

Evaluating the Effects of International Advocacy Networks*

By Ricardo Wilson-Grau¹

Introduction

This “think piece” will first sketch the special challenges of evaluating the effects² of the advocacy work of international social change networks. I will then present the approach to evaluating advocacy that I use. This essay is an adaptation of my most recent writing on the broader subject of “Complexity and International Social Change Networks,” which is a chapter in a book by the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict.³ These networks almost by definition have an advocacy component, which often is their central activity. Furthermore, my belief is that to a greater or lesser extent, the challenges and the general evaluation methodology I outline in this essay are applicable to almost all social change organisations. I leave that judgement, however, to the reader.

My understanding of the challenges of advocacy for international networks and my approach to evaluating their impact comes from two sources. First, there is my own experience. For ten years in the 1980s, I was managing director of Inforpress Centroamericana, a news agency based in Guatemala. I was involved in policy research and communication for a target audience of political and economic decision-makers, and those who influenced them. This involved frequent briefings to editorial boards, legislators, academics, human rights leaders, amongst others, in North America and Europe. Then, for two and a half years to 1993, I was a senior manager at Greenpeace International where I co-ordinated the Toxics Campaign, the second largest of the five global campaigns. Since then, I have had different assignments in advocacy with organisations in Latin America, Asia and Africa in my position as senior advisor with Novib, the Dutch development agency. More recently, as a consultant and evaluator I have worked with a variety of international networks that span the global North and South.

The second source is the knowledge and experiences of the international community of advocacy evaluators and especially the smaller community of evaluators of international networks. These practitioners are generating a growing body of literature on network evaluation that is rich in general lessons learned to date. Nonetheless, relative to other areas of evaluation, the theory and practice of international network impact evaluation is in its infancy. Consequently, the ideas I present in this essay are necessarily tentative. I make them in full awareness that there is probably much more learning occurring outside of my experience and the grey and published literature to which I have access.

What is a “network”? The phenomenon has different names—coalition, partnership, alliance, union, league, association, federation, confederation, as well as network, which is

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the generic name used in this essay. What distinguishes international networks is that they are groups of autonomous organisations (and perhaps individuals) in two or more countries or continents who share a purpose and voluntarily contribute knowledge, experience, staff time, finances and other resources to achieve common goals.

During the 1990s, advocacy networks became an increasingly important means of social synergy and for some a central characteristic of the world today.⁴ By 2000, one calculation was of 20,000 transnational civic networks active on the global stage.⁵ These formal or informal structures bring together diverse social actors to enable them to pursue common goals. In a globalising world with increasingly effective means of communication, an advocacy network offers unique political and organisational potential.

An international advocacy network typically performs a combination of two or more of these functions⁶:

- *Analyse global problems* from local, national and regional perspectives and knowledge.
- Filter, process and *manage knowledge* for the members.
- *Promote dialogue, exchange and learning* amongst members.
- *Shape the agenda* by amplifying little known or understood ideas for the public.
- *Convene* organisations or people.
- *Facilitate action* by members.
- *Build community* and often a movement by promoting and sustaining the values and standards of the group of individuals or organisations within it.
- *Mobilise and rationalise the use of resources* for members to carry out their activities.
- *Strengthen international consciousness*, commitment and solidarity.

When a network focuses its goals and functions on changing relations of power between societies, then it constitutes what I refer to here as an international advocacy network, and hereafter simply as advocacy network. An advocacy network generally will have these objectives:

- a) Influence change in institutional policies, practices, programmes or behaviour.
- b) Develop the capacity of civil society organisations and individual citizens to exercise that pressure for change.
- c) Restructure society so that individuals and groups are involved in decisions made by other social actors but which affect them.

This special nature and combination of functions that characterise an advocacy network leads to three challenges for evaluating (and for that matter planning and monitoring as well).

The complex, open and dynamic challenge

An advocacy network is characterised by its complexity, openness and dynamism and, in addition, operates in a similarly unpredictable environment. “Complex” means that the relationships between the members and the global, regional, national and often sub-national advocacy network co-ordinating structures, which are the essence of an advocacy network, are massively entangled. Numerous interdependent variables—political, economic,

social, cultural, technological, ecological— in the external environment, and many others among the advocacy network’s participants, influence its activities.

The relations between these autonomous, voluntary advocacy network actors are very open. Their behaviours are dependent on the diverse contexts in which they are embedded and where they act. That is, factors outside the boundaries of an advocacy network may have as much influence on behaviour as the social actors within it. What appears to be relevant may become irrelevant, and the accidental may become causal. Furthermore, participants enter and exit with sufficient fluidity so that commonly it is difficult to identify at any given moment all who are involved.

In addition, the relationships amongst advocacy network participants are dynamic. The interplay of a large and diverse number of advocacy network actors strongly influences them and their environment. The change is constant but discontinuous and the interaction generates new patterns of relations. New structures are established and old ones disappear. The advocacy network promotes and is nourished by the enthusiasm and energy characteristic of its voluntary nature. It benefits from the dynamism to the extent to which the advocacy network is able to balance the diverse contributions of members with joint, sustained collaboration.

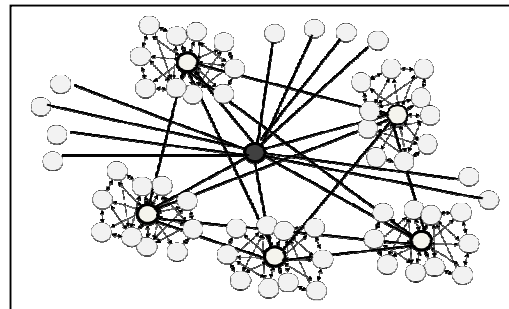
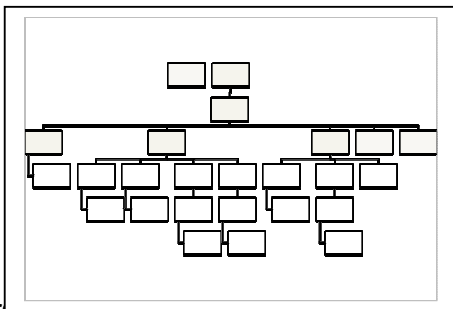
Because of the complexity, openness and dynamism, an advocacy network’s activities and results also tend to be highly unpredictable. Multi-level and multi-directional causality drives interaction in an advocacy network, as well as in the environment in which it operates. It is messy, not orderly. Sometimes the part determines the whole. Sometimes the whole determines the part. Sometimes, parts determine each other.

In these circumstances, the demands on members and the advocacy network itself to change course, often dramatically and at short notice, increasingly overrun planning, monitoring and evaluation processes and procedures. Conventional means for managing for operational effectiveness and efficiency and progress towards goals, are not simply difficult but often useless.

Advocacy networks are unique organisations

The second evaluation challenge is that advocacy networks are unique organisations that contrast to a large degree with the corporate, governmental or civil society organisational structures of their members. To paraphrase systems thinker Russell Ackoff: *An advocacy network is not the sum of its parts. It is the product of the parts' interaction.*

An advocacy network is loosely organised and non-hierarchical, with authority and responsibility flowing from and around autonomous members. Accountability is highly diffuse for what happens, what is achieved and by whom. Within an advocacy network, all but a few accountabilities constantly shift. For example, the organisational chart on the left is



common for government, business or civil society organisations...typically the organisational forms of the members of an advocacy network.

The advocacy network's own organisational chart, however, is quite different, similar to the diagram on the right. This is further complicated because networks share accountability for many actions with allies outside the advocacy network.

The difference between an advocacy network and other organisational forms, however, is more than the structure of relationships of power, money, information, co-operation and activities. The nature of those relationships is also unique in two other important ways: democracy and diversity.

Democracy is a necessity because the principal actors in the advocacy network are voluntary, autonomous organisations. In relation to the advocacy network, so too are the individuals that participate on their behalf; the majority are not employees of the advocacy network. Hierarchical management and command and control simply do not work well with these social actors. Democratic management and participation are the keys to empowerment, ownership and concerted, common action in an advocacy network.

Advocacy networks can address the causes for dissatisfaction but the concern for democracy is always present. Thus, advocacy networks operate more through facilitation and co-operation around the activities of its organisational components than by directing programmes and executing projects. Success depends on equity in the relations and exercise of power within the advocacy network. Stakeholders expect leaders to stimulate and strengthen the active participation of all members and their effective work in alliances.

Therefore, members' participation in decision-making is the best guarantee that the decision will be implemented. Echoing the views of the Canadian International Development Research Centre's Evaluation Unit, the willingness of the members of an advocacy network to monitor and interpret success (along with planning, implementing and adjusting activities) constitutes ownership in an advocacy network.⁷ The planning task is to enable each one of these heterogeneous actors to make a creative and constructive contribution. The monitoring and evaluation task is to assess how well the actors are interacting, understand and learn from the mistakes and successes of their co-operation.

Another unique difference of an advocacy network compared to other organisational forms is the great *diversity* amongst its members, of course within the unity of their common purpose. Part of the genius of this organisational form is that its members share common values and a collective purpose but have different visions and strategies on how to achieve change. The motivation of the principal actors—the members—in joining an advocacy network is wide ranging. Some may be more interested in receiving information or the tools it generates while others join for the political spaces and relationships an advocacy network offers. Many but perhaps not all may wish to be institutionally associated with the common, larger purpose or community. In situations of social or political conflict, the motivation may be simple protection. The conviction that they cannot achieve meaningful political objectives by working alone drives some advocacy network members. In sum, the strength and sustainability of an advocacy network depends to a significant extent on its usefulness to its members, who may very well have different interests and needs in belonging to the advocacy network.

In sum, because advocacy networks are such unique organisations that demand empowerment of the enormously diverse actors within it, the task of evaluation is also unique.

Advocacy network stakeholders expect conventional forms of evaluation

The third challenge of evaluation in advocacy networks is that stakeholders think of the advocacy network from the perspective of their own government agency, civil society organisation or business. More specifically, they want advocacy networks to be evaluated as they are accustomed to in their own organisations' programmes and or projects.

In addition, cause-effect attribution is thorny in all social change endeavours but especially so in advocacy networks. Their political purpose is to influence the structure, relations and exercise of power, from the national (and sometimes the local) to the global. These achievements rarely are attributable solely to the activities of the advocacy network. Usually they will be the fruit of a broad effort with other social actors. Frequently, results will be collateral and unintentional. Therefore, establishing reasonable links of cause and effect between an advocacy network's activities and the political results it aims to achieve is of another order of attribution than that faced by the organisations that make up its membership or for consultants accustomed to evaluating other types of organisations.

Understandably, steering committee or board members and donors want to see quick progress and clear results for money and time invested in the advocacy network "project". Consequently, they exert project-minded, cost-benefit pressure. Their frame of reference is the familiar project evaluation approach based on the linear, causal chain: inputs → activities → outputs → outcomes → impact. Thus, they expect efficiency in the inputs → activities → outputs sequence, and they want to know that this sequence effectively leads to outcomes and impact. Are we doing well? Was our hypothesis valid? Did we do the right thing in a worthwhile way?⁸

These are all valid evaluative questions but for an advocacy network, they are problematic. When an advocacy network carries on short-term projects such as organising events or doing research, typically managed by a global, regional or country secretariat, the conventional project mode of evaluation may be appropriate. When, however, the focus is on advocacy, project methodologies do not work. Why? Well, for three reasons that flow from the challenges presented above.

1. Advocacy networks are in the category of organisational forms that Michael Quinn Patton calls "non-linear, dynamic social change agents".⁹ They act based more on values than hypotheses. Their advocacy activities take place in complex situations without predetermined, predictable, or controllable results. Even the "right" inputs-activities-outputs equation is often uncertain, because what works and does not work sometimes only emerges as the interactions of the advocacy network unfold.
2. In an advocacy network's activities and results—all immersed in fluid relationships amongst members and the unpredictable struggle for social change—cause and effect is rarely known and frequently not knowable, and then usually in retrospect.
3. The time horizon of an advocacy network and its advocacy effects is long-term and especially uncertain. The farther out the time horizon, the more uncertainty

increases. Opportunities and risks proliferate, and with more time, these variations magnify uncertainty.

For these reasons, sometimes the environment in which advocacy networks operate is so volatile that project management may not work even for short-term secretariat projects. The project approach is even less appropriate for the management of a programme of projects or for the advocacy network as a whole. A recent study undertaken by the European Centre for Development Policy Management's draws on the existing literature on networks and capacity development, as well as on several case studies of successful network experiences. The study summarises the expectations of one of the most important categories of advocacy network stakeholders—funders:

...donor interventions with networks are mainly in the form of projects, usually of limited duration, that rely on input-output models (e.g. logical frameworks) and measure success in relation to the attainment of clear, measurable results. The characterisation of networks offered by workshop participants and reflected in this paper suggests a need for approaches that better reflect the dynamic, fluid qualities of networks and the importance of participation, process and attention to how capacity issues play themselves out in networks.¹⁰

In conclusion, do these challenges imply that evaluating results is impossible for an advocacy network? Definitely not. Assessing effectiveness (and efficiency for that matter) in an advocacy network simply requires innovative approaches.

Evaluating for results in an advocacy network

By definition, the reason for being of an advocacy network is to contribute to social change. Therefore, it is of fundamental importance for an advocacy network to assess its results. But, what results should you evaluate? In the chart Results, Results, Results I customised the conventional definitions for an advocacy network, taking into account the special evaluation challenges presented above.

The importance of *operational outputs* for evaluating an advocacy network revolves around the issue of accountability. You can only hold an advocacy network strictly accountable for the results that it controls: generating processes, services and products (through its own activities). Equally important, these outputs may or may not lead—immediately or eventually, directly or indirectly, wholly or partially—to outcomes and eventually to impact.

Results, Results, Results

OECD-DAC¹¹

International advocacy networks¹²

<p>Outputs The products, capital goods and services that result from a development intervention; may also include changes resulting from the intervention, which are relevant to the achievement of outcomes.</p>	<p>Operational outputs: The processes, products and services that are an immediate result of the activity of the advocacy network. An advocacy network <u>controls</u> its outputs.</p>
<p>Outcome The likely or achieved short-term and medium-term effects of an intervention’s outputs. Outcomes are the observable behavioural, institutional and societal changes that take place over 3 to 10 years, usually as the result of coordinated short-term investments in individual and organizational capacity building for key development stakeholders (such as national governments, civil society, and the private sector).</p>	<p>Internal, developmental or “organic” outcomes: The changes in the behaviour, relationships, or actions of the advocacy network’s members that strengthen and develop their collective capacity to achieve the advocacy network’s political purpose. The changes are a result—partially or fully, intentional or not— of the activities of the network. External or “political” outcomes: These are changes in the behaviour, relationships, or actions of individuals, groups or organisations outside of the advocacy network involved in activities related to the network’s political purpose. The changes are a result—partially or fully, intentional or not—of the activities of the network. An advocacy network <u>influences</u> outcomes.</p>
<p>Impacts - Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.</p>	<p>Impact: Long-term changes in the relations and exercise of power in society as expressed in the political purpose of the advocacy network. An advocacy network <u>contributes</u> indirectly to these intended impacts.</p>

Nonetheless, the ultimate purpose of an advocacy network’s activities and products is to contribute to enduring, structural *impact* in society. Since an advocacy network’s aim is to change relations and structures of power but its membership is composed of diverse organisations with their own missions and objectives, the problems in evaluating for impact are double-edged. First, how do you predefine the changes you will achieve in the structure and relations of power in circumstances characterised by uncertainty and unpredictability? The changes an advocacy network seeks occur in heterogeneous contexts, are indefinite in time, and depend on the actions and decisions of many more actors than the members of the network. Second, when there is a change that represents impact: Who can assume credit for the change? Who is accountable for what changes (and does not change), and to whom and how? These problems of attribution and aggregation mean that an advocacy network only indirectly contributes to impact. If advocacy activities and outputs are not especially significant achievements and the impact of advocacy efforts, which is significant, is extremely difficult or simply impossible to evaluate, what then do you evaluate?

The solution is to focus on the results that are up-stream from impact—on outcomes understood as changes in the behaviours, actions, and relationships of social actors within the advocacy network’s sphere of influence. Outcomes bridge between an advocacy network’s activities, services and products, and the impact it desires. Since social actors working within the advocacy network along with those outside that they influence bring about the desired

social change, this definition of “outcome” developed by IDRC is most useful.¹³ Adapted to the needs and circumstances of an advocacy network, there are two types of outcomes.

The *internal, organic outcomes* refer to the developmental changes in the stakeholders of the advocacy network and especially its members and staff. One of the principal results of great validity and importance for an advocacy network is its existence and permanence over time. This is an unconventional criterion for an achievement. A for-profit business can rarely justify itself by the number of employees it hires; its margin of profit and return on investment is the principal measurement of success. Sometimes the major achievement of a government may be simply to have finished its term of office, but usually citizens assess its results in terms of the quantity and nature of its contribution to the common good. An NGO does not exist to exist; the NGO must benefit other people.

Advocacy networks, however, are both a means and an end in themselves. Admittedly, this is an inherent contradiction but also a challenge: “There is a tendency for advocacy networks to focus not on tangible impacts, but rather simply on the exercise of validating their own existence.”¹⁴ Nonetheless, if the advocacy network functions efficiently and effectively, it strengthens and develops the web of relationships that are at its core. That is, the development of the advocacy network is an inter-active, innovative process with added-value for its members. A network develops by changing the behaviour, relationships, or actions of its members, as they reinforce each other and advance together with joint strategies to achieve their common purpose. They do not just improve but develop—they change their way of thinking and doing. Thus, the concept of organic outcomes resolves this dilemma of ends and means.

Here are two examples of internal or organic outcomes from the human rights network Forum Asia:¹⁵

- In the past two years, *Forum Asia has achieved recognition by the international media as a key source of information on human rights in Asia*. For example, prior to the UN Human Rights Council membership election in 2006, Forum Asia published an analytical briefing paper that compared and ranked the pledges submitted by Asian governments, and called upon the General Assembly members to cast their votes based on this analysis. Over twenty different print and broadcast media, including the International Herald Tribune and the Associated Press published the findings.
- Since 2004, Forum Asia has sponsored a variety of in-country trainings and exchange programmes in UN advocacy and networking for its 40 members. As a result, there has been a *notable improvement in the Forum Asia member organisations’ advocacy capacity*, as evidenced by the advocacy outcomes at the UN level (described separately). Clearly, many of the member organisations are now more effective than they were in 2004, when few individual members were directly involved in UN advocacy.

Ultimately, of course, the success of an advocacy network depends on the external achievements that are its reason for being. A focus on the *external or political outcomes* meets this need because social actors modify the structure, relations and exercise of power in society. These outcomes are the changes in the behaviour, relationships or actions of one or more social actors that represent a contribution in the direction of the impact the advocacy network aims to achieve. Who changed what, when and where? Here are two more brief examples of external outcomes achieved by Forum Asia:

- During the 112th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), in April 2005 in Manila, Forum Asia lobbied the parliamentarians on their the role of parliaments in the establishment and functioning of mechanisms to provide for the judgment and sentencing of war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and terrorism, with a view to avoiding impunity. As a result of the lobbying by Forum Asia and other organisations, *the Parliamentarians adopted a resolution that called for the universal ratification of the Rome Statute for the International Criminal Court.*
- Since 2004, Forum Asia has lobbied the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR) on the need for sub-regional offices. This effort of Forum Asia and its' Nepalese member Informal Sectors Service Centre (INSEC) lobbying before the UN Commission of Human Rights, led to a *proposal by the Swiss Government proposal to establish an office in Nepal, which the OHCHR took in April 2005. By 2006, the OHCHR has also set up a sub-regional office in Fiji for the Pacific, and was setting up of the South Asia office in New Delhi.* Furthermore, an OHCHR office for Northeast Asia was also under consideration.

Beyond a description of the results and the networks contribution to them, a fuller description of external, political outcomes will generally include at least three other dimensions:

- ✓ Outputs: You describe how the activities, products and services of the advocacy network influenced each outcome in sufficient detail so that the reader can appreciate the relationship between the network and the outcome.
- ✓ Process: Those incremental, often subtle but vital changes will be part of a pattern of change generally involving a variety of social actors doing something differently. What is the pattern and how is it leading to the desired change?
- ✓ Context: A change in a social actor in country A does not necessarily have the same significance as a similar change in country B. Therefore, what is the specific significance of each outcome?

In international social change networks, identifying and formulating outcomes can be almost as challenging as contributing to them. The keys to success are timing and participation.

Participatory, developmental evaluation of advocacy network results

For advocacy networks that wish to focus on outcomes, and not simply on their advocacy network activities, it is vitally important to take full account of the messy, multi-level and multi-directional causality of the process and environment when evaluating its achievements. These circumstances are so complex, open and dynamic that an advocacy network is limited in what it can do to plan synergies between desired outcomes and the activities to achieve them. The number and levels of relationships between social actors is enormous, as is the influence of factors such as different national economies and political systems. Those relationships are fluid and permeable, reconfiguring as new actors and factors enter, leave or play larger or smaller roles. Furthermore, all those relationships are constantly changing, often very fast indeed.

A second consideration is the need for highly participatory evaluation in an advocacy network. Involving as many stakeholders as wish to be involved promises a variety of significant advantages. The advocacy network will:

- Identify achievements more quickly and more comprehensively.
- Enhance learning about success and failure, more than serving as a mechanism of operational or budgetary control.
- Appraise collectively the progress towards the political purpose and the development of the advocacy network itself.
- Serve as a mechanism for accountability to internal and external stakeholders.
- Preserve the historical memory of the common processes that gave birth to and sustain the advocacy network.
- Do justice to the core qualities of democracy and participation and strengthen internal processes.
- Forge broad commitment to a renewed common strategy.
- Mobilise maximum resources, especially those of its members for future efforts.

The complexity too has major implications for the evaluation of advocacy networks (and for the planning and monitoring of advocacy activities and achievements). For this, the increasing application of complexity science to the challenges of social change organisations, offers important insights.¹⁶

Conventional evaluation assesses achievement and performance against planned objectives and activities. It requires predefined SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) outcomes and a schedule of inputs, activities and outputs to achieve them. For an advocacy network, however, this approach ties down its capacity to respond and innovate, above all, when the advocacy network is bound to achieving those predefined results in order to demonstrate success to its stakeholders, notably donors. In a study of social change sponsored by McGill University and DuPont Canada, the authors conclude, "...to know step by step, in advance, how the goals will be attained [is] an approach doomed to failure in the complex and rapidly changing world in which social innovators attempt to work.... In highly emergent complex environments, such prior specification is neither possible nor desirable because it constrains openness and adaptability."¹⁷

One alternative is for an advocacy network to keep its planning process light and imaginative. The advocacy network would take advantage of the limited time available to foster maximum participation and concentrate on reaching broad agreement on which social actors it wishes to influence. The advocacy network would be less concerned about precisely what changes it expects to see and focus on what it will do to influence those social actors, and who will participate and how.

On the other hand, an advocacy network would invest heavily in on-going monitoring or "formative" evaluation—collecting and assessing data continuously in order to adapt and improve the advocacy network's strategies in the light of changing circumstances. Also known as "developmental evaluation", this monitoring mode "in its essence is about learning what works, acknowledging what doesn't work and learning to tell the difference."¹⁸ In advocacy network evaluation of this nature "control is replaced by a toleration of ambiguity

and the 'can-do' mentality of 'making things happen' is modified by an attitude that is simultaneously visionary and responsive to the unpredictable unfolding of events."¹⁹

The focus would also be different from conventional formative evaluation. An advocacy network would not scrutinize what it did (and did not) do according to plan and budget, but instead rigorously observe the individuals, groups, and organisations the advocacy network wishes to influence.²⁰ This developmental evaluation would be through participant observation because in addition to perhaps an external evaluator-facilitator, the observers would be stakeholders who interact and relate to the social actors they wish to influence.²¹ They seek both expected (or desired) and unanticipated outcomes. The goal is to recognise and understand the outcomes that emerge, their significance and how the advocacy network influenced them. The emphasis of this type of evaluation is, in IDRC's words, "on improving rather than on proving, on understanding rather than on reporting, and on creating knowledge rather than on taking credit."²²

Of course, there are moments for an advocacy network to evaluate rigorously what it has achieved. Judging the overall value and significance of work done should inform and support major decision-making about future strategy. Nonetheless, this "summative" advocacy network evaluation would be different too. An advocacy network would invert the customary mapping of what outputs lead to what outcomes. That is, first you identify the outcomes that the advocacy network influenced, either through the on-going monitoring or at the time of a periodic formative evaluation. The advocacy network would then identify which of its activities and outputs influenced those outcomes, partially or totally, intentionally or not. There will be activities that will never lead to outcomes, which is inherent to the complex, open and dynamic reality in which an advocacy network must work. Some outcomes will be a direct result of the advocacy network's influence and others only indirect, and that is normal. Some changes in social actors may be undesirable or unintentional, and that is life. The key evaluation question is did the advocacy network influence changes in social actors that are contributing to the desired impact? Have there been long-term changes in the relations and exercise of power in society as expressed in the political purpose of the advocacy network? What is the network's impact and how did it contribute, however, indirectly and small the contribution may be?

Thus, summative evaluation in an advocacy network is also primarily about learning. "Accountability shifts from compliance to learning: not just any learning, but learning that bears the burden of demonstrating that it can, does and will inform future action."²³

In this mode of evaluation, the involvement of external evaluators can facilitate participation and ensure checks, balances, and the objectivity of the process. Even in the formal, summative evaluations, the greater the involvement of the advocacy network's staff, members, allies and donors, and the more the evaluators serve as "facilitators in a joint inquiry rather than experts wielding 'objective' measuring sticks",²⁴ the greater will be the quality and validity of the evaluation. Perhaps most importantly, through their participation, the stakeholders, and especially the advocacy network's member, will develop the understanding and the commitment to implement the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation.

In conclusion, advocacy networks are growing in importance. As with other civil society actors, they are under great pressure within and without to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness in generating results. There is increasing recognition that managing, assessing and understanding them presents fresh new challenges to all the stakeholders involved. The voluntary and diverse membership and geographical spread

multiply the complexity, uncertainty and unpredictability of what they do and achieve. Effective and useful evaluation of advocacy networks engages stakeholders and thus enhances learning, as well as informs the internal and external decision-making processes.

¹ I am an independent organizational development consultant based in the Netherlands and Brazil. Involved in development all my adult life, I have had 25 years experience as a manager directing environmental, rural development, educational, research, and journalism programmes and organisations and served another 14 years as a senior advisor to Oxfam Novib: ricardo.wilson-grau@inter.nl.net.

² I use here “effect” as the generic term for results instead of “impact” because in international development the latter is a very specific form of result: “Impact: Positive and negative, primary and secondary long-term effects produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended.” (OECD, *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management*, 2002). The reader will understand early in this essay why I consider the distinction important.

³ See *Assessing Progress on the Road to Peace – Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities*, 2008 available at www.gppac.org. This essay also draws on two other documents:

- “Evaluating International Social Change advocacy networks: A Conceptual Framework for a Participatory Approach”, Ricardo Wilson-Grau with Martha Nuñez, *Development in Practice*, April 2007. Available from ricardo.wilson-grau@inter.nl.net
- “Participatory evaluation of the achievements of social change organizations”, a short article for the December 2007 issue of *Alliance Magazine*.

⁴ Manuel Castells considers that we live in an ‘advocacy network Society’ “made up of networks of production, power and experience, which construct a culture of virtuality in the global flows that transcend time and space”. Castells, M. *The information age: economy, society and culture* Vols I and II, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.

⁵ Edwards, M. and J. Gaventa, *Global Citizen Action*, London: Earthscan and Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001.

⁶ Adapted from Richard Portes’s, Steven Yeo’s and Wolfgang Reinicke’s functions classification: Yeo *Creating, Managing and Sustaining Policy Research advocacy networks*, preliminary paper, 2004; Yeo, Evaluation of the SISERA network for IDRC, Preliminary report, 2004; Portes and Yeo (2001) *Think-net: the CEPR model of a research network CEPR*. (Prepared for Workshop on Local to Global Connectivity for Voices of the Poor, 11–13 December 2000, World Bank, Washington, D.C), 2001; Reinicke et al, *Critical Choices: The UN, advocacy networks, and the future of global governance GPPI*, Global Public Policy Institute, 2000.

⁷ IDRC Evaluation Unit, *Annual Report 2005*.

⁸ See the *Very Brief Introduction to M&E Systems Design*, PowerPoint presentation by Jim Rugh, CARE, and his book *RealWorld Evaluation*, <http://www.sagepub.com/book.aspx?pid=11577>.

⁹ EVAL-SYS listserv exchange titled “Patton on Complexity”, 25 Mar 2006, eval-sys@lists.evaluation.wmich.edu.

¹⁰ *Advocacy networks and Capacity*, Suzanne Taschereau and Joe Bolger, ECDPM, Discussion Paper No. 58C, February 2007. Available at www.ecdpm.org.

¹¹ Sources: OECD, *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results-Based Management*, 2002, and OECD, *Management for Development Results - Principles in Action: Sourcebook on Emerging Good Practices*, 2006

¹² Source: Adapted from Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, and Terry Smutylo; *Outcome Mapping - Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs*; IDRC, 2001, available at www.outcomemapping.ca.

¹³ The IDRC’s Outcome Mapping methodology is a results-oriented methodology that is readily adaptable for advocacy networks’ planning, monitoring and evaluation needs. See www.outcomemapping.ca.

¹⁴ Riles, A., *The network inside out*, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2001.

¹⁵ Mary Jane Real and Ricardo Wilson-Grau, *Participatory Evaluation of Forum Asia’s Results - July 2004 to June 2007*, Bangkok, June 2007.

¹⁶ See, for example, the Plexus Institute’s application of complex systems to health care (www.plexusinstitute.org) and *The new dynamics of strategy: Sense-making in a complex and complicated world*, C. F. Kurtz and D. J. Snowden, *IBM Systems Journal*, Vol 42, No 3, 2003 www.cognitive-edge.com.

¹⁷ Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Patton, *Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed*, Random House Canada, 2007, pages 170 and 237.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, page 176.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, page 20.

²⁰ Idec's Outcome Mapping methodology calls these actors "boundary partners" because they are beyond the frontier where the advocacy network controls its activities and outputs and are in the realm where the network only exercises influence.

²¹ "Evaluators have traditionally been admonished to remain external, independent and objective, but complexity based developmental evaluation recognises that data collection is a form of action and intervention, that the act of observation changes what is observed and that the observer can never really remain outside of and external to what he observes." *Ibid*, page 239.

²² Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, and Terry Smutylo; *Outcome Mapping - Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs*; IDRC, 2001, page 21.

²³ *Getting to Maybe, op. cit*, page 240.

²⁴ Paul Engel, Charlotte Carlsson and Arin van Zee, "Making evaluation results count: Internalising evidence by learning", in *Policy Management Brief Policy Management Brief*, No. 16, August 2003.