:21). These two motives create dilemma and might contribute to both apparent and actual weaker results.

5.2 Numerous and partly inconsistent requirements

CB projects must satisfy many cross-cutting issues and requirements. First, there are the DAC criteria of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and

sustainability (OECD undated, a). There is the Paris Declaration to consider, which focuses on ownership, alignment, harmonization, results and mutual accountability (OECD undated, b). In addition, there are cross-cutting issues such as gender sensitivity.

It should come as no surprise that a single programme does not fulfil all these expectations and requirements at once. Indeed, if each project must satisfy all of them to be considered successful, then no project will ever deliver 'good enough' results. Evidently, some of these requirements involve different levels and may build on each other. However, there are also contradictory criteria. For instance, local ownership, self-reliance and contextualization, on one hand: more control, common criteria and harmonization, on the other hand.

It is challenging to evaluate results when the criteria for success are so broad and blurred. Which criterion for achievement should be prioritized for assessment? As noted by Rattsø (2006:36), a significant problem in carrying out evaluations is that development policy has too many goals and too many criteria.

One dilemma is to choose between prioritizing least-developed countries on one hand, and short-term results on the other. To achieve good results in a relatively short period, it is reasonable to choose countries and partners that have a potential to build on. This implies choosing countries and NSs with a certain standard. On another hand, these are not likely to be the most vulnerable and needy communities. This is a dilemma to which we return in Chapter 7 when discussing the possibilities and challenges of securing local ownership in weak or emergency exposed areas.

NGOs have an obligation to work for the most vulnerable. The MFA and Norad expect the organizations to work with the poorest and most vulnerable societies (Portela 2012). This creates a dilemma:

> *On one hand you're asked to work in those countries. You'd like to work in those areas because that's where people have the most need, but at the*

> *same time they are the most risky.* (Save the Children representative in Portela 2012:89)

The perception is that the MFA and Norad are not willing to share the risk with the NGO:

> *If the MFA asks us to do work in a country that is among the top ten most corrupt countries in the world, then, they need to understand that both of us have to take that risk (…) We have not yet managed to come to that point that the MFA and Norad will share the risk with us.* (Save the Children representative, in Portela 2012:89)

5.3 'The buzzword challenge'

Development history is crammed with new ideas and good intentions: empowerment, good governance and human rights based approaches to name but a few. The challenges are often about operationalization: to turn these nice concepts - or 'buzzwords' - in to hard reality lessening the burdens for vulnerable and marginalized people (Banik 2010:23). The same challenge goes for 'Capacity Building' and 'strengthening civil society'. Are we by those two expressions talking about the same things? What do we want to achieve by strengthening civil society? (Ivar Evensmo/Norad representative, Banik 2010). What do we mean by 'Capacity Building' or 'Organizational Development'?

> *Organizational development is a terrible word. We should rather step down one level and call it training of volunteers in advocacy, resource mobilization or finance development (…)* (Red Cross informant 4)

Red Cross informants see the objectives of strengthening civil societies, both to be democratization and improved service delivery. Yet those two goals might not be very compatible. Moreover, there are ongoing internal discussions and some confusion on how to understand the concept of Capacity Building. If you do not

know where you are going, any road will get you there. My point here is that if the objectives are unclear, it will be difficult to assess the results.

5.4 Interpretation of the term 'results' differ

The phrase 'results in aid' has various interpretations. Results can be seen at a global and aggregate level, or results can be seen at national, organizational or project level. I have argued that it is a challenge that both on a national level and at project level, the term 'results' is used.

In addition to a gap in levels between what results a project can deliver and global results, there is a level-gap between activity and impact level within each a project. As presented in Chapter 3, the intention with RBM was to move beyond reporting on activity and output level, to report on outcome level. However, reporting on this level still leads to stakeholders asking for prove of results. Norad are not satisfied with current knowledge of effects of Norwegian aid and ask for more impact analysis – long-term and aggregated results (Norad 2009:15-16). Norad's increased focus on impacts reflects a trend generally and for Capacity Building in particular: 'M&E should be able to measure how CD contributes to wider development processes (...)' (Ortiz and Taylor 2009:9). My data indicate that the term 'results' is used for activity, output, outcome and impact level.

Secondly, the concept 'aid' encompasses a range of approaches, channels and goals which makes it challenging to conclude results of aid on an overall level. The approaches vary from emergency aid to investments. The channels vary from NGOs like the Red Cross, the UN, state-to-state aid to Norfund and microfinance institutions. The aid objectives vary from increased school enrolment to emission reductions. In addition, Norwegian aid covers more than 120 recipient countries. No wonder it is challenging to sum up in a single conclusion whether aid works or not.

By now we can, however, sum up that we have two types of level-gaps: one related to scale of the ambitions (global versus projects) and one related to stages in a project implementation (activity versus impact level). When it comes to 'results', conclusions whether goals are achieved and results are delivered will depend on which level one choose to focus on.

5.5 Consequences of the gaps

The gaps described above must lead to some consequences. Among these are reduced trust in aid and a greater demand for result reporting. The Norwegian people's confidence in aid is diminishing, and the reason is probably that development results seem to be weak.

> Slightly under half of the surveyed persons believe that aid gives fairly good or very good results. This is a definite decrease from the surveys in 2010 and 2006 (…) The respondents are particularly negative towards the long-term development assistance (my translation, SSB 2013).

The gap between politicians' development goals and the programme goals of NGOs is one likely source of the impression of the lack of results in aid. What I have showed is that this is a gap in levels and not necessarily an actual absence of results. The consequences of this gap and the subsequent impression of lack of results might have contributed to the increased call for RBM systems from the 1990s. It had led not only to increased calls for Results Management, but also to a certain type of Results Management.

Lack of results in the aid sector is often understood as lack of control mechanisms or a need for improved ways of using the resources – in other words, an efficiency problem. The greater focus on results builds on the underlying assumption that the aid sector is not efficient. This might be wrong. What is perceived as lack of efficiency might actually be lack of capacity to fulfil overall goals and numerous requirements. Concerning the Norwegian health sector, Vike makes an interesting point: that challenges are perceived as lack of efficiency,

instead of too high ambitions and too many goals (Vike 2004:12). I suggest that the same can be said about the aid sector.

Overwhelmingly, NGO aid projects do achieve their immediate objectives (Riddell 2001:269–270), but still this is not necessarily captured by global or national indicators. The FD programme for Southern Africa has achieved many of its goals – for instance all NSs had financial policies in place, six had audited their financial statements and six used the new accounting system (Norwegian Red Cross 2009). A global study of Organizational Development where 15 Red Cross societies were assessed concludes that:

> At least half of all ICB [Intensive Capacity Building] participants achieved significant change in 71 percent (37 of 52) change areas assessed. (...) These findings demonstrate that, overall, ICB activities were highly effective. (Bloom and Levinger 2011:29).

Norad's civil society panel also concludes that projects tend to achieve their goals. Health, education, micro-credit and agricultural services are provided to 'significant numbers of people', however, 'for most projects we are talking of a few hundred people (sometimes fewer), not tens of thousands' (Norad 2012b:5). Civil society contributes to poverty reductions, although small, but important (Norad 2012b:16-17). Should these limited results be viewed as lack of efficiency or lack of capacity? Norad's civil society panel answer:

> It makes little sense to make civil society accountable for reducing or not being able to reduce poverty.(…) due to the limited scale of work, and the final impact depends on a number of external factors. (Norad 2012b:17).

This is not to say that increased capacity within NGOs would be sufficient to achieve the development goals. However, greater capacity in the NGO channel might contribute. To make aid alone responsible for the failure to achieve development goals is misleading. Increased financial investments, improved trade regulations, reduction of agriculture subsidies and subsequent job creations are obviously some key factors as the White Paper on coherent development policy addresses (NOU 2008: no 14). However, often aid is 'blamed' because it

is so much more challenging and painful for states to alter their trade regulations and commitments, for instance.

5.5.1 Lack of capacity also within the projects

One way to increase the capacity to carry out development projects is to hire, train and retain qualified staff.

Administration costs are controversial. Donors prefer to fund visible activities (Fukuda-Parr et al. 2002:11) and not the core structures that are the fundament for carrying out those activities and conduct necessary back office tasks. If administration costs are controversial, salaries are probably the most controversial part of it. Several reports and interviews show that retention of staff is a main impediment for CB.

> *Normally NS's salary scales are not proportionate to the job profiles, that is, the responsibilities conferred upon the staff are much higher than the remuneration. Subsequently most partners are not willing to contribute towards recruitment of well-qualified people and therefore you often see more square pegs in round holes running around. Those quality and qualified ones, when they come they don't stay longer that is one of the reasons why there is high staff mobility at all levels within the NSs.(...). In developing world, salaries are considered as a highly motivating factor. Unfortunately the Red Cross doesn't pay well compared to other established NGOs/humanitarian org. PNS[4] are interested in paying for programme activities. (…)* (Red Cross informant 7)

Already in 1998 retention of staff was an important hindrance for development:

> Northern NGOs and their counterparts must give greater attention to the need for southern NGOs to offer adequate incentives to attract and retain capable staff. (Bohwasi et al.1998:10)

[4] PNS: Partner National Society, used as a term for the funding part in a Red Cross cooperation.

So-called ‘brain drain’ is one of the biggest challenges for the Financial development programme. As reported through Norad report and stated in interview with Red Cross informants, loss of trained financial staff is a main impediment for further progress.

> *There is immensely high turnover. An important reason is that they reach a level where they get recruited to other places where they get a better salary. In several national societies, this was the case*. (Red Cross informant 5)

Higher salaries could be one way of motivating staff to stay. However, other PNSs oppose such a strategy, and the freedom to raise salaries for the Red Cross societies that are dependent upon PNSs is restricted:

> *Huge informal pressure from PNSs might be a reason why they do not raise salaries. This is connected to the unwillingness to pay core costs. Many PNSs demand to see the salary payments to the employees! That is totally… We would not like it if MFA had asked to see what we earn. But some have a totally different approach to partnerships. They want to have much more control (...) One has to base partnership on equality, but to my view many do not take that into account* (Red Cross informant 2)

Incentives are seen as one of the main challenges for CB (Mkandawire, in Fukuda-Parr 2002:152). As Mkandawire describes:

> The most obvious forms of incentives are the material ones, including job security. Capacity development requires provision of adequate remuneration. Modern bureaucracies are founded on the premise that individuals who work in them will serve the public good as opposed to catering to personal or sectional interests. This presupposes a basic income or living wages that will allow public servants to carry out their duties without succumbing to extraneous pressure (Mkandawire in Fukuda-Parr 2002:152).

Evidently, it can be questioned if the Red Cross offers good enough incentives to achieve their CB goals.

It has been discussed in the Red Cross to make sure the conditions for financial managers are competitive (Red Cross informant 5). This might be just as effective a measure for achieving the ultimate goals as continuous training and supervision. The risk of people leaving will still exist, but would probably be reduced. On the other hand, it could be objected that by increasing salaries the Red Cross would contribute to an imbalance in the local markets for both NGOs and the private sector aiming to create profitable businesses.

Volunteers are not paid in the same way as staff, but an example from volunteers might still be relevant to show the limited resources available. During a visit to Lesotho, the project coordinator and I observed that the volunteers had next to nothing when it came to material possessions. Sadly, one of the highly-valued women volunteers died just before our visit. We visited her mother to offer our condolences and show that we appreciated her work. Her home was small, but very tidy and neat. The mother was sick herself and remained in bed, but she did not ask us for anything. But when we left, the programme coordinator of the Lesotho Red Cross asked if we could find a way to pay for a coffin for the volunteer who had passed away. Her mother had no money for the coffin and the volunteer had left nothing behind, and the Lesotho Red Cross has no budget for support to volunteers.

5.6 Summary regarding ambitions and gaps

Objectives are set on different levels, ambitions are overly high, agendas are multiple, capacity is restricted and requirements are many and incompatible. The consequence is a prevailing impression of weak results and subsequent diminishing trust in aid and increased demand for Results Management. It is quite easy to claim that results are not achieved when the objectives are numerous and exist on so many levels. Then accusations of ‘lack of results’ will

have a high probability of encountering some truth at some level. This might explain the call for improved effectiveness and efficiency. In this subchapter I have pointed to an alternative explanation of ‘lack of results’ – namely lack of capacity.

It is important to understand the pressure for results and RBM. There are many ways that the gap between ambitions and results can be reduced, and it might not be that more stringent requirements, more results reporting or greater effectiveness are the only relevant strategies.

In Chapter 6, I will proceed to look at the methods used for assessing and documenting results and explore whether or not the methods used contribute to improving results.

6. RESULTS MANAGEMENT – METHODOLOGY AND DOCUMENTATION

Does RBM document actual results of CB and contribute to improved results through i.e. learning?

As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a gap in levels between development policy goals and project goals. I argued that this gap contributes to the impression that aid does not work and does not show results. In this chapter, I discuss whether RBM is a suitable approach for measuring and evaluating CB, including making a foundation for better future decisions. What is gained by this approach, and what is lost? My discussion will show a nuanced picture. RBM is useful for documentation and creates dialogue between partners. However, the methodology can also prove useless and at times even destructive.

First, I examine whether RBM is an appropriate method for monitoring, evaluating and documenting CB results. Then I discuss why apparently ill-suited approaches are used. And finally, I will look at the use of alternative approaches.

6.1 The RBM approach for Results Management of Capacity Building

The RBM system introduced in the 1990s has probably contributed to achieving better results over time. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) showed an increase in effective projects from 35% to 60% and the Department of International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom had an increase in the rate of results from 66% to 75% (Fukuda-Parr et al. 2002:5).

After reading the extensive criticisms of RBM, I wondered if the negative aspects were exaggerated. Could there be positive sides that were not brought forward to the same extent as the negative sides? My Red Cross respondents mentioned several positive aspects of RBM:

- ability to compare between projects, countries and over time
- documentation and thereby ability to find historical data
- a contribution to quality assurance

- more systematic approach
- logframes function as a basis for dialogue between partners

According to a recent study of evaluation practice in six Norwegian NGOs, evaluations are 'associated with positive attributes'(Norad 2013b:xiv). Evidently, Red Cross employees do see positive effects of RBM on quality assurance and documentation:

> *For sure there is a lot we have done in Africa that we cannot summarize.(…) We are not able to document what we have done. If you dig into the archives, you will probably find many reports, but no systematic approach. They are not comparable. There might be good reports, but the lack of system makes it difficult to document the totality. The advantage of Results Management is system and quality assurance.* (Red Cross informant 9)

Red Cross staff-members interviewed for this study held the following to be the main negative factors of RBM:

- time-consuming tracking and reporting
- less relevant than talking to people directly
- not able to track the most relevant substantial and qualitative results
- lacking context
- expectations of a specific standard, coupled with weak national societies, make local ownership of the project plan very challenging
- assumed linearity
- bureaucratic

RBM is intended to document results, follow-up and contribute to learning. Drawing on data from the Norwegian Red Cross, I will revisit the RBM criticisms presented in Chapter 3 to see whether there is support in the data material. I will discuss the four aspects: control, indicators, linearity and accountability deficit.

6.1.1 Control

> *Everyone will have more time if they do not have to spend the time on reporting. For instance in Lesotho Red Cross – if he [the project manager] did not have to spend four to five days a month to ensure a proper report he could have spent those days on travelling around speaking with them [volunteers and branches] and follow up in a more direct and flexible way. Results Management creates a lot of bureaucracy.* (Red Cross informant 9)

This quote supports the impression that New Public Management has led to significant bureaucratization. The danger is that actual development work becomes secondary, and RBM efforts the primary task of the staff. The experience of Price Waterhouse Coopers[5] is, in general, that some 80% of project resources are spent on tracking and documenting, leaving only 20% for adjustment and implementing necessary follow up activities.

The control aspect is vividly discussed in the academic literature (see Fukuda-Parr et al. 2002, Ebrahim and Rangan 2010). The character of NPM is one reason for more focus on control. Another is likely to be the policy change from Technical Assistance to Capacity Development: fewer 'experts' are now being send to the field (Riddell 2001). Possible side-effects can be a felt loss of control and the need to impose control mechanisms. In other words, decentralization is met by an increased focus on control that might undermine true decentralization (Kruse et al. 1998:32).

The intention behind NPM was a greater focus on results. The Norad guide on Results Management asks for a shift 'away from a focus on inputs, activities and processes to a focus on benefits – **from what you have done to what you have achieved'** (Norad 2008:9), which resembles the change from 'rules' to 'goals' in

[5] Price Waterhouse Coopers, giving courses on project management to Red Cross, presented these figures (December 2012).

New Public Management. My informants associate RBM with reporting, documentation and control, and not with learning.

Both this case study and experiences reported by others indicate that is has been easier to fulfil the procedural rather than the substantial parts of the new goal- and result orientation. As described in Christensen et al.:

> (…) today, the Ministries ask by and large detailed report requirements to their subordinate entities (...) [but] (...) reporting on results achieved has been particularly problematic (…) (Christensen et al. 2007:102).

The Norad handbook on RBM (2008) can be said to reflect a procedural approach to Results Management. Results reports are to include outcome, logframes, baselines and indicators. Stein Erik Kruse, representing an evaluation consultancy company, explained:

> *A huge part is just simple bureaucratic reporting and little focus on a qualitative assessment of what has really happened. Bureaucratic reporting is all about economy – what you actually can control – input, activity and output. (…) If one should take Results Management seriously one should focus broader (…) The idea of goal management was to get further than input-output.(...) However, Norad is not consistent either.* (Stein Erik Kruse)

On the other hand, a focus on control was explicitly mentioned by my informants as negative aspects of RBM.

6.1.2 Indicators – the question of facts, context and causality

> *We cannot let our work be governed by indicators. We have to customize RBM to the way we work.* (Red Cross informant 2)

While the focus on control was not mentioned explicitly by my Red Cross respondents as a negative aspect of RBM, the indicators were highly controversial. Using indicators is one way to ensure objectivity, to control, and to

measure progress along the way from inputs to effects. As outlined in chapter 3, measuring should be based on (1) facts, (2) constant external conditions, and (3) a verifiable causality chain.

1) Specific, verifiable facts

'We should not burden them with measuring every something under the sun that interests us' (Red Cross informant 1). Although indicators have become an essential part of RBM in Red Cross and many see this as a positive development, there are worries that this tracking leads to unnecessary extra burdens.

Red Cross devotes considerable resources to discussing indicators, coming up with relevant ones, defining, tracking and reporting on them. There is an ongoing debate within the organization on how useful indicators are and how they can or may contribute to its main objectives.

IFRC has made a checklist for Characteristics of a Well-Prepared National Society, with 30 characteristics grouped into seven themes[6] in addition to seven proxy indicators[7] (IFRC 2010b:7). There are also six sets of 'Core Capacities that are critical for successful and effective functioning of National Society in service delivery to beneficiaries' defined. These Core Capacities are divided into 91 attributes (Red Cross undated[8]). This indicates a strong belief in the feasibility of indicators.

In 2013, an indicator-tracking table was developed for the Norwegian Red Cross, covering, *i.a.*, Health, Disaster Preparedness and Capacity Building. The table is based on a template from Red Cross internationally as well as on a previous version of indicator tables. The table forms a part of the reporting system where qualitative assessments and narratives are included. Description and analysis of

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[6] 'Disaster Preparedness policy and planning', 'Structures and organization', 'Human resources', 'Financial and material resources', 'Relevance', ' Advocacy' and 'Effectiveness'.

[7] These are: 1)# people volunteering time, 2)# paid staff, 3)# people donating blood, 4)# local units (i.e. chapters, branches), 5)# people reached, 6)# total income received, and 7)# total expenditure.

[8] The list of criteria and attributes were provided by Red Cross informant 2

progress are to be related to this indicator table. As an optional element, stories from beneficiaries may be included in the reporting. The extract below shows the indicators for CB (see table 2).

Main Indicators Tracking table		Project/ Programme:								
Project/ programme Name:		0								
Thematic Area/Areas:		Organisational Development				Project Location:	0			
						Programme Coordinator:	0			
ID	Indicators:	Gender	Base-line	Target				Means of Verification	Method of Collection	- Provide an explanation to the figures - Add key achievemer - Be transparant re
				2013	2014	2015	2016			
3. Organisational Development										
Outcome 3.1 National society branches have well qualified staff and volunteers and well functioning management systems in place										
Output 1.1: Branch has a trained volunteer base that is balanced in age and gender and reflects community diversity										
Output 1.2: Volunteer management system is implemented										
Output 1.3: Branch has adequate facilities, equipment and standardised system										
Output 1.4: Branch has adequate trained staff										
30 400	Number of National Society branches with management structures in place	Women								
		Men								
		Total								
30 401	Number of branches with a volunteer data base	Women								
		Men								
		Total								
30 402	Number of staff (gender disaggregated) with updated relevant job description	Women								
		Men								
		Total								
30 403	Number of staff (gender disaggregated) trained	Women								
		Men								
		Total								
Outcome 3.2 Governance and management has characteristics of a well functioning national society (CWFNS) with managem										
Output 2.1: National Society management and governance are trained in management and governance issues and know their roles										
Output 2.2: National Society has the capacity and skills to plan, monitor report and evaluate programme implementation										
Output 2.3: National Society has established relevant policies, strategies and regulations and uses them										
Output 2.4: National Societies have developed and adopted a gender policy										
Outcome 3.3 national societies have sound financial systems managed systematically and transparently										
Output 3.1: National Society has a relevant accounting system that is being used to its full potential with trained staff										
Output 3.2: National Society has a resource mobilisation strategy that is being implemented										
Output 3.3: National Society has a functioning fraud and corruption policy in place										
Outcome 3.4 B) National societies have mainstreamed gender into community-based programmes										
Output 1: Technical support provided to Gender Network and Gender Focal Points in National Society planning processes.										
Output 2: Gender mainstreaming tools are developed and disseminated.										

Table 2: Extract of Indicator tracking table on Organizational Development (Norwegian Red Cross 2013a)

One of my informants see indicator tracking as relevant because it tells something about change, but at the same time questions that e.g. an increase in number of volunteers necessarily means that the organization is stronger and more sustainable (Red Cross informant 6).

The academic Robert Chambers claims that surveys, purely quantitative measurements and indicators have shortcomings, as these rely on predefined categories, categories that often have an academic bias, as well as concentrating on what is measureable or answerable (Chambers 2008:6). The table above also includes more qualitative aspects – such as 'know their roles', 'well qualified staff', 'management system implemented' and 'relevant policies'. On one hand, these indicators cannot be said to be easily measured. On the other hand, they constitute a potential for different interpretations. What is the definition of 'well qualified staff'? What is the acceptable degree of implementation in order to conclude that something has been implemented – 90%? 100%? In order to document how the indicators are defined and what they are based on, the columns 'Means of verification' and 'Method of collection' are added. However, this does not necessarily help in better defining the indicator as such.

People interpret indicators very differently, indeed. Even a basic concept like who should be counted as a volunteer is debated. A Red Cross workshop on indicators held in Nairobi 2013 revealed that 'share of children' gave rise to different interpretations. When the surveyed population is internally displaced and partly on the move, what population do we count and how do we calculate the 'share' of children that are vaccinated? Confusion regarding such definitions led one participant to conclude:

> *They will have a huge problem when they are going to merge the indicator results from different places and make it into one result. It will be either very imprecise or so diluted that it will not say anything meaningful.* (Red Cross informant 2)

Thus, measurability might not be as easy as both supporters and sceptics claim. Predefined categories do not necessarily lead to predefined and standard interpretations. Some claim that summarizing anything that has a slight possibility for divergent interpretation will make the aggregated results useless.

Some are sceptical towards the whole system of logframes and indicators:

> *The regime introduced recently means that we report at a wrong level, a level which is very general. One has to aggregate elements that are very different. One loses sight of the real results. (…) Behind an audit, there can be various results and important factors. If we analyse at the level of the national societies we can say much more about how the financial management actually works. It is a danger if we are satisfied when only the overall objectives are reached.* (Red Cross informant 9)

This also reflects an academic debate where critics argue that indicators reduce the social reality to bits and pieces that say very little about what is really going on (Eggen 2011:71). When the challenges for each society differ and hence project activities differ, then also the possibility of aggregation on impact level will be questionable: for as Ivar Evensmo says, '*the more one moves to a higher level or on an aggregated level, the more the questions regarding methods appear*.' (Ivar Evensmo, Norad representative).

On one hand, aggregation of indicators across projects in several countries might answer to the quest of documenting overall results that policy-makers, Norad and the general public want. On the other hand, to be able to aggregate results, one must rely on the lowest common denominator.

Standardization of indicators across projects might have the unintended effect of reducing motivation, as such harmonization may indirectly communicate that

only what is tracked is deemed relevant. A recent workshop revealed the following:

> [*For them, it was]no fun to participate in the workshop and notice that none of the main indicators reflected their programs (…) Then there will be very limited motivation to report on anything at all*. (Red Cross informant 10)

After another workshop on logframes, one participant reported that the others had found logframes extremely difficult and demanding. The focus on logframes created frustration, confusion and felt like a complete draining of energy (Red Cross informant 6).

Do these indicators capture the elements that really work and are leading to the development wanted by the Red Cross, Norad and each and every country? Both IFRC (2010:8) and those responsible for the reporting system within the Norwegian Red Cross make it clear that tracking indicators are possible only at output level, and that indicators are only one part of Results Management – albeit a meaningful and necessary one.

If it is possible to develop objectives and attributed indicators only at the activity or output level, then the question of the relevance for impact documentation arises. Activity-focused reporting will probably add to the impression of lack of results.

According to a review of RBM made by former employees and consultants of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), 'the most cited challenge related to the method itself is the difficulty in selecting appropriate, objective indicators that measure relevant results rather than activities' (Vähämäki 2011:20).

An example – alternative method, different result

Even if indicators are meant to only be a part of results assessments, my informants feel they get too much focus. Several studies have recommended a greater focus on learning (Kruse et al. 1998:32, Norad 2012b).

A new approach, focusing on reflection and learning, has been tried in Red Cross, with interesting findings. The Norwegian Red Cross has worked for many years in Sudan, supporting CB and other specific projects. Here two methodological approaches were tried in order to improve evaluating. The first method was a conventional approach with key informant interviews, indicators, cost–benefit analysis and focus groups (Khogali and Zewdu 2009). The second method was unconventional, using interviews, quotes and reflection through workshop dynamics (Farah et al. 2012). This change in method actually altered the conclusions of the project. As a member of the evaluation team explains:

> *An evaluation was conducted in Khartoum 2 to 4 years ago. It was a large evaluation team with focus on counting and statistics. It showed that x number of latrines were built and so on. (...) The evaluation report concluded with positive results, but now a new workshop [using another method] showed something different – because at that time they counted, but never asked and talked to people.* (Red Cross informant 6)

The first report concluded: 'Impacts are being realized in socio-economic, health and education terms', and 'sustainability had been reached' (Khogali and Zewdu, 2009:25). The report mentioned a concern about sustainability, but there are indications that this concern drowned in the dissemination of the report. My informant's impression is that the report was extremely academic and ended up on a shelf instead of being used to make necessary changes (Red Cross informant 6).

The second evaluation approach was building on the same elements as PA. The facilitators of the workshop and the evaluation explain some of the rationale and the method:

> It was decided that this evaluation would not take a conventional approach – analyzing for effectiveness and efficiency. Instead, it would be designed to encourage collective reflection involving all the interested parties (…) The style used in this report is to let those who have been interviewed speak for themselves. (Farah et al. 2012)

Quotes from the people interviewed were hung up on the walls in the workshop room before the workshop began, explains one of the facilitators. Participants walked around, read the quotes and talked about them. It gave room for discussions and reflections. The evaluation process opened the eyes of those involved, according to the facilitator (Red Cross informant 6). This time the programme was shown *not* to be sustainable. Latrines collapsed. Income-generating activities proved unfeasible alongside more needed humanitarian activities. Even more important, the workshop approach created new motivation to change and implement new measures. Those working on the project started out with the renewed energy almost before they left the workshop room (Red Cross informant 6). Chambers claims that PA releases energy, creativity and learning and that the methodologies are 'drivers of change' (Chambers 2008:178). That was, according to my informant, what happened in this particular workshop.

Not only the style of evaluation process differed, so did also the participation.

> *What we found out through the workshop was that the participants had other recommendations based on their knowledge of the local context and experience with the programmes (…) If they had used the same method earlier and before the programme exit, it might have had another results..?* (Red Cross informant 6).

The two methods differed in several ways: style (report vs joint reflection), who participated, and the content of recommendations. The workshop/participatory

approach led to more ownership of the recommendations and motivation for change (Red Cross informant 6).

This is an example of how what may be hidden with one methodology becomes visible through another, and that the approach might have immediate effect through its motivational force.

The second evaluation in Sudan allowed for more learning and corrective actions. However, the second evaluation method did not document results in a conventional written report with documented 'verifiable' facts. In other words, although the workshop approach proved effective for 'management improvements', it is questionable if it satisfies the 'performance reporting' requirements.

2) Constant external conditions and relevance

Constant conditions are the second prerequisite for indicator use. As the following quote indicates, changes in context are likely to happen, and more so in vulnerable or unstable environments. Moreover, changes in context make it more challenging to read results solely from tracking indicator.:

> *To show results (…) one should look at results within their context. One should have qualitative assessments, interpreted within the context where the data and results are collected. We can have done everything correctly according to a programme, then there is suddenly an outbreak of cholera, and then every quantitative indicator heads in wrong direction. However, it might have been that without the capacity development programme the results of the cholera outbreak would have been much worse.* (Red Cross informant 2)

The quote shows that indicators can be useless without contextualizing, and to assume constant external conditions is very often unrealistic. Deteriorating contextual conditions, like coup d'etat or war, might lead to an impression that

there is a lack of results. And conversely: how can we know when results can be attributed to a particular programme?

Burundi Red Cross was a very weak national society at the end of the civil war. In 2006, the IFRC launched a programme for Intensified Capacity Building (ICB) with the following objective:

> [T]o best serve vulnerable people through a tailor-made and holistic approach. It helps selected societies build the organizational capabilities needed to scale-up country-wide service delivery. (IFRC 2008:2)

After implementation of the programme, and a corresponding increase in humanitarian activities, the number of volunteers increased from almost none in 2007 to 300,000 by 2010. How can we know that the positive changes are due to the CB Programme and not the changed context? Apparently, it is rare to use control groups –for instance, comparison with other NGOs and their development in terms of volunteers, activities or reach. Is it possible to isolate the effects of the programme from the changing context in Burundi at the end of the civil war? It seems plausible that change of context contributed or was an enabler, but it alone cannot account for the change.

Further, in the transition from increased capacity to increased service delivery, it is seen difficult to separate the support from external factors, and to be sure about causality. Indicators are not seen as sufficient for assessing causality.

> *Organizational Development is supposed to lead to better service delivery. This is difficult to measure! Do we reach more people than ten years ago? Yes, but it is not sure that the result stems from Organizational Development. That is very difficult methodologically. We have to look at not only simple indicators, but also use more in-depth analysis.* (Red Cross informant 2)

3) Verifiable causality

In 2011, the Norwegian Red Cross conducted an evaluation of a Financial Development (FD) Programme. The objectives of the FD Programme had been to promote accountability, increase financial resources, gain or maintain donor confidence and contribute to sustainability of the organization (Bensky 2011).

This review found the cause-and-effects link difficult to establish, and isolating elements was often impossible. The evaluation reported an anecdotal link from the FD Programme to improved confidence and competence among finance staff. That might also have led to increased donor confidence and funding, but such a link could not be documented (ibid.:12).

The evaluation team had developed an indicator-based interview guide. During the dissemination of the review, they reflected on the choice of method. In retrospect, it appeared that using indicators instead of narratives and in-depth interviews reduced the possibility of reflecting on causality: '*We focused too much on indicators which in the end did not give us much. We should have focused more on narratives'*(anonymous respondent)

6.1.3 Linearity – relevance of baselines and possibilities for causality?

> *A danger with indicators is that over time the focus is only on them. There are many other relevant factors that we maybe did not think about when the project started* (Red Cross informant 2).

Indicators defined at the beginning of a project to act as a baseline for gauging progress may prove irrelevant over time. Other studies confirm this risk (Riddell 2001:285). CB demands in-depth knowledge of an organization. If results are measured against irrelevant baseline indicators, then 'progress' on these indicators may be weak, and that contributes to the impression of weak results.

Some academics doubt that the hunt for empirical data will help in verifying causal links (Eggen 2011:8–9). It might be both challenging and costly, if not impossible, to document causality through observable and objective facts tracked as indicators and conventional methods. However, although in a narrative form, the causal links between volunteer activities and societal impact are substantiated through the following account from Burundi:

> Initial services were agricultural in nature – digging a field, building a house or mending a roof for an elderly or disabled person – and based on existing skills and tools within the communities. The logic was that lots of people doing simple things once a week would lead to very visible impacts. From the start, these groups attracted members from both Hutu and Tutsi, men and women, young and old. As the groups got used to working together, a level of social cohesion began to return to communities which had been destroyed during the civil war, rebuilding links between members of Hutu and Tutsi communities. (IFRC 2011a:19)

According to one respondent, it is commonly recognized that it is not possible to document results through the linear model of activity-output-outcome-impact (Red Cross informant 8). And yet, public opinion and the politicians demand such documentation of results. Norad acknowledges that this is more complex.

A study of Organizational Development of Red Cross societies highlights the complexity of demonstrating causality (Bloom and Levinger 2011). This study uses a broader set of methods to assess the links between all types of Organizational Development initiatives and Capacity Building with the objective of building CB knowledge. The study aims to capture all elements that have an influence on CB. The evaluation focused on fourteen Red Cross national societies, including Burundi Red Cross. The methods used were desk studies, interviews, participatory workshop, evidence-based assessment tool, surveys, indicators, discussions, correlation analysis, regression analysis and social network analysis.

The study found that networking, building on existing resources, reflecting local needs, commitment and ownership were key success drivers of CB. Table 3 is an extract from a table displaying the results.

Dimension Type	**Dimension Type Definition**[9]	**Dimensions**
'Strong drivers'	Performance on these dimensions is highly predictive of an NS's C-BAR *composite* score (i.e., there are no more than 4 NS that have composite scores that differ from the score received on this dimension). Additionally, scores for these dimensions are strongly linked (i.e. correlated) with performance on at least 9 (i.e., three-quarters) of all other C-BAR dimensions. Good performance on these dimensions is crucial. NS that don't score well on C1 (effective internal communication), for example, do not reach the highest performance tier. At the other end of the spectrum, an NS that scores 'developing' on B1 (foundation of sustainability), will also have a 'developing' composite score. Thus, B1 acts as a warning sign while C1 appears to be a prerequisite for success.	B1, foundation of sustainability, (warning sign for a developing rating); C1, effective internal communication (a prerequisite for an exemplary rating)

Table 3: extract from Table 3 in Bloom and Levinger 2011:19

Thirteen dimensions scored and ranked through a discussion process form the foundation of this study. These dimensions cover everything from having a culture that fosters progressive thinking, to having the skills necessary for developing administration systems and for coalition-building (Bloom and Levinger 2011). To score thirteen, broad dimensions can be accused of being reductionist. However, while the discussions leading to the scoring probably provide insights, learning and value for the participants, it is questionable if the form of presentation makes the results accessible enough to provide learning for others. Although learning was the main purpose of this evaluation, the communication of the results through the written report seems quite inaccessible for non-researchers. As one respondent noted: *'I have been to two meetings where the report has been presented, but I find it complicated'* (Red Cross informant 1)

[9] NS: National Society , C-BAR: Capacity-Building Assessment Rubric

Red Cross tries out various methods to establish causality. We have seen through two very different approaches that proving causality is challenging, although it may be assessed. The study referred to above is comprehensive and complex, but probably fails to satisfy policy-makers' quest for simple and clear presentation of results.

Organizational culture

We have seen that it is challenging to establish causality in CB, and that indicators tend to concern measureable activities and not always the most relevant aspects. Cultural change is not among the easily verifiable facts in a causality chain. Red Cross representatives underline the importance of culture:

> *The whole idea is that when the management supports its employees, with good attitude and dedication they will be able and willing to achieve intended results. (…) The bond that holds this process together is the values and leaders in the organization. (*Red Cross informant 7)

Assessments of governance and leadership are weaker than assessments of other factors in NGO evaluations (Norad 2013c:xv). Previous research has shown that culture is a common denominator in successful companies, so culture should also be one of the most important parts to measure when working with Organizational Development (Høidal et al. 2008). Red Cross representatives underline the importance of leadership:

> *I believe that a motivated workplace is driven by strong leadership and management. Creating and sustaining motivation therefore, requires open communication, honesty and respect.* (Red Cross informant 7)

Although measuring cultural elements may seem relevant, the linear model from cultural change to impact is challenging to display. The indicator table presented above does not include explicit indicators for culture. However, culture is a part

of some of the evaluations conducted by Red Cross, and is to some extent included in the reporting to Norad (see Norwegian Red Cross 2011:14). For instance, the IFRC review of Burundi focuses on self-sufficiency versus dependency, and the traditional values of helping one another (IFRC 2011a). The study used interviews, but apparently there is no measuring of cultural elements that can act as documentation of causality and linearity.

Communicating results based on cultural change may prove challenging, and there is a long way to go to get results from cultural change. That, too, might add to the impression that results are lacking.

6.1.4 Accountability deficit: Beneficiaries' assessments

Vulnerable or poor people are the main target group for most aid projects. And yet, 'beneficiary accountability' is often lacking. As one respondent put it: '*[We should] not only become an organization that is reporting, in addition [we have to ensure] beneficiary accountability.'* (Red Cross informant 2)

In general it is not very common to do beneficiary surveys (Red Cross informant 2). None of the evaluations or reports presented in this thesis included beneficiaries' assessments of the relevance or quality of the services provided. One reason for this absence of the voices of the intended beneficiaries might be that the target groups are far from the Norwegian decision-making processes, so the accountability link between populations and politicians is disturbed by many intermediary levels, and that there is no way that the population directly can hold the politicians accountable. To complicate matters further, we are not talking about *one* population with similar needs. Norway provides aid to at least 124[10]

[10] According to Norad statistics for 2012 – url: http://www.norad.no/no/om-bistand/norsk-bistand-i-tall. In addition come the countries that NGOs support through own funds and through other actors and channels.

countries with very different needs. The question then becomes *which* populations' interests and needs are reflected in the donor aid policy goals.

Secondly, the links between an FD Programme and beneficiaries' access to and satisfaction with humanitarian activities are long and unclear. Beneficiaries might receive more and better service from Red Cross for reasons not stemming from a specific FD Programme.

Thirdly, the number of donors might add to their power and presence, so that others (like beneficiaries) are overlooked. Most of the implementing NSs have many funding partners and back-donors they have to satisfy. Several of my informants at the Norwegian Red Cross observed that NS resources often go to satisfying the diverging objectives and interests of back-donors or Red Cross funding partners:

> *(…)for those national societies with many partners who all want to achieve different things, who the national society has to serve – they spend really too much of their time and resources on that instead of doing what they really need to do and should do – namely serve the people (…)* (Red Cross informant 1)

6.2 The assumed distortion not fully supported

Above we have seen that conventional methods, including indicators, might over-focus on activities and not provide the tools needed to demonstrate causality. Further, one of the assumptions was that indicators and the RBM regime lead to distortion of priorities (Hulme 2007:8). According to Red Cross staff, partners prefer to fund and support the most 'legible' or easy-to-explain projects:

> *It is easier to get funding for a relief operation or building water wells. To be able to count something or to take photos of it becomes important.(…) It is very difficult to 'sell' Organizational Development.* (Red Cross informant 4)

> *Most partners are interested only in 'sexy programmes' like HIV/AIDS, health etc., perhaps those are easy to measure impact, but not FD or OD programmes that are sometimes difficult to measure.* (Red Cross informant 7)

The quotes indicate a distortion away from CB towards projects that are easier to present to public opinion. This might give short-term results, but less sustainability and hence fewer long-term results.

As it is highly challenging to visualize and document impact for beneficiaries from CB Programmes, it is hard to get funding for core costs of the organizations. Core costs are necessary for running an organization. They can cover, for instance, the salary of the Chief Executive Officer and costs related to accounting. It is likely that the organizations will become less sustainable if they are used as service providers for funding partners without the necessary organizational foundation to do so. The following quote from a project plan for Malagasy Red Cross highlights the challenges of lack of funding for core costs:

> The Malagasy Red Cross [MRC] is financially very dependant to donors and partners. MRC is being used as cheap service deliverers by PNS, their back-donors and other international aid agencies. Funding would be available for projects but not for the core costs of the Society. Independence and growth on this model is unsustainable (Norwegian Red Cross 2012b).

There are several plausible reasons for the distortive practice away from CB from international donors and Red Cross societies. It might be a consequence of RBM and indicator use. Or, it might be that the international donors have little faith in either the concept or CB. A third explanation might be lack of confidence in the receiving National Society (NS). Not having interviewed international donors, I cannot offer conclusions regarding faith in the concept. Lack of trust in receiving NS is a challenge. A need for control can be said to underlie all three possible explanations. In order to avoid accusations from their home constituencies, donors often prefer 'manageable' projects and retaining control (Hulme

2007:11). The paradoxical consequence is that the poorest and weakest NSs risk receiving the least support for CB.

Experiences with Red Cross and governmental back-donor priorities internationally show the distortion towards visible and measureable projects. However, my initial assumptions of obvious distortion also in Norwegian aid priorities are not confirmed. Both Norad and the Norwegian Red Cross give priority to CB. As one respondent explained: *'We don't have to convince Norad. When it comes to ECHO it is harder. To convince the EU system – that is not possible*!' (Red Cross informant 4)

6.3 Gap between RBM intentions and practice

I have shown that extensive resources are spent on tracking indicators. We have seen that indicators might lead to distortion, but that forces in Red Cross and in Norad can counter that. In addition, we have seen that the focus on indicators and conventional approaches might neglect the question of sustainability. Finally, we have seen that opportunities for reflection, dialogue and learning are partly lost in current RBM practice. In sum: indicators tend *not* to capture impact, and often lack relevance and contextualized results. Moreover, the challenge of aggregating meaningful results contributes to the impression that CB efforts fail to produce results.

Indicators make it possible to summarize results from various countries and various projects into aggregated results. However, there is a risk that the most relevant and important work is made invisible, and that important and qualitative changes in social realities are not tracked. An expert and instructor in RBM describes this:

> *The problem [with indicators] is that you often get the things that are possible to count, and hence output level. You will not get the qualitative changes. At outcome level there are different target groups and different challenges. (…) For instance, in Save the Children they state that 1 million children are reached. That is appealing, but it does not say anything about what kind of change has happened. We cannot say that 1 million children have a new and better life. Some have received education, others have received something else.(…) The goals are always qualitative, or they should be, where you describe the changed situation for the target groups. With indicators it might be that you steer towards what can be counted instead of steering towards the goal.* (Anette Simonsen)

We have seen that some of the criticisms of RBM are relevant, and have noted the gap between the intentions of RBM and practice. As presented in Chapter 3, the intention of RBM is both 'management improvement' and 'performance reporting'. However, my data indicate that the 'performance reporting' with a procedural approach and focus on activity dominates to some extent at the expense of a focus on results, learning and beneficiary accountability. According to one informant the focus on logframes means that one never manages to move beyond step one to four in the project cycle (see Figure 3). Reflection and learning are lost in the logframe fog (Red Cross informant 6).

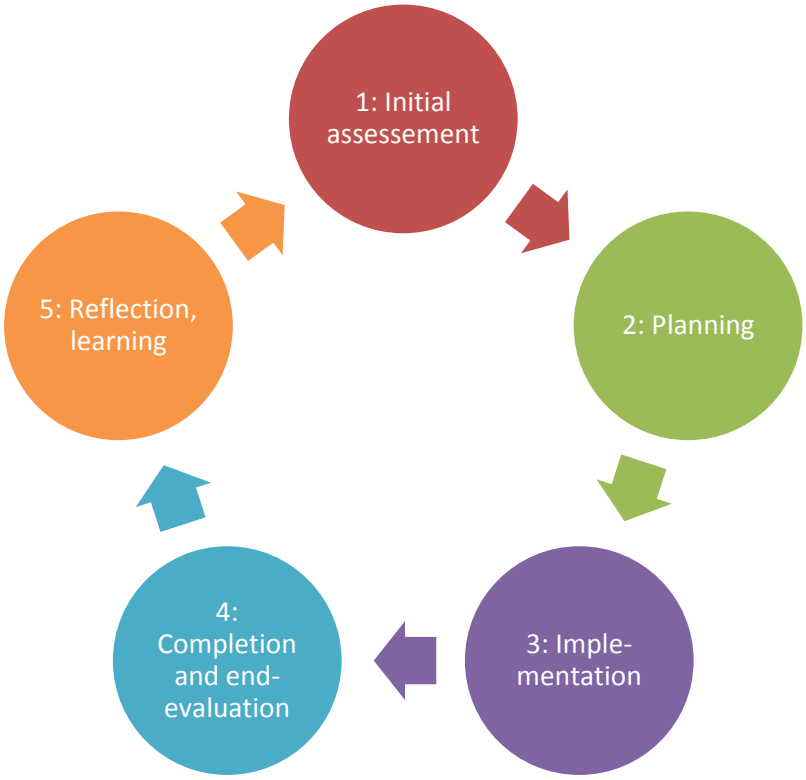

Figure 3: Project cycle (based on Norad 2008:23–28, IFRC 2011b:10 and Red Cross informant 6)

6.4 Gap between Red Cross needs and RBM requirements

The earlier Results Management system was less formal, but perhaps more to the point and hence more relevant, according to one informant:

> *Traditionally there has been much more presence in the fields. I do not think the Results Management was any weaker, but it was different and more informal. The priorities were different earlier, less bureaucratic. There was more time to talk with the national societies, to listen to how things were going, observe, and spend time operationally in the field. In addition, one would achieve results at that time too.* (Red Cross informant 10)

Researchers and critics who hold that RBM is counterproductive (Ebrahim and Rangan 2010, Vähämäki et al. 2011, and Natsios 2010) might be at least partly correct. If information is not relevant, it will not be used. Somehow, information is collected despite indications that it is not used. Neither NGOs nor people in MFA and Norad have sufficient time to read reports (Norad 2013a, Norad 2013b).

The different stakeholders have different needs for information. What is seen as relevant for one actor might be less relevant for another. Table 4 summarizes what Norad asks for and what Red Cross staff say they need for managing projects.

Norad	**Red Cross**
Methods: • Baselines • Logical Planning models • Outcome • Sufficient data collection, but preferably based on existing data tracking • Use of Indicators Purposes of monitoring and evaluations: • Accumulated effects • Demonstration of progress • More knowledge regarding impact and wider effects • Results for beneficiaries	Methods: • Beneficiary satisfaction assessments • True and clear answers • Context and culture based evaluations • Holistic assessments • In-depth understanding, not superficial • Minimization of resources spent on data tracking and reporting, not overload implementing national societies with data tracking • Acknowledge the process, not just results • Practical and economically realistic Purposes of monitoring and evaluations: • Beneficiary accountability • Comparison across programmes • Contribute to dignity, respect and trust for those involved • Impact assessments: if CB leads to improved service delivery etc. • Contribute to learning • Usefulness: easy to read and use the evaluations

Table 4: comparison of Norad and Red Cross Needs for Results Management (Based on Norad handbook 2008 + interviews)

Both actors want impact, results for beneficiaries and some kind of systematic approach. However, there is a gap regarding what is perceived as relevant. Norad want to see accumulated effects and demonstrated progress. Red Cross wants in-depth understanding, contextualized results, learning and to contribute to dignity and trust. Norad wants logframe models and use of indicators. Red Cross wants holistic assessments and minimization of resources spent on data tracking.

The table conveys the general impression from interviews and documents, especially the differences. However, both Norad and Red Cross have nuanced perspectives on this; and of course not all employees agree – viewpoints may vary. My impression is that the debate is very much on-going in both places.

The conventional RBM approach does not always give Red Cross practitioners the information they most need for managing projects and programmes. Obviously, this must have consequences on results. Conventional methods are often used without considerations of strengths and weaknesses or of other alternatives (Norad 2013c:xv). Perhaps a different choice of method than the conventional one could provide more relevant information.

Whether RBM is relevant or not also depends on which step in the result documentation process we are looking at. Although many feel that indicators and the overall reports to back donors are too narrow, underlying material produced along the way is seen as relevant by some of my respondents. Country-specific reports are examples of material underlying the production of overall reports to Norad. They are in-depth and based on the specific context, history and challenges of the particular country and programme. Such reports give insights and understanding that contribute to learning and are thus seen as relevant.

> *Those reports are on such a level that you understand what the goals are. They are not aggregated: you read them in the context. For instance, what did we want to achieve in China, what were the challenges in China? It was not written as examples or thematically, but was written as context*

> *specific reports. Reading such reports from areas you were not familiar with gives good insight into what was really going on.* (Red Cross informant 2)

6.5 Possible reasons for the gaps

We can conclude that there is a gap between what Red Cross staff need for monitoring and implementing better programmes, and what Norad demands, altthough the picture is mixed. There is also a gap between the intentions of RBM (results focus) and reality (activity focus). These gaps probably lead to the impression of lack of results and actually weaker results. The next step is to discuss reasons for these gaps.

First, scholars point to differences in methodological approaches caused by different ideas and ideologies (Knutsen and Moses 2007). Here, I will take a closer look at these arguments, and suggest that this analysis does not cover all explanatory factors. As an example, and the second point here, I hold that there are sheer practicalities and realities that may also govern choices, but this is not often debated in the academic literature. Thirdly, some claim that priority is not given, as insufficient resources are spent on Results Management. Fourth, I ask whether current RBM practice is only a ritual performed for an external audience. Lastly, I discuss the weak acceptance of complexity in aid.

6.5.1 Methodological gap and legitimacy

Knutsen and Moses (2007) help us to understand preferences in methodology: methodologies, they explain, refer to the philosophical ground floor or understanding of the world, whereas methods refer to the techniques applied. Different disciplines apply different methods and relate to different

methodologies, although methodologies and disciplines to not correspond fully. Simplifying, we might say that a naturalist understanding corresponds to economists' methods and that constructivism correspond to anthropologists' methods.

There is a tendency to believe, particularly in policy and economic circles, that the more naturalistic way of researching has the highest standing. Evaluation credibility depends on international acceptance and that reports are perceived as being rigorous (Ortiz and Taylor 2009, Hulme 2007). Natural science methods and quantitative methods are seen as most objective and able to give the most precise answers:

> *For the last years, it is no doubt that the quantitative oriented method people that have had the dominance. Those 'softer' oriented have been more on the on the defensive side. (…) Results are often perceived as quantifiable. Journalists do not want any approximate answers. One wants precise answers, -so and so percentages etc.* (Ivar Evensmo, Norad representative)

The striving for measureable indicators and empirical verification of causality are fuelled by media and academic voices based in naturalistic traditions. There are also influential researchers in Norway who criticize aid evaluations for not being scientific. For example, Anne Welle-Strand and Asle Toje find a Norad report to be based on '[l]oosely founded guesses', with a lack of causality and lack of quantitative data:

> There is no necessary link between the questions being asked and the answers given – there is no causal relationship between dependent and independent variable. (…) The parts that are presented are all qualitative within a field where quantitative analysis is desirable and possible. (my translation, Welle-Strand 2008)

With a sigh, one evaluation consultant said: '*For positivists, things have to be quantified in order to exist.*' (Stein Erik Kruse). Learning seems often to be sacrificed on the altar of perceived rigour.

Perceptions of objectivity and what is scientific can be understood as results of dominant discourses (Thagaard 2003:111). Compliance with the criteria upon which Red Cross legitimacy rests influences priorities and RBM practice to a certain extent. As demonstrating performance is one way of gaining legitimacy (Portela 2012:114), doing it in compliance with accepted standards will obviously yield the greatest legitimacy.

One reason why there is not more use of PA and appreciative inquiries may be that we still believe the naturalistic methodology to be most objective, giving 'uncontaminated' facts. Appreciative inquiry contradicts the highly valued standard of avoiding leading questions during surveys. The 'gold standard' is objective and verifiable facts:

> There is a general belief that natural science is quantitative and therefore rigorous, whereas social science is qualitative and therefore not rigorous. (Norgaard and Sharachchandra 2005:971)

Thus, striving for legitimacy might be one reason for greater focus on indicators than on storytelling or appreciative approaches, and for the other gaps noted above. But scientific legitimacy is not the only thing that governs evaluation methods in Red Cross. In the Sudanese case, two methods were employed – the first used tracking and classical report writing, while the second used quotes on a wall and active participation in an workshop where participants were paired up to discuss the quotes. The latter created active reflection, new perspectives and learning.

The variety of methods used leads me to claim that academics have exaggerated the negative sides of RBM, or have at least not taken sufficient notice of other approaches in use. In that way they might not see the nuanced ways in which an organization like the Red Cross employs various approaches. The evaluations cover a broader methodological range than anticipated, but some gaps remain.

In any case, giving priority to tracking, focus on control and the requirement of upward reporting ‘on demand’ may create an atmosphere less focused on learning and results than in-depth analysis and reflection could have done. In hunting for indicators, we may lose sight of real people living in real societies – and that too can add to the impression that results have not been produced.

6.5.2 Intentions meet realities

> Reporting was a specific area of communication mentioned as problematic.(…) Internet access at the national level is generally good (...) but few branches have internet access, and some do not have electricity (IFRC 2011a:29)

Results Management is not only about methodological preferences, but very much about resources and practicalities. Evaluations and reporting require data, which in turn require resources, competence and sufficient budgets.

> *If you are going to say something about empowerment, then you have to do a thorough examination. The problem is that it requires a lot of data*. (Stein Erik Kruse)

My case study indicates limited RBM budgets as well as limited investments in competence and prioritizing of sufficient time in field during evaluations.

Coming from the analysis department in a large private-sector company, I was surprised to find how tiny the budgets for evaluations and analysis are in the aid sector. Customer satisfaction surveys are done every month for mobile phone subscribers in Norway – but we cannot afford annual beneficiary surveys for those most vulnerable on our globe. This is a general challenge for the aid sector.

Torild Skard, with experience as researcher, UNICEF director and special advisor in the MFA, reflects on the imbalance between the complexity and scale of aid compared to evaluation budgets, and finds that the budgets do not reflect the costs:

> The development assistance administration conducts studies, assessments, programs and project evaluations to ensure the quality of the operations. But the scale is limited. (...) Quality assurance of the aid in total got 139 mill NOK in 2010 – about half a percentage of the total aid budget. That does not match the scale and the complexity of the development cooperation. (my translation, Skard 2011)

The use of indicators might as well be a reflection of realities as well as of naturalistic ideology.

Although Red Cross staff see logframes and in-depth studies as complementary, the perception is also that one cannot do both: '*There is no contradiction between logframes and in-depth studies, but it is unjustifiable economically to do both'* (Red Cross informant 2). My data indicate that when the organization has to choose, primacy is still given to logframes and indicators.

There are clear indications of conflicting expectations as to results documentation and low administration costs (Portela 2012). One of my informants pinpoints the paradoxical requirements:

> *Norad criticizes the use of funds for personnel in field. At the same time they ask for more monitoring and documentation of results. If those present in the field are to manage everything, they need our assistance. It is naïve to believe that we can just send an order and that they will reply back satisfactorily (*Red Cross informant 11).

Then again, we can ask ourselves: why do we want to keep evaluation costs so low? Naïve back-donors as well as the NGOs' own fund-raising departments might be the ones to blame. As many donors see low administration as a sign of efficiency, fund-raising departments cite low administration costs when competing for donations.

One study emphasized the lack of systematic RBM implementation (Norad 2011a:xvi–xvii). Such reports might give the impression that NGOs lack the willingness to measure results. But I find no indications that willingness is lacking – the resources spent on producing indicators, tracking, testing various

evaluation methods etc. should prove this. What is lacking are adequate budgets and capacity. And when budgets are limited, it is hard to prioritize beneficiary surveys, indicator tracking *and* in-depth, context-based studies.

6.5.3 Insufficient priority to real Results Management

Methodological preferences and budget constraints are two explanations for the gap between RBM intention and practice as well as between needs and requirements. The third explanation is lack of actual priority to Results Management.

Capacity

Correct application of RBM requires capacity and knowledge. It is not enough to conduct data tracking: data must be turned into useful information. As one respondent noted: '*It requires a lot to track and analyse data'* (Red Cross informant 6).

National society representatives participating in a workshop expressed the need for more resources within the field of RBM and PMER. The situation was described as: lack of unified plans for PMER, lack of dedicated departments or persons, lack of priority at management level, and lack of well-trained staff for collecting and analysing data (Red Cross informant 6).

Considerable personnel resources are already spent on tracking and reporting. At the same time, there is still need for more impact reporting and relevant use of data, and the NSs have neither enough capacity nor competence here. This is a constraint felt by several informants: '*there is limited understanding in Norad and MFA that this requires resources*' (Red Cross informant 11).

Corruption and financial management

Although my informants were divided on this point, some felt that the MFA gives priority to budget and activity control more than results. There are good reasons for focusing on budget control. For many years, corruption has been seen

as a main impediment to development (Banik 2010, Moyo 2009). However, signals from some back-donors might have influenced Norwegian Red Cross to put a greater focus on budget control than on PMER[11] (Red Cross informant 6). This impression might come because the MFA asked only for audit reports (in addition to narrative reports), and not indicators as Norad requires. Others perceive the MFA as flexible and not concerned solely with how budgets are spent. Different positions within the organization might explain some differences in perceptions.

The question is if the priority given to FD Programmes can be understood as a consequence of budget-control efforts. In fact, budget control is only one reason for FD Programmes. The Norwegian Red Cross supports FD in order to make NSs capable of reporting adequately on funding, but also because of a genuine wish to strengthen NSs (Red Cross informant 11). As another informant stated:

> *Partly our own interest drives the FD programme because we need to have stronger control on our money, and report better. (…) [however,] if they are to be a trustworthy partner, one that other organization and the private sector can support, they have to do this [have financial systems and control]*.' (Red Cross informant 1)

Some find financial (mis)management a relevant issue to address (IFRC 2011a:31), others find it over-focused. The Norad Civil Society Panel concluded the following regarding corruption:

> (…)incidents of corruption remain very low compared to total funds outlaid, with only a small number of serious cases recorded over a number of years (…) [and] (…) corruption is not a large systemic problem involving entire organizations (…) (Norad 2012b:6).

[11] PMER=Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

Although perhaps over-focused, corruption is a considerable challenge – and trust is a crucial stepping-stone for increased funding. The situation for Burundi Red Cross in the early 2000s was lack of partner confidence due to lack of transparency in their use of funding. Low transparency, together with weak democratic processes, made partners withdraw, staff leave and services collapse (IFRC 2011a:16). Reasons like this support the need for anti-corruption measures.

On the other hand, one consequence of the struggle to avoid corruption might also be less CB. It was legitimate to fear corruption during the operation at Haiti after the earthquake. However, the consequence of not using existing, albeit weak, institutions was a lost opportunity to strengthen those same institutions (Jonathan M. Katz, interviewed by Ask 2013). Avoidance of those institutions also undermined their future relevance and role in fighting corruption (Ask 2013).

The question is not an either/or between Financial Management (and anti-corruption) and Results Management, but whether the aid sector has found the right balance between. '(…) while corruption is invariably an important factor explaining policy failure, it is by no means always the dominant factor' (Banik 2010:49).

6.5.4 RBM as a ritual?

Øyvind Eggen (2011) shows how bureaucrats in Malawi perform a beneficiary selection that they clearly know will lead nowhere. Eggen interprets this as an aesthetic ritual: 'everybody' knows it does not work, but they still do it. Can the same be said about RBM and reporting?

According to one Norad study, 70% respondents from six Norwegian NGOs disagree that evaluations tend to be empty rituals (Norad 2013c:47). Still, a substantial share (30%) do perceive RBM as an empty ritual – why?

Some Red Cross staff also doubt the relevance of the RBM system with overall logframes, seeing them as a way of packaging the projects:

> *If the new type of Norad application with thematically and overarching logframe, contributes to real changes in a certain national society – because we package our application in a new way and perform the Results Management differently – I am not so sure about that.(…) we create our own reality.* (Red Cross informant 9)

Most agree that, in order to get funding, there needs to be a project plan and results over time. To make the plans and the results legible, the organization uses procedures and formats that are familiar to it, and its back-donors. The development of more thematic logframes in the latest application from Norwegian Red Cross to Norad is an example of this. RBM starts by defining target and outlining the result chain. This is a part of the RM, and the aim is better results. 'The reality is, I believe', argues Desmond McNeill, 'that staff in MFA/Norad will often take decisions based on information that is not captured by LFA (but is very relevant): but feel required to present their decision as if it was the result of an LFA.'[12] (McNeill 2012).

We may view RBM, logframes and indicators as rituals with meaning, thereby confirming ourselves as rational and sensible people.

> In a society where a rational ideology is predominant, decision-making for instance, is a sacred ritual which confirms and communicates the current ideology. Organizations collect information and perform their analysis because that is what well-run, proper organizations and decent decision-makers do. (my translation, March and Simon, in Hennestad and Revang 2009:49).

Although a substantial share see RBM as ritual, this is not the dominant perception. Close to 95% of the NGO respondents from the study mentioned above disagree that evaluations are mostly useful for external audiences (Norad

[12] LFA: Logical Framework Approach, or 'logframe'

2013c:47). This might indicate, once again, that academics have a more negative perception of RBM than what the reality is – or, at least, how NGO representatives perceive RBM. More empirical research from NGOs, following the entire value chain from implementing NSs to back-donors, could shed light on this issue.

6.5.5 Complexity

When assessing rural development in Norway there is wide acceptance for complexity, but when assessing aid projects in developing countries a linear logic is required (Red Cross informant 8). It seems paradoxical that complex development programmes at home and abroad are met with such different expectations and requirements, although Norad acknowledges that '*complex projects need long-term as well as different measuring system'* (Villa Kullid, at the Norad Civil Society Panel presentation of the Tracking Impact study).

David Mosse holds that international development is characterized by narrowing of means to quantifiable targets and at the same time widening of means into more complex programmes for good governance and strengthening of civil society (Mosse 2005:3). Drawing on Mosse, I will claim there is another paradox adding to the one above: more complex interventions, such as CB, are at the same time met with more simple methodological instruments, such as logframes and indicators.

Why is there limited acceptance of the complexity and difficulties in displaying international development results? One factor that probably leads to an impression that it is quite easy to achieve development results internationally might be how fund-raising campaigns present needs and solutions – with extremely simplified messages. Working many years in fund-raising, I have experienced that the more clearly and simple the message is framed, the more funds we are able to raise. Here two ethical considerations are in conflict: ethics

of duty and ethics of consequence (Johannessen et al. 2007:159–160). The first focuses on being honest and doing the right thing regardless of the results. The second focuses on the consequences of the act and less on how the results are achieved. To a large degree fund-raising follows the second ethical orientation – maximizing the results of a campaign in order to help the most people. The side-effect of following such a consequentialism ethic is both stereotyping and creating the perception that aid is accomplished in a straightforward and simple manner. This give an over-simplified impression of how aid works, which in turn may lead to higher expectations of results than if the campaigns had presented the real, more complex picture.

6.6 Alternative approach from Norad

Norad acknowledges many of the challenges in the current RBM regime and asks for more impact analysis, results for the poor and accumulated effects:

> *There is no consensus today on how to track sustainable result (…) The Civil Society Panel's method is a totally new way of tracking (…) [Today,] reporting from the CSOs are too narrow and short-term. (…) We should not be afraid to go outside the standard.* (Villa Kullid, Norad) [13]

A methodological challenge for proving impact identified by Norad, as well as the Red Cross and many scholars, is the challenges of aggregation, as previously debated. In other cases, the link between output and impact is an attribution problem (Norad 2009, Ortiz and Taylor 2009:9). Here some academics and consultants call for contribution analysis instead of attribution analysis, which Norad supports (Stein Erik Kruse, Mayne 2008, Riddell 2001:208).

[13] Villa Kullid at the dissemination seminar of the Civil Society Panel. Any incorrect citation is my responsibility as tape recorder was not used.

Contribution analysis

Norad established a panel of development researchers who tested contribution analysis (Norad 2012b). They started with changes at country level, and searched for contributions from lower levels. Quite contrary to Chambers' claim that '(…) aid agencies (…) are only familiar with traditional methodologies and are neither willing nor able to invest time in changing the approaches of those they fund' (2008:180), Norad here has shown willingness to try out new methods.

The background for the study by the Civil Society Panel was that evaluations overwhelmingly reported on individual projects and short-term results: 'Much less is known about the long-term impact and the wider effects of CSO development interventions (...)' (Norad 2012b:3).

Although there are certainly areas of improvement, the main conclusion from the Panel was that:

> (…) short-term objectives are overwhelmingly achieved (…), Norwegian CSOs and their partners are prudent and use available funds efficiently (…) [and] provide support to marginal and hard-to-reach areas (Norad 2012b)

Three interesting conclusions can be derived from this: First, that there are positive results. Second, it is possible to show results without basing it on a bottom–up approach with indicators as necessary building blocks or empirically, verifiable causality chains. Third, there are signals of acceptance from Norad for alternative approaches.

Norad's signals might reflect an inherent inconsistency in NPM calling for both more control and more autonomy at the same time (Christensen et al. 2007:101). The experience is more focus on control, more detailed reporting and subsequently increased bureaucratization. The RBM system requires verifiable, specific facts, and verifiable causality. Norad's quest for more substantive results by asking for 'wider effects' and 'going outside the standard' may prove a necessary corrective to the approach stemming from the NPM influence in recent

decades. The question is whether this new approach will fulfil all stakeholders' expectations.

6.7 Learning and PA

We have seen that RBM has deficits although the picture is more nuanced than the most sceptical academics have claimed. We have also seen that Norad acknowledges challenges and is experimenting with new approaches. Let us now turn to the alternative approach presented in Chapter 3 – the PA, based on the work of Robert Chambers (2008). The aim is to bring forth a methodology that empowers and ensures that the voices of the poor and excluded are heard.

PA involves observation, flexible interviews, intense interaction, joint reflections and data processing, and questioning underlying assumptions (Chambers 2008). An example of an alternative approach using intense interaction and joint data processing is the latest evaluation of the partnership between the Sudanese Red Crescent and Norwegian Red Cross, as presented. Chambers argues that the PA, with interaction and joint reflection releases energy and creates learning – and this we have seen in the example of the Sudan workshop.

Three of the other evaluations in this case study have also used participatory methods, but involved only staff, peers and volunteers – not beneficiaries (Bloom and Levinger 2011, IFRC 2011a, Beryl 2011). Chambers presupposes that 'participation' implies bringing forth the voices of those most in need. When beneficiaries do not participate themselves, I can partly agree with anthropologist Maia Green (2009), who holds that participation is often used rhetorically and that all assessments are facilitated by 'experts', and thereby filtered and customized. It is not feasible to include everyone, but as Chambers takes care to point out, any assessment should make sure to avoid biases (2008:35–36). Elite bias occurs if only headmen, village leaders or other influential people participate. User and present bias occurs if only those using the services and

those active in making themselves visible participate. ‘The sick lie in their huts. Inactive old people are often out of sight’, and likewise the ‘apathetic, weak and miserable’ (Chambers 2008:36). Although challenging in practice, any assessment process should ensure that these voices are included, not only those of the local elite and the most active (ibid. 35–36).

However, the team leader of one of the evaluations pointed out how time constraints did not allow for a participatory method when it came to involvement of all relevant key stakeholders (Bensky 2011:7). Even in projects with activities closer to the beneficiaries and without such long and blurred causality chains as in CB projects, it is often challenging to record data from beneficiaries, due to resource constraints:

> *In order to measure effects on health of hand-washing advocacy programmes, for instance, how many wash their hands, then you have to go in there and count, and there are no resources to do that. (*Red Cross informant 9)

Evaluations take time and are expensive (Red Cross informant 9), and beneficiaries or those most vulnerable are perhaps the ‘easiest’ to exclude as they seldom sit at the decision-making table.

The rhetoric use of ‘participation’ was one of the criticisms of the approach as presented in Chapter 3. The other elements criticized were its apolitical approach and power inequalities. Any aid intervention can be accused of being apolitical, and especially the Red Cross approach with its neutrality principle. When it comes to lack of addressing local power inequalities, I feel that Green is right. The evaluations presented in this case study do not problematize the issue of local power structures.

Drawing on Green and Mosse, I suggest that their criticisms have ignored two important issues: the practical infeasibility for donors to participate in all processes, and the need to aggregate and compare results.

One of the rationales behind PA ‘was that decision-makers needed the right information at the right time’ (Chambers 2008:67).According to the PA principles, decision-makers should listen, learn and to try ‘to get inside their skins and see the world as they do’ (Chambers 2008:74). As long as back-donor agencies cannot participate in person in all ‘participatory’ processes, reports are what they have to rely on. Chambers’ approach therefore does not fully answer the back-donors’ need. PA does not answer the need of Red Cross to compare and systematize results.

At the project level, however, we have seen from the Sudan case that the PA approach can have positive effects. Despite positive effects, PA appears less likely to alter the aid structure with asymmetrical relations between funding and receiving actors. Thus I must conclude that a new approach will not alter the potential for fundamentally changing what needs to be changed to achieve the objectives and potential of CB Programmes.

In my view, an alternative methodological approach is not sufficient for addressing the root cause of the challenges in achieving better results. Simply bringing in a new method will not deal with the challenges of asymmetric relationships, or poor coordination among funding partners. That will be a main issue addressed in Chapter 7.

6.8 Summary

We started the discussion of RBM by asking if the apparent lack of results is due to inability to document results or to improve results. Now I conclude that conventional RBM is not able to fully document the results of CB projects. Indicators cannot capture all substantial changes, while aggregated results lose important information along the way, and causality is complex and challenging to verify empirically.

RBM does not fully utilize the potential of contributing to improvements of results. This is due mainly to limited learning potential. In part, indicators lead to distortion and drawing of resources away from CB, although my case material does not fully confirm the initial assumption of distortion. In part, RBM and tracking draw resources away from humanitarian activities. Capacity and competence of PMER is a further constraint. Many evaluations ensure some participation, but beneficiaries are silently absent. RBM has shortcomings, and is perceived and practised in a way that does not fully support what staff feel they need: learning, trust, context and qualitative documentation of results.

When a higher share of NGO resources is spent on reporting instead of performing humanitarian assistance, more reporting might lead to less development assistance, as well as more bureaucracy, and lower – not improved – effectiveness. And yet, there are indications that politicians and Norad do not really get what they ask for through a greater focus on results.

However, the picture is nuanced and Red Cross staff can see both pros and cons with RBM. It leads to a more coherent system and better quality assurance. Red Cross staff-members use logframes as a basis for dialogue between partners. The use of evaluations in the Red Cross is not restricted to the conventional approaches – although from this case study, and without generalizing, conventional approaches seem dominant.

Lastly, we have noted several obstacles that limit the use of best available methods for RM: methodological legitimacy, budget constraints, lack of capacity and limited acknowledgment of the complexity of CB. Although there are positive aspects to using PA usage, alternative methodological approaches cannot fully address the root challenges.

7. CAPACITY BUILDING CONTENT

What are the main challenges of CB and does RBM address those?

Some claim that CB promises more than it can deliver, and the results remain absent or elusive (Fukuda-Parr 2002, Banik 2010). Moreover, the current RBM system does not fully document results, as demonstrated (Riddell 2001:269–270, Norad 2012b:5 and 16–17, Norad 2010, Bloom and Levinger 2011:29). In other words, CB programmes probably yield better results than what is documented. Further, we have seen that the potentials for improving results are not fully utilized, as learning is often not prioritized, which means there may well be more to be gained from current CB programmes.

In this chapter, I explore whether the current RBM practice sufficiently address the root causes of the challenges to CB as they are perceived by my informants. According to Fukuda-Parr et al., 'capacity has emerged as the one particularly elusive goal' despite all seminars, courses, training, computers, experts, consultancies and a new 'spirit of partnership' (2002:3). Norad fears the concept is a new white elephant (Norad 2013a:9–10). Although more use of the Participatory Approach might answer some of the challenges, it is unlikely to be enough. We have to dig deeper into the root challenges of CB, like ownership, culture, including trust and equality, donors' priorities, and coordination – issues that often remain often outside the scope of project or programme evaluations. Before proceeding to these four topics, I will present the transformation of Burundi Red Cross and achievements of CB and FD programmes.

7.1 BURUNDI Red Cross: transformation[14]

The first task the Burundi Red Cross (BRC) started with around 2007 was to recruit volunteers, as volunteers are the basis for everything Red Cross does. The following quote highlights the challenge BRC had in rebuilding the organization:

> *The first thing the potential volunteers asked us was: 'What will you give us?' The local communities were used to getting food from WFP, plastic shelters from UNHCR, and IFRC had been giving per diem. Imagine how difficult it was to ask them to volunteer without receiving anything! We had to make a promise, so we said –'We can give you training, but only if you show that you have done something in your local community first'. And we promised not to ask them for money, only services!*

The results of the re-establishment and re-orientation of BRC have been both tangible and numerous:

> *They started to cultivate, fetching water for those not able to do it themselves, collecting wood, building thatched houses, and they took sick people to hospital. To say no to volunteering became a non-option, because next time you yourself would benefit. The change we have seen is a change of mindset. People were used to receiving only. Now they started to realize they had resources!*

Recruiting volunteers, using local resources and building local units have been the focus for BRC. A crucial part has been restoring confidence in their own resources, to put people in the 'driving seat' of their own future, and build on elements present in the culture. By fostering new confidence and building on the culture, BRC now has a 'local-first approach' to challenges:

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[14] Based on internal presentation by Burundi Red Cross, June 2012: Organizational Development, Norwegian Red Cross Support to national societies, presentations and discussions, Red Cross, Oslo

> *As an example Burundi experienced a local famine in 2007/2008, but there were places that had a good harvest. We said to the local units: 'Please make an appeal locally before you appeal to headquarters.' So then the harvest from those places with a good harvest was collected and redistributed.*

In addition to local mobilized resources, the other most relevant factor for explaining the results for BRC is the dialogue with the partners. BRC thanked the Norwegian Red Cross for supporting them with seed money in the initial phase of this development. After this initial phase:

> *...the partners came back and asked to give us support. But, in the first meetings with PNS we had to tell them: 'Even if you bring money, you can't decide what we are going to do'*

This transformation was very context-dependent and built upon local knowledge, local values and confidence. It can be questioned whether the intended results of CB can be achieved without addressing and working with such fundamental building blocks.

7.2 CB projects: main achievements

Many NSs dependent upon external funding experience that donors require their own accounting and reporting system. This is a draw on resources and is not sustainable, as one informant explained:

> *German Red Cross, who supported a project, required reporting in their own system. They actually paid a person who sat and entered all receipts into the accounting system that the German Red Cross required, and then they entered all receipts again into Navision[15] afterwards. (...) This is*

[15] Navision is an accounting system that is provided through the Financial Development programme supported by the Norwegian Red Cross

> *highly unsustainable, and Lesotho Red Cross does not progress*. (Red Cross informant 5)

The objective of Financial Development (FD) is avoid such situations. A success story in this respect is a National Society in Africa that has profited from an FD Programme up to the point where they no longer need the Norwegian Red Cross as a partner. Through one accounting system, standardization of partner agreements and increased coverage of core costs, they have developed a sustainable organizational structure and sustainable activities.

> *Now they have (…) well-functioning routines, systems and governance mechanisms beyond the financial management, which works so well that they no longer need our support. That is a sign they have reach a goal. They manage without us.(..) All the partners now use one single accounting system. They have gained confidence from all Red Cross partners. They have managed to implement a standard memorandum of understanding that all partners have to sign, a partnership agreement, where all partners commit themselves to add 10% for coverage of core costs.* (Red Cross informant 2)

In sum, results from FD and CB can be described as greater efficiency, self-confidence, ownership and sustainability. According to my respondents, the results are as follows: fewer resources are spent on irrelevant administrative tasks and on satisfying different donors' reporting requirements, and there is increased confidence from partners. Further, they mention the development of own strategic plans, taking charge of their own development, of awareness being raised and thereby increased responsibility for the society beyond own family, and greater accountability towards stakeholders in general. These results lead to both increased funding in general and increased coverage of core costs in

particular. Hence, FD creates more sustainable organizations, FD concerns much more than budget control, and acts as a basis for further growth. [16]

7.3 Challenges of Capacity Building

According to my Red Cross informants, the most challenging issues regarding CB are:

Ownership:

- The funding partners' (PNSs) need for control in combination with their financial power
- Lack of interest in change from the National Society in question
- Ownership versus local needs
- Maintaining attention on sustainability in an environment with huge humanitarian needs, weak organizations and donors wanting to solve problems
- Short time-horizons
- Pushing standard indicators top–down conflicts with a bottom–up CB approach

Culture, trust and equality:

- The importance of understanding of context, creating trust, equality and building long-lasting partnership

Priorities:

- Risk of corruption versus need for decentralization
- Lack of competence in change management
- Back-donor priorities
- Low salaries and lack of human resources

Coordination:

- Poor coordination among partners

Other issues:

- CB is not a straight-lined process. If a new Board or Secretary-General is appointed, the process of CB might have to start all over again
- Strengthening the finance division risks creating imbalances within an organization
- Definitions of the concept in use: 'Organizational Development'/'Capacity Building'
- Over-ambitious donors and back-donors

[16] Summary of examples of impacts mentioned by Red Cross informants 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 11

We have already mentioned discussed over-ambitious donors, low salaries, definitions of the concept CB (the buzzword challenge) and short time-horizons. Now I will look into (1) ownership, (2) culture including trust and equality, (3) donor priorities, and (4) coordination.

7.4 Ownership – four main obstacles

Critics have argued that there is insufficient attention paid to ownership, existing capacities, commitment, and the priorities of the poor themselves (Fukuda-Parr et al. 2002:8, Hyden 2006, OECD 2006, Howell 2002, Chambers 1995). The issue of ownership dominated the CB discussion with my informants. The basis for CB is a strong ownership in the host National Society and motivation to change (Red Cross informant 6). There are at least four subtopics to examine here: (1) Western standards and who should change? (2) Time pressure versus sustainable results, (3) Local knowledge and South–South cooperation and (4) Ownership dilemma in extreme situations.

7.4.1 Western standards – who should change?

> *I want to believe that all partners are working on the principle that we should be promoting and supporting the self-reliant efforts of local communities to take charge of their own development, but in reality the situation on the ground is different. In my view, partners need to change significantly in their attempts to help NS much more to become self-sufficient*. (Red Cross informant 7)

The quote above suggests that it is the funding partners that have to make the most fundamental changes. Here lies the basic challenge, one which alternative results approaches as unlikely to change. Different methodological approaches within Results Management, such as PA, can be helpful in steering projects in the right direction, but will not be sufficient to change the funding partners (PNSs).

The development field has a tendency to prefer top–down approaches, imposing 'Western solutions' on others:

> The main ambition has been to carry out transfer of institutions from the north to the south (...) The way these transfers have occurred, however, has typically ignored the social and political realities on the ground in Africa (Hyden 2006:10).

The prevailing development discourse, where CB is a praised strategy, might hide how we once again are trying to 'impose Western ideas and forms of social organization on other societies' (Eggen 2011:2–3). To imply that the ones to be changed are the *others* is nothing new. The concept of 'poverty' does the same (Banik 2010). It is more comfortable for 'us' to talk about poverty than inequality, since the latter requires us to examine our own wealth. The top–down, Western-based approaches contrast the '(...) frequently heard calls for local adaption' (Eggen 2011:61). Such a top–down approach clashes with the need for CB to be bottom–up, endogenous, based on local realities etc. The Red Cross search for aggregated results through common indicators (see Table 2) serves as one example of pushing requirements top–down, conflicting with the bottom–up ideal of CB (Red Cross informant 11). The bottom-up approach is essential due to that '(...) OD is different in all National Societies. You need the commitment and ownership from the NS leadership to OD, for change to happen.' (Norwegian Red Cross 2013b).

7.4.2 Time pressure versus sustainable results

An example from Pakistan shows the dilemma between time pressures and building up and building on local knowledge. The Norwegian Red Cross got funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affaris (MFA) to work on recovery after the catastrophic floods in Pakistan in 2011. The support included establishment of a local branch, but funding was provided for only one year. Local branches are important in securing rapid responses to floods or earthquakes. Norwegian Red

Cross provide support in the form of health clinics or rescue teams within 48 or 72 hours, but it will always be the local branches that are present during the first hours. This particular flood-prone area had no sustainable local branch, and with the support from MFA this could be established. Then the question was how Norwegian Red Cross could work within that limited period, as the following quote makes clear:

> *The MFA funding was for one year and that makes ii complicated (…) A new branch in Pakistan is to be established and they [one Norwegian project coordinator and one Norwegian delegate] are about to write the project proposal (…) I stopped them and said there were two overarching things we had to do: 'First, the national society themselves has to employ a person. We will pay the salary, but they have to employ a person and train him or her if he or she does not have any Red Crescent experience. Secondly, we have to find out about the structures of the current branches (…) if we can build on strong branches in Pakistan and make them take a role and help the new branch, instead of us sitting here, being Norwegian, and knowing everything best'.* (Red Cross informant 1)

It is likely to take more than one year to get a new branch up and running and prepared for the next flood. With time-restricted funding, the risk is that project plans etc. will be written by Norwegian Red Cross and implementation managed from a distance – with very limited local sustainable Capacity Building as a result (Red Cross informant 1). Pressure to demonstrate short-term results may hinder long-term results, thus contributing to the impression of the elusiveness of CB.

7.4.3 Local knowledge and peer-to-peer cooperation

The Norwegian Red Cross (NRC) tries to build on local capacities and knowledge. Likewise the NRC works to ensure ownership and sustainability. Several Red Cross evaluations cover the issue of ownership. The IFRC report

highlights the local approach in Burundi as a key success factor, with its bottom–up approach, use of locally-sustained services and of local accountability (IFRC 2011a:6–7 and 18). The evaluation addresses the donor–recipient relationship, acknowledging that previous practices of the IFRC have been said to 'contribute to a culture of dependency', and adding that 'the process should be led by people who have knowledge and credibility – not outsiders' (IFRC 2011a:8 and 33).

Another study of CB (Bloom and Levinger 2011) points to the importance of local engagement in the design and execution of capacity-development initiatives and activities that can closely reflect local needs, priorities and resources. The evaluation highlights the negative side of links that go predominantly between sponsors and clients and not between peers (ibid.: 9, 25) This study shows that building on 'existing skills, competence, and knowledge' is one of the strongest drivers for CB (ibid.:45) and that cooperation between neighbouring NSs or branches should be utilized to a greater extent.

Learning from others through horizontal networking has proven to be a successful way of increasing capacity (Fukuda-Parr et al. 2002, Bloom and Levinger 2011). And yet, resources for building capacity through networking with peers seem restricted. One specific objective of the Financial Development Programme has been to 'establish peer support mechanisms so as to optimize the use of available expertise and experience' (Bensky 2011:40). However, this relevant approach was not supported by the necessary means, as 'financial resources for trips to the field were limited' (ibid.:13), so participants missed the opportunity to visit each other, network and learn from each other's experiences. The IFRC study (2011a) shows that simple solutions, like providing bicycles, can sometimes solve this:

> The issue of transport at the communal level is problematic: bringing people together takes time and costs money. Some external projects have provided bicycles to colline units to enable more effective transport. (IFRC 2011a:32)

7.4.4 Ownership dilemma in extreme situations

> *Often those national societies with the weakest structures are in those places with the greatest humanitarian needs.* (Red Cross informant 5)

Red Cross states that in principle support for Capacity Building will be provided only if the NS welcomes the support and the changes needed. CB programmes are to be based on the local organization's own strategies and plans. Alternatively, development of such documents is to be supported, and project documents developed in a joint process with the funder (Norwegian Red Cross 2012c:7). However, for countries with the most pressing humanitarian needs, the Norwegian Red Cross sees it as their duty to consider support also to organizations whose ability, possibility and understanding of own needs not are that explicit.

As noted in Chapter 5, if the aim is to demonstrate results, one should choose countries with a certain capacity. The challenges are often greatest for the poorest countries, and working with them also means that the prospects for results are far lower. The weak institutional capacity of the least developed countries 'also inhibits their ability and confidence to get into the driving seat' (Fukuda-Parr et al. 2002:9).

The case of Burundi RC illustrates the importance of ownership on the part of the receiving organization and being in the driver's seat (Norwegian Red Cross 2012c:6). There certainly exist examples of the opposite approach. Belize Red Cross experienced that the Norwegian Red Cross took lead, designed a project and wrote the project application. This approach led to low commitment and no ownership. Other examples where the Norwegian Red Cross has set the premises and dictated the host NSs have showed that such an approach leads to resistance and hence no results. (Nord-Sør konsulentene 2011:4)

It is not necessarily the content of CB as such that is a challenge to achieving results, but that the *principles* are not followed all the way:

> *(…) often when there are big challenges in the country, then there are also big challenges in the National Society and they should deliver what is needed to the weakest part of the inhabitants. Maybe there is an emergency situation, maybe there are internal conflicts in the country and ICRC needs the National Society to help them access some areas in order to do food distribution etc. Then it is easy for a National Society with limited resources to let us come in there and build a branch, let us fix the situation, deliver what is needed – but that is not sustainable at all!* (Red Cross informant 1)

The perceived pressure for short-term results is felt not only in emergency situations, but is also present in longer-term three-year agreements with Norad. As one informant states: '*We have to report something after one year'* (Red Cross informant 11). A whole year is also perceived as a long time: '*We believe Norad does not have time to sit for a whole year waiting for results'* (Red Cross informant 11).

We have seen that the Red Cross is aware of the challenges – that donor priorities are imposed, that time-frames are pushed, that there is a risk that 'we' often think 'we' have the best solutions and competence, etc. There are many examples of RC staff doing their outmost to alter the asymmetric relationship, and Norad is demonstrably supportive. We have seen from the Pakistan example that back-donors' push for short-term results is countered by Red Cross staff putting the long-term results and CB principles first. We have seen that reports recommending more peer-to-peer contact etc. However, there is a need for continuous attention to and more research on these issues – the ground floor of CB.

7.5 Culture, trust and equality: Change of organizational culture – and unintended effects

Organizational culture consists of values, norms and assumptions, and is expressed through symbols, habits and language, among other things (Høidal et al. 2008:62).

According to one of the most experienced Red Cross on Organizational Development, there should be more attention toward cultural elements. Experience has shown that behaviour, attitudes and commitment are essential for achieving sustainable results. This informant highlights the importance of employees and leaders treating each other with respect, challenging each other, and giving effective feedback. Further, cooperation, understanding, willingness to accept positive criticism, is emphasized, as well as support of management decisions and changes, ability to speak freely, and a management which is communicating both horizontally, vertically and diagonally (Red Cross informant 7).

There are two main perspectives on organizations and culture. The first one is based on means–end rationality, which assumes that it is possible to use an organization as a means towards an end. The premise is that causality is rationally calculated. This is the *instrumental* perspective on how organizations work. New Public Management and RBM are based on instrumentality. The second perspective is the *institutional* perspective which focuses more on values and norms. Actions are guided by experience and what is regarded as acceptable and reasonable (Christensen et al. 2010:14, 23, 25).

Although culture is important, it is debatable whether culture can be changed and treated as a means to an end. Means–end rationality resonates with the assumptions of 'Western' bureaucratic culture. As instrumental perspectives are seldom sufficient in rationally-oriented cultures, there should be no reason to

believe that instrumental perspectives and analysis should fit even better in contexts less based on Weberian bureaucracy and means–end rationality. With an instrumental perspective, there is also likely to be a tendency to focus on the formal and obvious aspects of an organization, although informal, hidden aspects can be equally important and 'may crucially affect performance' (OECD 2006:22).

The institutional perspective can help us to understand why change takes such a long time. My impression is that Red Cross staff often has the institutional perspective while the RBM logic follows the instrumental perspective of change. The use of indicators is based on this means–end rationality. The performance of Red Cross NSs is to be tracked through an indicator set with 120 checkpoints for what it is to be a well-functioning national society (IFRC undated). Some see this assessment tool as an attempt to dress down the NS (Red Cross informant 7), and as unnecessary interference.

> *The Red Cross Federation has defined what is 'Well-functioning National Societies'. Evaluations of performance should be done through self-assessments based on the criteria list: How often do you have Board meetings? Decisions should be documented etc. This was not popular! (...) It proved difficult to be that honest and transparent.* (Red Cross informant 4)

The RBM focus on control and tracking NS performance might have the unintentional effects of indicating a lack of trust and equality. To reveal and document challenging issues might be 'seen as though one is "dressing down" the NS' (Red Cross informant 7). Without trust between partners, challenging issues may be hidden. Such unintended effects may pull the CB efforts in the wrong direction. The way of shifting or pushing the responsibility for cultural change downwards, although unconscious and unintentional, might undermine the idea of building on local ownership, local values and trust. 'Governance provide[d] a new tool-kit, an instrument of control, an additional conditionality

for the time when the traditional blame-the-victim defense again becomes necessary' (George and Sabelli in Taylor 2004:130). Changing the culture is sometimes seen as necessary, but it should build on long-term partnership based on trust (Red Cross informant 7).

7.5.1 Trust and equality

> *We often believe we are best (Red Cross informant 4)*
>
> *[I]n reviewing Swedish and Norwegian assistance to public financial management in Africa (…) success has been achieved by starting with core routine processes, and moving on to sensitive issues –management development – only when trust has been built up gradually. (Red* Cross informant 7)

It might be naïve not to set conditions for cooperation.

> *Why we need to implement Financial Development programmes? Some of us have the view that to become a main partner country, we have to set certain demands – finance systems, financial competence and obligations.(…) We are subject to thorough assessments and revisions from Norad and ECHO, and our requirements to our partners are far from that high today.* (Red Cross informant 5)

The balance between trust and requirements is a delicate one. More attention devoted to results might increase the top–down requirements. At the same time, the pressure for showing results as well as limited availability of 'own funds' can lead to a felt need to set strict requirements to the implementing National Society. As one informant puts it: '*It is our money. We have to show results to the donor.'* (Red Cross informant 11)

7.6 Donor priorities

Internally, there is a Red Cross debate on whether the purpose of sound financial management is to improve service delivery. Some feel that CB support is too technical and too heavily directed towards management requirements. This leads to projects focusing on management of funds, administration and strategy development support, whereas what is needed is a greater focus is needed on recruitment, training and retention of volunteers (Nord-Sør konsulentene 2011:3)

Critics warn that the normative standard is the donors' organizational form, and argue that the ownership rhetoric hides a prolonged Northern dominance (Howell 2002, Taylor 2004, Bohwasi et al.1998):

> (...) good governance has become what development and modernization were two decades ago: a hegemonic discourse that seeks to allow the North to define the South in its own image (Taylor 2004:136)

Moreover, the effect of (unconsciously) wanting to create Southern organizations in our own (Northern) image might be that the only partner-organizations are those that share donors', Northern, values and ways of working. Thus, 'certain parts of civil society are included, while various traditional and more informal organizations are excluded' (Norad 2012b:12).

> There is also a clear inclination to emphasize, or even equate good governance with the technical qualities of efficient management and the main accountability of client governments to funders/creditors and other external agencies. (Taylor 2004:128)

Priorities – streamlined organizations less relevant for change?

As shown earlier, Red Cross staff display two motives for FD Programmes: first and foremost strengthening and growth of the NSs for improved impact for those in need, but also improved financial control. Regardless of this discussion, Norad has expressed concerns regarding the side-effects of the content of CB Programmes:

> *There is a control aspect built into the Capacity Building all the way. That is one of the reasons that some of the most important change-makers within civil society get very little support. These organizations – tenant farmers, women associations, labour unions – often with a weak membership democracy and not that good at modern organizational management as we value – these organizations, when they start to move, things are really happening. The NGOs can do a lot, but a real impact on society is lacking*. (Ivar Evensmo)

If the inclination towards control has the consequence that the potentially most influential change-makers do not get support, then the result is less societal impact. One risk is ending up with organizations that are streamlined and proficient at result-reporting, but with little or no relevance or grassroots connections:

> *(…)you won't get a union with members being beaten, you won't get them to write long reports. They do not have time for that. It is only those without something important to do that has time for such tasks*. (Ivar Evensmo)

This issue of donor priorities is seldom mentioned in evaluations and results reports.

Lack of interest or resources?

A key success factor concerns *who* initiates the development programmes. Motivation may suffer if the programme is imposed from outside. Despite the Red Cross' focus on that key criterion of success, there are still situations where

> *(…)the national societies do not always understand the importance [of the Financial Development programme] (...) For some of the national societies in the Southern Africa region, I believe there is minimal interest in change*. (Red Cross informant 2)

Internally, some contest this perspective. Lack of ownership is often more linked to lack of resources than lack of willingness, according to one informant:

> *Of course, they are willing, but they have so limited personnel. In addition, funding is often restricted to projects.* (Red Cross informant 1)

In addition to the challenge of personnel resources and funding comes the question of competence and priority within a given Red Cross National Society. Often organizations are good at documenting and analysing, but not on change management or implementation.

> Normally, it is not the analytical competence to assess that is missing in change projects, but the ability to diagnose the need for change and the ability to implement the changes. (my translation, Hennestad and Revang 2009:50)

For Red Cross it seems that both parts need more attention. Change management is definitely needed:

> *Management and change management is a profession. Few of us are born with that competence – to make the organization move in one direction, to make changes happen, and so that those changes serve a purpose that makes things better.* (Red Cross informant 1)

In addition to competence deficit, those responsible for CB are often placed in a subordinate position. '*They have an Organizational Development advisor, or something like that, placed in a subordinate position in the organization*' (Red Cross informant 1). That signals low priority.

7.7 Coordination

> *Coordination is important: that PNSs do not come and push their own systems. That's obvious and banal, but happens anyway (…) There is a*

> *shocking waste of resources in this [lack of] coordination.* (Red Cross informant 5)

Arguably, the priorities of an organization and the management of projects are less fragmented when they are achieved through a participatory, bottom–up approach. Today we see the same NSs being drawn in many directions with fragmented goals. It might not always be in the interest of the funding partner to follow the conclusions of a Participatory Approach. There is a tendency to pick and choose, or emphasize certain elements, or wrap activities into a policy model with legitimacy in domestic policy circles (Mosse 2005). I hold that it is naïve to believe that new and better assessment methods will lead to less fragmented priorities. The challenge is not one of methodology, but the worldview of the donor countries, their policy priorities and the asymmetrical donor-recipient relations. As the informant quoted above also explained, the recipient NSs often do not say no if they are offered funding.

Moreover, recipient NSs do not necessarily base all their priorities and funding applications on PA, including communities and intended beneficiaries. They also pick and choose. As one informant notes, NSs are not passive receivers, but tactically adjusts their proposals and applications to what they know the funding partner prefers (Red Cross informant 8).

Fragmentation – The project model is not fully in use

One of the main challenges that RBM and the four evaluation reports address only to a limited degree is fragmented management (Fukuda-Parr et al. 2002:5). Some of my respondents were concerned about the unwillingness of various donors to coordinate, or let the implementing NS lead the processes. Underneath this ‘unwillingness’, I feel, there is a structural challenge in the way that programmes and projects are managed.

Interventions are organized as projects or programmes[17](IFRC 2011b), but there seems to be a lack of coherent management and systematic use of a management model. I hold that the project management model is not fully applied. A project manager leads a project and should report to a steering group (Jessen 2001:237). The role of a steering group is to:

- make sure that the objectives of the project or programme are coherent and relevant
- make sure the project has the necessary mandate and resources
- ensure efficient and adequate reporting routines, so that project management does not have to use scarce resources on 'time consuming discussions regarding who should have what type of information at what time, in what format etc.' (my translation, Jessen 2001:246)
- inform internal and external stakeholders
- take necessary decisions regarding larger changes in the project
- support the project manager and take necessary action towards stakeholders

(based on Gustavsson and Hallin 2012 and Jessen 2001:246–247)

The steering group should consist of 'representatives of various stakeholders' (Gustavsson and Hallin 2012:42). For a NGO project, these are likely to be representatives from funding partners as well as representatives from the end-users or the beneficiaries' community.

Especially for weak NSs, the problem is that there seldom exists one coordinated steering group for projects related to or involving CB components. Weak NSs have not been able to develop their own strategy plan with adequate activities which they invite PNSs to support (Red Cross informant 11). Then they have to base their activities on the priorities of PNSs and back-donors. The result is that project managers often have to report to many and disparate stakeholders with differing requirements, expectations, project-plan formats and reporting formats.

[17] Programmes often have more strategic or long-term goals than projects, and a programme might cover several projects (Jessen 2001:30–31)

> *All the partners have different requirements regarding format and how the logframe shall look. Then the Belgians arrive and want this system. Then the French come with that system. Then we arrive, but we are flexible and tell them to use what they already use. Then the Dutch come … Burundi Red Cross has 8–9 partners and 5–6 logframes. All of them set up differently.* (Red Cross informant 2) *It is so crazy. For them it is so much work that could have been spent on other tasks.* (Red Cross informant 10*) (…) This is the overall consequence of how we as a movement are unable to coordinate. All the costs are pushed downwards towards those partners which need the most to really use their time/resources on really working on the programme* (Red Cross informant 2).

The situation described in this dialogue is also the main reason why Norwegian Red Cross supports weak NSs with Capacity Building. The objective is for these NSs to develop their own strategies. Stronger NSs will be able to take the lead (Red Cross informant 11).

Without a coherent management like a steering group, project management must spread their resources on fulfilling the different objectives of different stakeholders and use disproportionate amounts of resources on reporting. This obstructs results. As this is the situation in many weak countries, the lack of coordination can be a highly relevant explanation for lack of results. Then it is not enough to evaluate the results of the single projects. As shown in Chapter 5, projects generally do achieve their objectives. And yet, overall impact seems to be lacking. More research is needed on if and how aid structure and lack of coordination influences long-term results.

Long chain – Many layers

In a classical project model, the project leader relates to the steering group. In the Red Cross, there is a long chain of actors between the project leader and the back-donors:

> Local branch -> National Society -> project coordinator in Norwegian RC -> management of Norwegian Red Cross -> Norad, MFA or another back donor

One of the project coordinators based in Oslo expressed confusion and uncertainty whether she could meet the expectations regarding her own role as regards project governance and Results Management system:

> *The challenge for us is that it is not us that are managing the projects. (…) Actually we are placed a bit on the side. Thereby the system does not feel relevant (...) I have to make sure the reports are delivered, that we start by writing good planning documents. (…) Often we have mechanisms (…) standard format, but it goes very wrong when I have to answer them. I'm not the one who has the answer or makes the decisions. It is their programme. (…)There is one level too many compared to the intentions.* (Red Cross informant 10)

In addition to many levels between a project leader and the back-donors, representatives from back-donors are spread in different funding countries.

Fragmented management makes it very difficult to steer towards specific, achievable and relevant goals – three of the SMART criteria. Delivering results is most often seen as the responsibility of the implementing party. This creates a paradox.

The Norwegian Red Cross reports on coordination and cooperation on a regular basis to Norad and MFA, but this is mainly related to specific projects or programmes, and not the overall aid structure. In addition, some perceive the issues of ownership, coordination, priorities and equality within the Red Cross movement not to be something that back-donors should be bothered with. As one informant stated: 'W*e see these as internal problems'* (Red Cross informant 11). Although ownership and coordination are part of RBM to some extent, these are still two of the factors that impede better impact of CB. In my view, neither better RBM nor more PA will be sufficient to change this.

7.8 Final remarks, chapter 7

The main challenges to achieving CB, as seen by Red Cross experts, are ownership, culture, priorities and coordination. These challenges might not be more easily overcome through alternative results approaches. It might be relevant to examine the suggested need to change the funding partners and to change the structure of how projects are governed at steering-group level. Rather than new methods of assessing results, governance that is more coherent might contribute to better results. Further empirical research is needed to conclude whether changes in priorities, aid structure or improvements in project governance, at the donor side of the aid channel, can contribute to improved results and less ‘elusiveness’ in CB results.

8. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis set out to investigate, based on a case study of the Norwegian Red Cross, why Capacity Building (CB) seems to remain an elusive goal despite the massive efforts of Results Based Management (RBM). The overall conclusion is that the impression of poor results or elusiveness is not always correct, and that the current RBM system appears to be better than its reputation. Although much of the criticism of RBM may be valid, it should be noted that the positive aspects are overlooked in most of the literature. Still, there is definitely room for improvements in results management as well as in the aid structure –influencing the possibilities of achieving better results for those in most need.

One of the main issues of this thesis has been the conflict between a bottom–up approach, CB, and a partly top–down approach, RBM. In this concluding chapter, I will take a bottom–up approach and start with the last sub-question:

1) What are the main challenges of CB, and does RBM address those?
2) Does RBM document actual results of CB and contribute to improved results through learning?
3) Do unrealistic ambitions and goals set Capacity Building up for failure?

8.1 Challenging aspects influencing CB

Some of the achievements of CB, and the Financial Development Programme in particular, are: i) more efficient administration, ii) increased trust and iii) implementing NSs taking lead in strategy development and planning. The main challenges for achieving more and better results are lack of ownership and lack of coordination between funding partners. Without generalizing, I have suggested, on the basis of this case study, that the project model approach has been only partially implemented in the aid sector. Without more coordinated

governance, improved results are likely to be obstructed. More research is needed to see how coordination and ownership influence long-term results. RBM and PA approaches partly cover the challenging issues of ownership and coordination, but, in my view, no methodological approach will be sufficient to tackle the root causes of the challenges: donor priorities, time pressure, resources for peer-to-peer cooperation, willingness to coordinate and compromise among funding partners and so forth. It is also worth noting that donor priorities do not necessarily yield the intended results. An interesting paradox is revealed between building streamlined organizations and supporting those organizations which are perceived as being most relevant for making real changes.

8.2 Methodology choices partly obstruct learning and documentation of actual results

I have questioned the perspective that 'The widely reported underperformance of aid in earlier years would not occur in the future as RBM methods would ensure high levels of performance' (Hulme 2007:18), as well as challenged the one-sidedly negative criticisms from researchers. RBM can contribute to improved results through more systematic approach and quality assurance. Armed with researchers' criticisms of RBM, I was struck by the positive attitude towards RBM among my respondents, and also by the variety of approaches that the Red Cross uses to evaluate projects, ensure learning and document results. However, this case study has also shown that RBM is ill-suited for documenting results of CB. It also confirmed that RBM can be counterproductive because of its extensive use of resources, limited attention to learning, and being a drain on energy. Worth noting, however, is that my initial assumption of extensive distortion has not been confirmed: I found that both the Norwegian Red Cross and Norad do indeed give priority to CB projects.

This study has identified a gap between RBM intentions and practice, as well as a gap between needs and requirements. Indicator tracking and procedural reporting have gained dominance at the expense of reflection and learning. I have indicated four main explanatory factors for this: methodological preferences, budget constraints, limited capacity and limited acceptance for the complexity of CB.

Drawing on methodological theory, I have suggested that the prevalence of conventional methods, and especially indicators, is because the natural-science tradition has higher legitimacy than constructivist methods involving narratives and reflections (see Knutsen and Moses 2007). Budget limitation is a practical hindrance just as relevant as ideology. Although indicators are never meant to give the full picture of any project, it seems unrealistic and unjustifiable to conduct data tracking *and* in-depth studies for all programmes. Despite the intentions of New Public Management to move from a focus on control to a focus on results, the dominant practice still focuses on control and donor accountability.

That said, methodological choices and budget constraints are not the only reason why the conventional approach still dominates. Two other explanations are limited understanding of the need for RBM (or PMER) capacity, and limited acceptance of the complexity entailed in building capacity. This study has indicated that the linear thinking of RBM is ill-suited for capturing the complexity of CB.

There is something very appealing about the Participatory Approach (see Chambers 2008) and PA ideas are in line with the CB concept (bottom–up, participation, ownership etc.). As shown by the workshop example, PA can create learning and energy, and thereby the possibility of contributing to improved results. On the other hand, it seems questionable whether PA can respond to back-donor demands for documentation, and whether it has the potential to address the root challenges of the CB concept.

8.3 Unrealistic ambitions set CB up for failure

Both Norwegian official development policy and the Norwegian Red Cross set high ambitions. My findings suggest that the capacity of the aid sector does not match these ambitions. The objectives of Norwegian development policy are set at a societal level, while the objectives of NGO projects are set at the institutional level. This leads to a gap in levels, wherein overall ambitions and project scopes do not match. In fact, many aid projects, including Capacity Building, do achieve their immediate goals (see Riddell 2001:269–270, Norad 2012b:5 and 16–17, Norad 2010, Bloom and Levinger 2011:29). However, this is not always visible in the societal and long-term impacts. The apparent lack of results might explain the diminishing confidence in aid (SSB 2013) and the quest for more efficient aid. One explanatory factor behind the perceived lack of results is lack of capacity, including the challenge of low salaries and high turnover.

Indeed, the ambitions set at project level are also high. This is driven both by pursuit for funding and for an intense desire to facilitate changes. The number of goals and requirements from various initiatives and the number of donors act as a third factor that can lead to unrealistic ambitions.

8.4 Paradoxes, multifaceted and interlinked challenges

Throughout this thesis, I have presented paradoxes and dilemmas in RBM and CB. One dilemma inherent in NPM, between control and autonomy, is still relevant as one explanation for weak results or documentation thereof. The thesis has also shown other dilemmas and paradoxes: i)support to weak NSs versus results requirements, ii)requirements of reporting and low administration costs versus weak capacity to track and report, iii)acceptance of complexity home versus abroad, iv)more complex interventions meets ‘simpler’ methodological instruments, v)distance between who is setting overall goals and who are responsible for implementing, vi)need for quick interventions in extreme

situations versus long-term results, vii)short-term results versus sustainability, viii)building streamlined organizations versus need for ‘real’ change makers. Mention has also been made of the aversion to risk-taking as well as the dilemma between prioritizing the least developed countries and being able to demonstrate short-term results.

The thesis has also presented various factors that can help to explain why CB seems to remain an elusive goal despite massive efforts of RBM. I have discussed whether the weak results are only an impression, or if they are real. This case study suggests that the answers lie in both categories: some are explained by actual weak results and some are only impression-based. Figure 5 summarizes the explanatory factors split in those two categories for each of the three sub-questions.

For example is the impression of weak results caused by (too) high ambitions and contextualised results lost in aggregation. Actual weak results are e.g. capacity constraints, limited priority of learning in the RBM practice and lack of local ownership. See more examples in figure 5. My point is that there is no single explanation for the neither actual nor apparent weak results. The challenges in both demonstrating and improving results are multi-faceted.

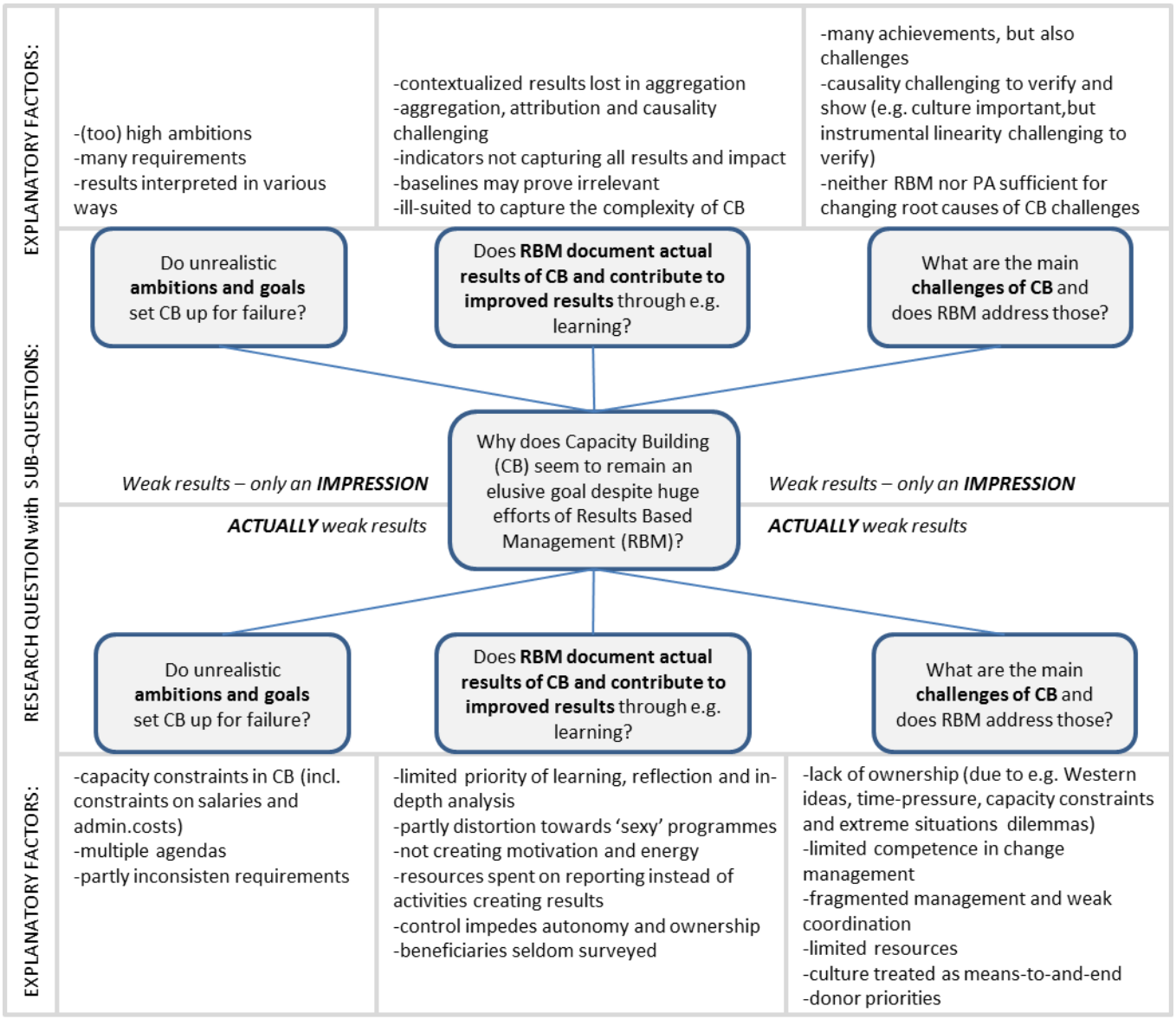

Figure 5: Summary of explanatory factors

The three sub-questions under discussion are also interlinked. High ambitions lead to high expectations. If they are not met, this is likely to lead to calls for more effectiveness and more Results Based Management. These requirements become translated into a certain RBM practice which in the next step also will influence CB projects. Both setting objectives and RBM practice will influence CB results. Further research is needed to analyse how goals and RBM can contribute to improved CB results in the future.

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Appendix 1: List of interviewees

Simonsen, Anette: Consultant, Course provider and Head of Results Management

Evensmo Ivar: Senior Advisor, Civil Society Department, Norad

Kruse, Stein Erik: Consultant and Partner at Nordic Consulting Group

Eggen, Øyvind: Senior Researcher at NUPI (now Policy Director, Evaluation Department, Norad)

Red Cross staff:

- Country representative Lebanon (previously programme coordinator for Sudan)
- Deputy Head of Programme Division International Department (previously programme coordinator for the Americas)
- Head of Finance Division (previously short-term mission in Zimbabwe)
- Head of Organizational Development Burundi
- Head of Resources International Department
- PMER advisor (Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting)
- Programme coordinator for East Africa
- Programme coordinator for Sudan (previously programme coordinator for Lesotho, Haiti, regional representative for East Africa and others)
- Programme coordinator for Tsunami programs (now SOS Children Villages)
- Regional representative Southern Africa (previously programme coordinator for Lesotho, West Africa, and Senior Advisor Disaster Risk Reduction East Africa)
- Regional representative for Southern Africa and Financial Development Advisor
- Senior advisor Organizational Development (previously programme coordinator for Iraq)

Appendix 2: Evaluations, policy documents and result reports

The following evaluations, policy documents and result reports have been used as empirical case material:

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Bloom, Evan and Beryl Levinger (2011): *Fulfilling the Promise: How National Societies Achieve Sustainable Organizational Development – A Multi-Country Study*. Available at: http://www.ifrc.org/docs/Evaluations/Evaluations2011/Global/GlobalODStudy11.pdf

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Appendix 3: Seminars and internal meetings

April 2011: Results of Development Cooperation through Norwegian NGOs in East Africa, presentation of study by Tärnstrøm at Norad, Oslo

December 2011: 'On the road home' seminar: On monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment, Oslo – Introduction by Howard White, director, International Initiative for Impact Evaluations (3ie)

November 2011: Presentation of PMER framework and practical guidelines, Red Cross, Oslo

November 2011: Dissemination of Financial Development Review, Red Cross, Oslo

December 2011: Norad Conference 2011: Development assistance and conflict. Norad Annual Report presented, Oslo

March 2012: What are the effects of Norwegian assistance? Presentation of report by civil society panel, Norad, Oslo

June 2012: Organizational Development, Norwegian Red Cross Support to National Societies, presentations and discussions, Red Cross, Oslo

April 2013: Study of the evaluation work of Norwegian civil society organizations, Norad, Oslo