

The Bellagio Initiative

Briefing Summary

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Evaluating Development Philanthropy in a Changing World

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Private aid giving is growing rapidly and international philanthropy has demonstrated a capacity to innovate. But the development assistance enterprise is in turmoil. The quality of aid has been affected by a proliferation of aid donors. The Millennium Development Goals will not deliver on their promises. Outside of China, poverty numbers are rising and the commitment to increase aid is currently threatened by an unprecedented global economic crisis. Public commitment to development is flagging due to the ongoing economic crisis.

If philanthropic organisations are to realise their potential they will need to (i) coordinate their operations with those of other development partners; (ii) revisit their management practices to ensure that their interventions deliver results; and (iii) assess their operational priorities and measure their development impact against metrics that reflect emerging conceptions of human well being. Achieving these goals requires state of the art evaluation methods and practices geared to accountability, organisational learning and closer links with partners and beneficiaries.

The public has become exceptionally adverse to self-serving claims that are not backed up by valid evidence. In a crowded development scene, the contribution of philanthropic activities can no longer be measured one programme at a time. Pooling resources to address has become imperative. By creating and supporting broad based collaborative programmes philanthropic organisations are more likely to achieve cost effective results than through 'go it alone' interventions. Such a systemic approach would go a long way in leveraging the resources available to development philanthropies.

A major management challenge facing development philanthropies is to design programmes in ways that make them evaluable. To do so, they should take account of the increasingly influential roles of rich countries' policies affecting trade, foreign investment, migration, knowledge flows, security and the environment. Evaluation designs should also mirror the human well-being aspirations of poverty stricken communities hard hit by a proliferation of 'problems without passport' – natural disasters, global warming, illegal trafficking, armed conflict, etc.

A well designed evaluation system expertly embedded in operational practices can deliver to the trustees of philanthropic organisations the moral equivalent of financial statements in the profit making sector. Investing in such a system would yield rich dividends by enhancing learning, accountability and responsiveness to stakeholders. This implies commitment to the following principles and the demanding courses of action that they imply:

- Adopt internationally agreed aid effectiveness goals: As increasingly influential partners of the global development enterprise, philanthropic organisations should subscribe to the Paris Declaration and design their interventions so as to enhance the country ownership, partnership, harmonisation, alignment and mutual accountability dimensions of their development assistance programmes.

- **Manage for results:** Judicious programme goals should be set in consultation with the ultimate beneficiaries so as to encourage global policy adjustments geared to equitable and sustainable development. Progress towards these goals should be tracked through results based management tools embedded in the organisation and deployed so as to guide program design and monitoring.
- **Design new metrics:** Philanthropic organisations should design and adopt common evaluation metrics that reflect the multi-dimensional reality of poverty and capture the material, relational and perceptual characteristics of human well-being at individual and community levels.
- **Select a mix of evaluation methods:** In order to promote accountability evaluation should go beyond attribution (whether an individual program has “worked” or not) to ascertain contribution (how individual development partners have performed towards the achievement of shared objectives). This calls for a mix of qualitative, quantitative and participatory methods.
- **Amplify the voices of the poor:** By connecting evaluation to the weakest and most vulnerable members of society socially networked evaluation can act as a feedback mechanism with major implications for the effective delivery of philanthropic aid.



Bellagio Initiative

The Future of
Philanthropy and
Development in the
Pursuit of Human
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The Bellagio Initiative is a series of global consultations to produce a new framework for philanthropic and international development collaboration in pursuit of human wellbeing in the 21st century. The project is led by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), the Resource Alliance and the Rockefeller Foundation.