Measuring

IMPACT

Case-studies of impact assessment in small and medium-sized voluntary organisations

The UK Voluntary Sector Research Group

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Foreword

Based on research carried out by the UK Voluntary Sector Research Group (a consortium of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA)), this report explores approaches to the assessment of impact in small and medium-sized voluntary organisations.

The report is aimed at those working in and with voluntary organisations who are interested in assessing the impact of their organisation. It reviews the findings and lessons from four different approaches to impact assessment, and ends with recommendations for those wishing to engage in similar work. It is exploratory in nature and does not intend to offer a single or complete solution.

This report is not a toolkit, nor is it a workbook. The validity and utility of our recommendations will vary according to context. It is intended to complement some of the more quantitative, indicator-driven approaches to impact assessment. The companion to this volume, Measuring Impact – a Guide to Resources, identifies some of these approaches and where to obtain further information on them.

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Introduction: impact assessment and the UK voluntary sector

Karl Wilding, NCVO

Introduction

To the newcomer working in the UK voluntary sector, the wide range of terms associated with the identification and assessment of performance and achievements must be confusing. Things start simply enough: an organisation may have a mission, and this usually incorporates a vision or a set of values. But then stakeholders want to know how, and if, the organisation is achieving its mission, and we start to enter less familiar territory. Far from simply describing its activities or even its outputs, an organisation may need to describe its outcomes, added value and impact (some people will now enquire whether a difference exists). And if the organisation cannot demonstrate its impact, does it have a sense of distance travelled? Should it do this by developing or applying performance measures? Or should the organisation engage in a benchmarking exercise? Maybe it should adopt some quality standards? Are some simple fundraising ratios sufficient? Perhaps an evaluation exercise will help the organisation to decide. They could always get a consultant...

This is, of course, an exaggeration. However, the ability to assess and report (though not necessarily quantify) achievement in relation to a mission statement does benefit an organisation and its stakeholders. Such an assessment may be undertaken for a number of reasons and may use one of a number of different approaches. Whatever the motivations, impact assessment is firmly on the agenda.

From inputs to impact

There is no single driver towards greater impact assessment and reporting. It is not simply a result of pressure from funders, but a natural evolution from the measurement of outputs (Figure 1.1). It builds on the measurement of outcomes by taking a longer-term, holistic view.
The drive to assess impact reflects similar moves in the private and public sectors. The common factors have been continuous improvement and the drive for a more effective allocation of resources. In the for-profit world, impact assessment was a relatively straightforward exercise, with a single indicator: profit. However, the bottom-line profit statement is no longer accepted without question, and for publicly-listed companies, share price is an additional indicator. The many intangible factors affecting share price (such as reputation) have led to broader measures of impact, such as environmental audits.

At the same time, government has moved away from measuring resource inputs and outputs (measures of efficiency) and towards outcomes and impact (measures of effectiveness). Aware that an increasingly consumerist public will no longer tolerate poor quality or poor value public services, attempts have been made to modernise service delivery. The problem, however, is that effectiveness (unlike efficiency) is a social construct.

This move towards impact assessment has had its problems, and the performance indicator culture in central and local government has been criticised for its lack of proportion in relation to the activities under review. There is a danger that organisations may become so keen to meet targets that they lose sight of their original goals. Recent improvements to the measures used have recognised the importance of ‘distance travelled’. This might include, for example, school performance results weighted to reflect pupils’ educational attainment on entering a school.

Impact assessment and the voluntary sector

Some of these difficulties and aspirations are shared by voluntary and community organisations. It could be argued however, that they face additional pressures due to their position within a web of stakeholder interests. Furthermore, reliance upon voluntarism (the gift of time or money) places a greater emphasis on the maintenance of public trust and confidence: values that are easily damaged by poor or inaccurate reporting of achievements.

One of the key issues to arise has been the question of whether impact should or can be measured or demonstrated. While the answer to this question will depend on the circumstances, it partly reflects the non-alignment of different stakeholders. Impact measurement – with its quantitative connotations – tends to be more externally, top-down driven. Impact measurement undoubtedly gives an accurate report of quantifiable achievements, but one could argue that it is less helpful in identifying soft outcomes and unanticipated impact.
In contrast, pressures to demonstrate impact are more likely to be bottom-up and internally driven. The process of demonstrating impact is more likely to be qualitative and may be more resource intensive. Stakeholders such as donors and volunteers might be more interested in how progress towards a set of goals has been achieved with a certain level of resources, rather than the proportion of targets met in a given year. However, it could be argued that impact demonstration does not address the central question of efficient resource allocation.

**Approaches to impact assessment**

Chapter 2 offers a short overview of the currently available tools, but argues that some aspects of impact, including long-term and unanticipated impact, cannot be readily measured or demonstrated using the available tools. This is a significant barrier, certainly for small and medium-sized organisations.

Chapter 3 illustrates the common themes and principles that underpin our approaches to demonstrating impact. The main body of this report then highlights findings from four different (but related) approaches to impact assessment. The approaches were tested using four separate research projects, undertaken in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

The first report (Chapter 4) asks “what are the dimensions or characteristics of collective impact from the voluntary and community sector’s perspective?”. Based upon a large-scale survey of organisations in Wales, it highlights key problems for those wishing to assess the impact of the sector or its constituents, including the diversity of function and industry. It also highlights concerns regarding the flexible use of language in this field, such as the interchange of impact and outcomes. However, the chapter identifies a broad range of themes that might form the basis of a future impact typology. This is discussed in more depth in the concluding chapter.
A key learning point from the first study is the importance of a method where the investigator is \textit{in situ}, and able to explore concepts directly. The second study (Chapter 5) addresses this issue through the use of in-depth, loosely-structured interviews. It also moves the scale of analysis from sector-level to a cluster of organisations. In this case they are connected by their regeneration work in East London. The study shows that loosely-structured interviews are not a solution by themselves, but that they offer the opportunity to uncover the aspects of impact that are the most difficult to assess, particularly unanticipated impacts.

The study of the East London regeneration work also introduces the idea that impact can be more easily understood by thinking about the role of an organisation within a larger network or system. This approach is developed in Chapter 6, a study of an organisation working with the recent-arrivals community (refugees and asylum seekers) in Glasgow. The study again changes the scale of analysis by focusing on a single organisation, albeit one that is the hub of a system designed to deliver services to a distinct community. This approach demonstrates that by mapping an organisation and its relationships with other agencies it is possible to see where that organisation is adding value within its particular context. In the case-study organisation, this includes the cultural and gender-sensitive delivery of training and employment advice to a community not served by other, more mainstream providers.

The Glasgow study argues that perceptions of an organisation’s impact vary between stakeholders such as staff, other organisations and clients/beneficiaries. The need to take account of multiple stakeholders is the focus of the final study (Chapter 7), which is again a single-organisation case-study. Using the example of a Belfast-based umbrella organisation, the approach demonstrates how the qualitative approaches outlined in the previous chapters can be used to develop ‘soft indicators’ of impact. This is of particular value in relation to the development of social capital to which we will return later (although a discussion of how and where voluntary and community organisations build social capital is worthy of a report in itself).

The four studies are exploratory in nature and viewed in isolation do not offer a solution. They reflect the experiences of those working in small and medium-sized organisations wishing to assess the impact of their work. Taken together they are indicative of the successes, opportunities, problems and limitations for organisations wishing to assess and report their impact. Chapter 8 summarises some of the key learning results from this work and, to use one of the terms highlighted at the beginning of this chapter, gives us a sense of our distance travelled. Chapter 9 contains some of the key references and resources for those wishing to build upon our work.
Introduction 2.1

Given the different motivations for impact assessment and the different kinds of impact (see section 3.3), no single tool or method can adequately capture the whole range of impacts. Similarly, the diversity of the voluntary sector means that it is unrealistic to expect a single tool to be applicable to the whole sector. We have identified a wide range of tools, each of which is appropriate in different circumstances. This chapter looks briefly at some of these tools and considers their uses and limitations.

Existing tools 2.2

The available tools reflect the range of activities that the sector engages in. Approaches have been developed that are tailored to a particular type or size of organisation, as well as to particular activities. Numerous guides offer step-by-step instructions, as well as overviews of the available tools for organisations that want to know what is available. These are covered in more detail in Measuring Impact – A Guide to Resources, so only a short review is offered here.

A good starting point for those interested in impact assessment is to look at the tools and approaches developed for voluntary organisations engaged in regeneration activities. Regeneration covers a wide range of activities, yet the common themes, including community involvement and a contribution to social capital have formed the basis of a number of impact assessment tools. For example, Achieving Better Community Development (Scottish Community Development Centre) is an approach based on the idea that the evaluation of community development should be governed by the same principles as community development itself. Evaluation is seen as an integral part of the process of community development, and community involvement as a vital part of the evaluation process.

Funders seeking to measure the impact of their project funding sometimes develop their own approaches. These include the Millennium Commission’s study of the social impact of their Millennium Award scheme, and Lloyds TSB Foundation’s First Steps in Impact Assessment. The latter tests the usefulness of a questionnaire as a tool for impact assessment.
Finally, a number of studies have tried to take into account the different perspectives of stakeholders when assessing impact. A number of frameworks have been developed to address this, including the New Economics Foundation’s *Social Auditing*.

**Common themes**

Common themes can be identified among existing tools and approaches. Perhaps the most persistent is the involvement of the community and other stakeholders in the evaluation process. Another is the idea that the voluntary sector differs fundamentally from the public and private sectors, and any tool for impact assessment should reflect and capture this difference or *added value*. Social capital is another important issue for the sector. Organisations are thought to both make use of, and contribute to, social capital. While a number of approaches attempt to capture this, the field needs further development.

There is general agreement that not very much is known about the impact of the sector as a whole, or sub-sectors and clusters of organisations. This is being rectified in part by a number of recent studies that have attempted to address this. However, these are not UK specific. The range of methodologies being used to measure impact in the voluntary sector has also been studied, though again this field is not UK oriented.

Another common feature is the development of toolkits, methodologies or guidelines for in-house use, with the recognition that they may be of interest to a wider audience. Examples include Connexions’ *A little Book of Evaluation*, New Economics Foundation’s *Prove it!* and the previously mentioned *First Steps in Impact Assessment* by Lloyds TSB Foundation.

**Problems with existing approaches**

No tool can claim to assess all aspects of impact. As a result, approaches are tailored to specific types of impact or organisation. Nevertheless, there are still particular types of impact that cannot be adequately identified or assessed using current tools. For example, no tools exist to adequately assess *unanticipated impacts*. Most approaches establish a framework for assessment at the beginning of the process, which might preclude the observation of unanticipated impact during the measurement process. Unanticipated impacts include the negative aspects of an organisation’s impact, rarely captured using any of the existing tools.

Similarly the short time scales of most approaches, and the need to be able to report impact soon after a project is completed, rarely allow for the assessment of *long-term impact*. Also, the more time that is allowed to pass between an activity and the assessment of its impacts, the more the impact of the activity will be diluted by external factors. Finally, *collective impact* (impact achieved by a cluster of organisations or projects) is difficult to measure using any of the existing tools as the measurement process involves the co-operation of more than one organisation or project.

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1 For example Morrissey et al (2001) *Building an Indicator Template for Evaluating Community-Based and Voluntary Activity in Northern Ireland*.


The reasons for these limitations are clear:

- conventional questionnaire and hard indicator-based approaches do not lend themselves to the assessment of impact that cannot either be predetermined or readily quantified;
- short timescales are not conducive to the measurement of long-term impact;
- collective impact measurement requires the co-operation of a number of organisations or projects. Organisations may be unwilling to take part in an evaluation of collective impact, being interested only in their own impact;
- unanticipated impacts, if not central to an organisation’s mission or objectives, are unlikely to be top priority for staff or funders, hence the lack of tools that address these issues.

In short, not only are collective, long-term and unanticipated impact rarely high on the list of priorities for many organisations and funders, there are also significant practical problems involved in measuring them, which means that these types of impact will tend to be neglected.

**Conclusion**

While it may not be possible to change the particular attitudes that act as a barrier to assessing these types of impact, it may be possible to develop approaches that at least make it possible to capture some aspects of impact that are currently difficult to assess. Chapters 4 to 7 look at the four approaches that were developed by WCVA, NCVO, SCVO and NICVA that attempt to address some of the limitations with the existing tools. The following chapter looks at some of the ideas and concepts that underpin these approaches.
Ideas underpinning impact assessment

Ruchir Shah, SCVO

Introduction

The approaches described in the following four chapters are completely separate studies, but they are based upon some shared common concepts. These concepts are broadly:

- a definition of impact that is broader than an organisation’s aims and objectives;
- a shared understanding of evaluation terminology;
- a bias towards qualitative approaches;
- the engagement of multiple stakeholders;
- the idea that all organisations operate as part of a wider system or network of organisations.

This chapter explores these ideas in order to explain the approaches used later in the following four chapters.

Definition of impact assessment

Impact assessment has a broader aim than performance measurement. Performance measurement tends to focus on the efficiency of the organisation, or how well resources have been transformed into meaningful outputs. The aim of impact assessment is broader, and can involve the investigation of an organisation’s effect on the system or environment in which it operates.

Performance measurement looks at the extent to which an organisation has met its targets. This will usually fail to capture any unanticipated long-term or collective impact. Impact assessment is broader than the monitoring and evaluation of performance. Therefore it does not necessarily need to take into account the organisation’s aims and objectives – although most existing tools do adopt this approach. Instead, impact can be assessed by focusing on a project or organisation’s presence within a wider context of partnerships, networks and relationships.

4 Distinction also made by Adams (2001)
Some additional key terms associated with impact are defined in the box below.

**Inputs** are the resources that contribute to a programme or activity, including income, staff, volunteers and equipment.

**Activities** are what an organisation does with its inputs in order to achieve its mission.

**Outputs** are countable units, and are the direct products of a programme or organisation’s activities. They could be classes taught, training courses delivered or people attending workshops. In themselves they are not the objectives of the organisation.

**Outcomes** are the benefits or changes for intended beneficiaries. They tend to be less tangible and therefore less countable than outputs. Outcomes are usually planned and are therefore set out in an organisation’s objectives.

**Impact** is all changes resulting from an activity, project or organisation. It includes intended as well as unintended, negative as well as positive, and long-term as well as short-term effects.

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### The dimensions of impact

It is clear that impact has a number of dimensions, and any assessment process needs to reflect this. The dimensions of the voluntary sector’s impact might be economic, social or political. The dimensions of impact might also be individual or collective, geographic (local through to international), or time specific (short or long-term).

Economic impact has unsurprisingly received the most attention. This has been based on an organisation’s contribution to *physical capital* (land, buildings and fixed assets) and *financial capital* (contribution to GDP and paid employment). There is also an increasing body of literature on the impact of the voluntary sector on communities and local people. This includes a contribution to human capital (the skills, knowledge and self-esteem an individual can gain over time). It has also been argued that voluntary and community organisations contribute to *cultural capital* (communication and behavioural norms that are passed from one generation to the next).

A long-running debate over the social impact of the voluntary and community sector has recently become centred around the concept of *social capital*. How, why and where voluntary and community groups contribute to social capital is the subject for another study, but a basic explanation is helpful here. Social capital has been defined as “features of social organisation, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putman, 1993). He further argues that “social capital has forceful, even quantifiable effects on many different aspects of our lives”. If this is the case, then understanding and measuring an organisation’s contribution to social capital is a worthwhile exercise in impact assessment, and is addressed in Chapter 7.5

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5 Forthcoming work by NCVO explores this in more depth, using case-studies of voluntary organisations in rural areas.
Some forms of impact can be adequately described by quantitative measures. These might include financial and physical capital, and even some aspects of human capital. However, other forms of impact, especially the impact on social and cultural capital, cannot be adequately described by quantitative measures alone and thus require a more qualitative approach. Consequently, the studies presented in the next four chapters draw more strongly on qualitative approaches.

Placing organisations within a broader context

One of the central themes underpinning the approaches in this report is the role of voluntary organisations within a wider system or network of stakeholders. Voluntary organisations are increasingly engaged in intricate webs of organisational partnerships, and understanding how organisations add value to these partnerships will increasingly be necessary. Impact assessment in such a complex setting requires a flexible, holistic and multi-perspective approach.

This report explores approaches that look at an organisation’s impact as part of a wider system or network. Three of the studies presented here have drawn on basic systems principles (the idea that an organisation operates as part of a network or system) and the use of system diagrams or maps. This has been the framework for the collection and interpretation of information. Our thinking is based loosely on ‘systems theory’, which argues that:

“A system is a set of interconnected variables, change in any one of which will affect all the others... variables should not be analysed in isolation but rather for their interrelation as part of a system.” (Seymour-Smith, 1986)

The basic principle of this theory is that it looks at the world holistically. The immediate world is broken down into various parts which could be people, activities or organisations. The analysis then focuses on the way in which each of these parts interacts with the others.

As an impact assessment tool, a systems approach seems to offer a number of advantages for researching impact in the voluntary sector.6 Organisations are embedded within complex webs of relationships with other organisations, people and groups. Key stakeholders have very different views on what they see as the significant issues of concern. Its holistic approach assumes that impact is in part dependent on interrelationships with other organisations in the system. It also recognises the synergies that occur as a result of such interdependencies. Visual representations of networks and relationships also give a clearer sense of broader impacts.

There are however, a number of limitations to this approach. These include the difficulties in defining the boundaries of a system, and the fact that the relationships between organisations and groups in the system may change.

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6 Also see Williams (2002) for a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of systems approaches.
Conclusion

The following four chapters apply these ideas in four quite different institutional and social contexts. Some ideas crop up regularly, like the use of the basic system or network idea. Others underpin the studies without being mentioned explicitly, like the definition of impact and other key terms. Dimensions of impact, mentioned earlier, crop up during the analysis of findings, when impacts inevitably find themselves falling into a number of categories.

Finally, Chapter 8 reviews our implementation of these ideas and makes practical recommendations for organisations who want to assess their own impact.
Identifying and categorising the sector’s impact

Bryan Collis, WCVA

The first study looks at the dimensions of the impact of voluntary and community sector organisations in Wales, as reported by people from those organisations. Using a questionnaire-based method, the study illustrates impact in relation to individuals, organisations, communities and society in general. Some common themes in the way outcomes or impacts were described were found. These themes indicate that a large part of the voluntary sector may be able to benefit from sharing good practice in measuring impact. Problems identified by the study include the lack of understanding of what impact is and how to enable people to describe negative impact.

Introduction

4.1

Many intermediary and umbrella organisations support and represent a diverse range of organisations. In doing so they are interested in the impact of their work and the wider, overall impact of the voluntary sector in their area. With this in mind, the aims of the study were:

- to identify self-reported impact of voluntary organisations in a geographical area;
- to see if any patterns of impact were evident across the sector which might inform others who are interested in measuring their impact.

The study was carried out using the resources that might be available to an intermediary body with no specific research capacity. Therefore, a questionnaire was used, as interviews were assumed to be too expensive. In total, 161 case-studies of organisations across Wales were completed. The case-studies were condensed into short descriptions (Garfield & Collis, 2003) that act as concrete examples of the variety of impact of voluntary organisations and projects. These enable other organisations to compare their own situation with a range of different organisations to help them identify their likely impact.
In this chapter, an analysis of the impact reported by these organisations is presented. The description of types of impact across a range of organisations enables the identification of the overall impact of the voluntary sector. Furthermore, an analysis of the distribution of types of impact across the voluntary sector may help in the development of tools for investigating particular types of impact not addressed by the existing range of approaches.

**Methodology**

The study used a postal questionnaire comprising 16 questions. Respondents were asked to choose either their whole organisation or a single project and answer questions on:

- the project or organisation’s aims;
- inputs (people involved, funding, income, benefits in kind);
- whether a needs assessment had been carried out prior to the work starting;
- beneficiaries;
- outputs and outcomes;
- whether it was felt that the aims had been achieved;
- the ‘wider or secondary benefit’ that resulted from the work;
- whether any evaluation had been carried out.

The questionnaire was piloted with six organisations and amended as necessary.

Organisations were systematically sampled from a database of over 25,000 voluntary organisations operating in Wales, with initial telephone contact before sending the questionnaire. The return rate at this stage was too low to continue. The questionnaire was then sent to all of WCVA’s 800 member organisations, and a further 500 organisations randomly sampled from the database. This resulted in 101 responses. A further 60 case-studies of health and social care organisations were obtained from telephone interviews using the same questionnaire.

All the responses were entered onto a database and a summary was produced for each case-study which was then signed off by the organisation in question. The text of the summary was then analysed qualitatively using a colour coding method. Types of impact and outcomes were identified and categorised into four levels (individual, community, organisation or general) that were adapted from levels described for outcomes by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation (2002). The distribution of these descriptors across different areas of voluntary activity was then analysed.
Findings

4.3.1 The representative nature of the case-studies
The case-studies were allocated to one or more activity heading depending upon the replies received. Table 4.1 shows the activity areas and the number of organisations in the study with an interest in that area. The distribution is broadly similar to the original database. Differences are accounted for by the emphasis on health and social care organisations in the sample, at the expense of sports and recreation organisations.

4.3.2 The outcome descriptors identified in the survey
The outcome descriptors used by the respondents in the survey were grouped together around common phrases or themes (Table 4.2). The table also shows the level at which the outcome is observed (individual, community, organisational or general). The maximum number of outcomes identified by a single group was nine, with the average being between two and three.

A large number of organisations from many activity areas identified aspects of the quality of life and outcomes linked to it, such as improved access, gaining skills, building confidence, empowerment, enabling participation in decision making, and improved health. Thus, two core aims of the voluntary sector (improving the quality of life of individuals and communities, and enabling people to improve their own or their community’s quality of life) are identified by organisations as outcomes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY AREAS</th>
<th>No. of Orgs*</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; social care</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education &amp; training</td>
<td>56</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children and families</td>
<td>42</td>
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<td>Community</td>
<td>38</td>
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<td>Disability</td>
<td>33</td>
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<td>Youth</td>
<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advice &amp; advocacy</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arts, culture &amp; heritage</td>
<td>25</td>
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<td>Intermediaries</td>
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<td>Environment</td>
<td>22</td>
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<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>Sport &amp; recreation</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benevolent organisations</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International aid &amp; emergency relief</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>Employment</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Animal welfare</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethnic minorities</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community justice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1 – Distribution of case-studies by activity area

* Activity areas or forums were developed from Kendall & Knapp (1996). They are the same as the networks that are represented on the Voluntary Sector Partnership Council of the National Assembly for Wales.
* The sum of the number of organisations is greater than the number of case-studies as many organisations are classified under more than one activity area.
Many of the outcomes can be measured quantitatively (e.g. the number of people enabled to enter further education or the number of parents demonstrating improved childcare skills). However, others are more difficult, especially those concerning empowerment and participation. Here there are issues relating to whether success is thought of as a positive outcome for the beneficiary (e.g. the service that was needed was accessed) or the enabling of a person to make their needs known, irrespective of the result.

4.3.3 The impact descriptors identified in the survey
There were fewer descriptors of impact than might have been expected. This reflected the genuine difficulty that many respondents had in expressing what they felt the wider impact of their work was. The two most common impacts cited were increased public awareness and reduction of demand for a public service. Increased public awareness of the interest or cause or the situation of the beneficiary group was seen in both service-providing and campaigning organisations. The reduction of demand for a public service was reported as an impact where beneficiaries were enabled to gain employment or helped to solve family issues, hence reducing the load on local social service provision. The frequent reporting of this impact reflects the number of health and social care organisations in the study. Another common impact mentioned was an increase in community spirit or perceived safety as a result of the work of an organisation. This came from many different types of voluntary organisation. Many organisations were able to say that there were wider economic benefits resulting from their work. This figure would be greater if a reduction in demand for a public service were transformed into savings for the area’s social services.

The impacts described in the survey are measurable in some cases, but often only by using public surveys, such as a community safety survey, or a larger public awareness survey. Some organisations may be able to monitor changes in coverage in the media, changes in the pattern of personal giving or changes in the policies of service providers. Economic impacts may be able to be measured for large-scale projects, but community projects may not have access to the local statistics or expertise that would enable them to determine whether their work is having a noticeable effect.

There was no incidence of an organisation identifying a negative impact of its work. There are two reasons for this: the questionnaire used the phrase ‘wider, added value or secondary benefit’ to ask about impact, and there is a natural tendency for workers to avoid reporting negative results. This represents a major drawback of the study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESCRIPTOR</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Access</strong> to learning and employment, services and cultural activities</td>
<td>I, C</td>
<td>C, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills</strong> relating to personal care, caring for others, employment, recreation, socialising and general skills</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self confidence</strong>, esteem and personal satisfaction</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empowerment</strong>, including self development, having a choice, having a voice, being given value and independence</td>
<td>I, C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of life</strong>, including general and family-related</td>
<td>I, C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Health</strong>, including general health, mental health, child development and promotion of exercise</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>I, C, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Service provision</strong>, including participation in decision making, effecting provision, affecting policy, reducing demand for public service provision, and providing support for people</td>
<td>I, O, G</td>
<td>I, C, O, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community development</strong>, including regeneration, providing resources, safety, social inclusion and pride in the community</td>
<td>I, C</td>
<td>I, C, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Financial</strong>, including fundraising, improved standard of living, and new sustained employment</td>
<td>I, C, O, G</td>
<td>C, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economy</strong>, including local, national, and tourism related</td>
<td></td>
<td>C, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group development</strong> and organisational change</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Animal welfare</strong></td>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environment</strong></td>
<td>C, G</td>
<td>I, C, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>International development</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Awareness and knowledge</strong></td>
<td>I, G</td>
<td>I, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Others</strong>, not categorised</td>
<td></td>
<td>G</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**KEY**  
I = Individual,  
C = Community,  
O = Organisation,  
G = General

Table 4.2 – Outcome and impact descriptors: distribution by level and subject area

† Not all sub-categories of the outcomes and impacts are shown in this table.
4.3.4 The outcomes and impacts with the widest distribution
Outcomes or impacts that occurred in at least ten of the 21 activity areas are listed in Table 4.3. These descriptions are indicative of the most common ways that voluntary organisations describe their outcomes or impact. Some appear in both lists, reflecting the different language used by the respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTCOMES</th>
<th>IMPACTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Quality of life</td>
<td>• Public awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confidence and esteem</td>
<td>• Community safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Skills, general and personal</td>
<td>• Local economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Community development, social inclusion and safety</td>
<td>• Pride in the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Health (general), child development and mental health</td>
<td>• Reduced demand on public services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• People supported</td>
<td>• Social inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Participation in, and effect on, service provision</td>
<td>• Community development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Empowerment</td>
<td>• Local employment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Access to learning, employment and cultural activities</td>
<td>• Improved health and well-being</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Financial, fundraising and standard of living</td>
<td>• Participation in local decision making</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Changes in organisations</td>
<td>• Enhanced cultural life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Public awareness</td>
<td>• Improved local environment, nature conservation and recycling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Changes in organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Service provision</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3 – Main outcomes and impacts cited by groups

4.3.5 Activity areas with large numbers of outcome and impact descriptors
The activity areas were ranked according to the number of different descriptors that were cited by organisations of that type (Table 4.4). This gives a list of types of organisation whose impact is more likely to be easily described by the outcome and impact descriptors cited here through to those that would probably require tailored methodologies. Two activity areas did not have enough case-studies to give an accurate representation.
Education and training
Health and social care
Community
Children and families
Intermediaries
Youth
Disability
Volunteering
Arts, culture and heritage
Environment
Advice and advocacy
Sport and recreation
Gender
Benevolent organisations
Employment
Religion
International aid & emergency relief
Animal welfare
Housing
Community justice
Ethnic minorities

Outcome and impact are likely to be well described using the descriptors cited in this study.

Outcome and impact are likely to be fairly well described using the descriptors cited in this study.

Outcome and impact measurement are likely to need additional descriptors to those cited in this study.

Outcome and impact measurement are likely to need tailored methodologies.

Not enough case-studies to give a true representation.

Table 4.4 – Activity areas ranked by occurrence of outcomes and impact

Critique of methodology

The study used a large number and broad range of organisations. These organisations described a wide range of activities and identified many areas where the voluntary sector is having an impact. However, this approach has a number of drawbacks:

• The approach allowed for description rather than demonstration of impact, except where external studies were quoted by organisations.
• Using a questionnaire relied heavily on the respondent understanding what was meant by impact or added value.
• Concentrating on just one stakeholder group (staff of the organisation) will have resulted in a bias in the types of impact identified, and may have made it more likely that negative impacts were not reported.
• It is also hard to draw causal links between particular impacts and any outputs or inputs of the organisations, or the context or system in which the organisations operate.
• The wording of the questionnaire, and the use of a questionnaire rather than interviews also reduced the ability of the study to identify negative impacts.
Conclusion

For many groups, the resources required for an in-depth demonstration of impact are not readily available. If an organisation, like an umbrella body or funder, wants to find out the impact of a large number of organisations, then the costs increase dramatically, and an in-depth qualitative study may not be feasible. This study tested the appropriateness of a questionnaire sent to the voluntary organisations themselves as one way of overcoming this hurdle. This was in part successful, as many different areas of impact were identified. However it was unable to provide a complete picture of impact as there was no beneficiary involvement or wider consultation with other stakeholders.

The study has identified a large number and extensive range of impacts that the voluntary sector has in a geographical area. This is of use to the sector as a whole, in drawing the attention of policy makers to the long-term results of investment in the sector. It also illustrates, for organisations in different activity areas, types of impact that they may choose to investigate. The identification of different levels at which impact can occur is important for choosing an appropriate methodology. The questionnaire as a tool showed some limitations and would need to be supplemented with interviews and/or focus groups to be more effective. These approaches are developed in the following chapters.
Assessing the impact of regeneration projects

Susan Wainwright, NCVO

This study focuses on unanticipated, long-term and collective impacts. Three projects, supported by an SRB (Single Regeneration Budget) funded regeneration partnership in East London were the focus of the study. A qualitative approach was used, based on interviews with project managers, volunteers, funders, local residents and other stakeholders. There were three main aims: to identify the main types of impact that arose; to test the feasibility of identifying unanticipated, long-term and collective impact; and to translate lessons learnt into practical guidance for voluntary organisations.

Introduction

The study by NCVO aimed to assess the feasibility of identifying aspects of impact (i.e. collective, unanticipated and long-term) that cannot be adequately measured using existing tools. The approach recognised that organisations operate within a complex wider network of organisations and people, including local residents, funders, the local council, local businesses, volunteers, partner organisations, intended beneficiaries and so on. The main aims of the study were to:

- identify impacts using a qualitative approach, taking into account the system in which an organisation exists;
- assess the feasibility of identifying and measuring these impacts;
- highlight lessons learnt for organisations measuring their impact, and in particular the more difficult-to-measure elements of impact.
Methodology

5.2.1 Identifying the system

A Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funded regeneration partnership, based in East London, was chosen for a number of reasons. The partnership provided an opportunity to look at joint working, relationships between organisations and collective impact, as well as the impact on other organisations and sectors. The grass-roots nature of many of the projects funded by the SRB scheme meant that there was a high degree of community involvement, while the small geographical area made the interview process more manageable.

Three SRB funded projects selected for study

**Biodiversity:** a project that aims to make ecological and visual improvements to the waterways in East London, run by Lea Rivers Trust, a voluntary organisation with paid staff and a team of volunteers.

**The Lansbury Festival:** a one-off arts festival and architectural conference that took place on the Lansbury estate in East London in the spring/summer of 2001. Leaside Regeneration Ltd., the administrative body for the whole partnership, co-ordinated the project.

**Racial Tolerance:** a programme of youth work (including workshops in schools, an evening youth group, and a football tournament organised by Leyton Orient Football Club) addressing issues of racial tension, co-ordinated by a local youth worker.

Three projects funded by the partnership were selected for in-depth study (see shaded box above). The projects selected were either run by a voluntary organisation (the Biodiversity project), or have a strong reliance on volunteers or community involvement (the Lansbury Festival and the Racial Tolerance youth work). Projects were either complete or in progress. They all had a strong connection with the local community.

All three projects monitor their progress using a set of predetermined indicators and submit monitoring reports on a quarterly basis. The indicators cover particular types of impact, such as numbers of volunteers, numbers of local residents consulted, and amount of matched funding levered in. Therefore, the approach adopted by this study complements the measurement of these more easily identifiable outputs and outcomes already carried out by the projects.

**How does this study address gaps in existing approaches?**

**Collective impact:** Looking at linked projects means that it is possible to explore how impact was achieved by working in conjunction with other projects, and whether any additional, collective impact was achieved through collaboration.

**Unanticipated impact:** The loosely structured style of interview offers the greatest possible opportunity for identifying impacts not anticipated or planned by the organisation, which may include negative impacts. Interviewees were able to talk freely about their perceptions of the impact of the projects. Thinking about a project as part of a system or network means that a broader range of “impactees” can be identified.

**Long-term impact:** It was hoped that the use of a system or network approach would provide a good basis for measuring or identifying long-term impact.
5.2.2 Interviews and analysis

Following agreement with the project managers and partnership co-ordinators, interviews were held with project managers and key stakeholders for each organisation. These included intended beneficiaries, local residents and activists, volunteers, staff, project managers of other SRB-funded projects, and other funders. Not all stakeholders were specific to one particular project: local residents, local authority and London Development Agency (LDA) staff for example. Interviewees were selected based on availability and suitability. Contact details for further potential interviewees were obtained at many of the interviews (particularly the interviews with project managers).

A total of 28 interviews, lasting between half an hour and one and a half hours, were carried out. Most were individual interviews, but in some cases it made sense to interview two or three people in an informal group situation. Many interviews took place in the interviewees’ work places. In the case of volunteers, they were carried out informally on-site, or in the interviewees’ own homes. Some local residents and volunteers involved in the Lansbury Festival were interviewed in the informal setting of the post-festival celebratory party. Three local residents were accessed via a local New Deal provider.

Interviews were loosely structured and varied depending on the interviewee. This allowed the greatest opportunity to identify the full range of impacts. Importantly, there was no particular emphasis on anticipated impacts.

Questions were asked based on a number of themes, most of which were common to all interviews. New themes arising during interviews were used to inform subsequent interview schedules, resulting in a fuller and more comprehensive interview schedule. Broad themes included:

- social capital (linking\(^7\), bridging\(^8\) and bonding\(^9\));
- long-term/future impact and sustainability;
- impact on and relationship with other organisations, including members of the partnership and other funders;
- negative impact;
- other current impacts, including skills, enjoyment, environmental improvements, and changes in attitudes.

Interviewees were also asked about their perception of the system or network in which the organisations operate, and to represent their perception of the system diagrammatically, explaining the roles and relationships within the system. In addition, some local resident interviewees were asked to circle on a map the area where they lived. The map was then left on the table so that interviewees could refer to it throughout the interview.

Analysis was carried out on an ongoing basis, so that subsequent interviews could be amended accordingly. The transcribed interviews were then coded according to themes.

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\(^7\) Linking social capital: the connections between individuals and groups in hierarchical or power-based relationships such as national and local government.

\(^8\) Bridging social capital: the links or relationships between people from different groups or networks.

\(^9\) Bonding social capital: the strong ties and close relationships within homogeneous groups.
Findings

The primary aim of the study was to evaluate this approach for identifying and measuring impact. However, the results of this study also provide information on a range of possible types of impact that could form the basis of an interview structure or questionnaire relevant to any voluntary sector activity, and particularly community-based activities.

The findings are divided into themes that correspond roughly to the interview structure, although additional topics emerged during the analysis. Although the emphasis of the interviews was on the impact of the specific projects, more general impacts were also identified, relating to regeneration activities or the voluntary sector in general.

5.3.1 Raising an area’s profile
It is recognised that there is a role for regeneration activities in ‘putting an area on the map’, or raising its profile. This is likely to be the case with regeneration activities that generate media attention, like the Lansbury Festival, and is particularly relevant where an area is ‘in the shadow’ of other more commercially significant or attractive areas. This is a common feeling on the Lansbury estate, which is in close proximity to the thriving City of London and Docklands areas.

“The Isle of Dogs is a multi-billion-pound development...there is a community right in the foothills...in a sense we feel like the Sherpas, and you’ve got these Europeans coming along who conquered Everest. It’s like we’re making them aware that there’s a community here.”
– Local resident and activist, Lansbury estate

It is thought that there is also a role for regeneration in bringing an area in line with other areas; for example, by delivering the kind of arts festival which is commonplace in other neighbourhoods.

5.3.2 New skills and opportunities
One of the most significant impacts for volunteers, participants and staff was the opportunity to engage in activities that not only contribute to the development of new skills but also to quality of life. All of the projects in question offered the opportunity for volunteers and participants to develop new skills. The Lansbury Festival for example, provided the chance for people to bid for funding, organise activities, speak and perform in public and lead guided tours.

“There were children’s groups putting on performances at the architectural conference in front of really senior people and that takes some courage, and it gives them a feeling of self-worth.”
– Member of staff, Leaside Regeneration Ltd

“People who took part in the Lansbury Festival discovered skills they never knew they had.”
– Member of staff, London Development Agency

Volunteers for Lea Rivers Trust have the opportunity to work on boats, to get involved in a range of environmental projects and to witness wildlife at close quarters.

“...we got to within about 12 feet of this kestrel feeding on its prey – who would have thought that in the heart of East London you’d get to see something like that?”
– Member of staff, Lea Rivers Trust
5.3.3 Social capital, local residents and community involvement

A range of respondents felt that the Lansbury Festival offered a new arena for, and resulted in, social interaction. The very nature of the events meant that there was a mixture of both bonding and bridging social capital, with people who would not normally mix coming together to get involved in the festival. Sometimes the projects contributed towards the breaking down of barriers, helping people to feel able to mix. This was also the case with the Racial Tolerance football tournament.

“When we first went on the estates, the kids from Teviot wouldn’t go to Aberfeldy, and the kids from Aberfeldy wouldn’t go to Teviot, and there was a bit of territorial warfare. But the good thing about the football tournaments was the kids were actually coming across and getting involved with tournaments on opposite estates.”
– Member of staff, Leyton Orient Football Club (Racial Tolerance project)

“A whole range of people got involved – older people, young people, very young people, Bengali people, and it’s because we had a good facilitator who knew how to work with different groups.”
– Member of staff, Leaside Regeneration Ltd (on the Lansbury Festival)

“After the festival there was much less segregation.”
– Member of staff, London Development Agency (on the Lansbury Festival)

These findings complement recent work on social capital by Robert Putnam, which shows that people are becoming disconnected from neighbours, family friends and their communities.

Linking social capital also resulted from the Lansbury Festival, as it provided an opportunity for local residents to have their voices heard by local and central government. Similarly, Lea Rivers Trust ensures that it engages local young people in their decision-making and planning process, giving them an opportunity to have their views heard.

“There was an open debate at the architectural conference and anybody could get up and speak, so you had renowned architects standing up and saying what they thought of the estate and then you had residents standing up and saying what they thought.”
– Member of staff, Leaside Regeneration Ltd. (on the Lansbury Festival)

There was a strong feeling that one impact of the projects, in particular the Lansbury Festival, was to mobilise and activate local residents, many of whom would not normally get involved in local issues. However, it should be noted that respondents tended to be realistic about the impact on local residents and the community. For example, only a relatively small percentage of local residents actually got involved in the Lansbury Festival. There is clearly a long-term impact resulting from the involvement of local residents. Residents getting involved in football coaching for example will increase the likelihood that the football league programme will be sustained after the funding runs out.
Interviewees said they felt safer just knowing that activities are being organised for young people in the area, perhaps highlighting unanticipated impact relating to community safety. Some projects have a more obvious impact on local residents than others. The type of activities that by their very nature involve local people (like youth work and arts festivals) will tend to have a more obvious social impact on local residents.

5.3.4 Partner organisations and added value
The three projects benefited other organisations they collaborate with, or that provide funding in addition to the SRB funding. Organisations working in partnership with SRB-funded organisations will benefit by having some of their targets met through their involvement with regeneration activities. There is a feeling among staff at Lea Rivers Trust that, being a voluntary organisation, there are particular benefits or added value, that they are able to offer to the community, as well as to organisations with whom they work in partnership, and from whom they receive funding. These included engaging with the community on a much more personal level and involving groups of people that public or private sector organisations would not otherwise have access to. Other organisations can benefit from this by funding or working in partnership with a voluntary organisation and tapping into the added value provided by that organisation.

“Lea Rivers Trust benefits other organisations by allowing them to tap into funds that they couldn’t reach otherwise.”

– Manager, Lea Rivers Trust

“Because we have the river, we are able to offer conservation groups opportunities that they might not get on the sites where they normally work.”

– Member of staff, Lea Rivers Trust

There is a feeling though that partner organisations and funders do not fully appreciate the extent to which they are benefiting, and the added value that results from working with or funding a voluntary organisation.

“I don’t think they [other organisations] fully recognise the potential that we have to offer them... we have a unique approach and unique resources and a unique position... we have much better links with the community... we have volunteers and communities that are involved in our activities.”

– Member of staff, Lea Rivers Trust

5.3.5 Volunteering
Interviewees felt that volunteering benefited both volunteers and organisations. Benefits included an opportunity to socialise, the chance to work in a team and gain work-related skills, and a feeling of making a valuable contribution to the local community or environment. For the organisation, the opportunity to engage local people in their work and harness voluntary resources enabled them to achieve otherwise impossible goals. Importantly, volunteer time was eligible as the organisations’ contribution in a matched-funding applications.

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10 Added value is the characteristics or qualities that the voluntary sector is able to offer which are different from the private or public sectors. This issue will be explored in a forthcoming report on the added value of the voluntary sector (NCVO, 2003).
“There are some [volunteers] who are thinking about trying to get back into work and this is an opportunity for them to get good experience.”

– Member of staff, Lea Rivers Trust

“I’m retired and I’ve always wanted to work on canals, and I thought: well here’s my chance, and it’s companionship, and it keeps me active – more active than I would have been if I just sat around indoors!”

– Volunteer, Lea Rivers Trust

### 5.3.6 Funding

The impact of new funding streams on an area is perhaps obvious, and while not a direct impact of an individual voluntary organisation or project, it is certainly an impact that local authorities, funders and central government will have an interest in. The very existence of regeneration funding can have an important impact on people and organisations, as the knowledge that funding is available in a particular area makes people feel valued. When people are not aware of the existence of funding, they may feel that other areas are getting all the attention and feel left out.

“Sometimes just knowing that there is a programme of funding for regeneration and that organisations in your area are getting their share of it has an impact in itself.”

– Member of staff, London Development Agency

Another positive impact of regeneration funding is the emphasis it places on cross-sectoral working. Otherwise unprofitable ventures become feasible with the help of public and voluntary sector funding. Also, bids for regeneration funding require the formation of cross-sectoral partnerships, thus encouraging relationships and communication between organisations.

Finally, regeneration finance requires matched funds from alternative sources, and thus it plays a catalytic role. The impact of this is that again, organisations are encouraged to work and communicate with organisations from other sectors, and that a range of organisations find themselves engaging in regeneration activities\(^\text{11}\). Voluntary organisations have a particular role to play here as they can lever in non-formal and non-cash resources such as volunteer effort. They can also attract matched funds from other charitable sources.

### 5.3.7 Long-term impact and sustainability

Respondents tended to be realistic about long-term impact. There is a recognition that projects need to be made sustainable if they are to have any impact in the future. While this may be through continued or additional funding, in one particular case, local residents are given coaching so that in the event of funding coming to an end, the activities can be continued.

“We actually train up some of the older kids so that if we’re gone in five years’ time for whatever reason, [like] if the funding runs out, hopefully there will be three or four people on the estate who can continue the work that we have started.”

– Member of staff, Leyton Orient Football Club (Racial Tolerance project)

\(^{11}\) Jeremy Kendall and Martin Knapp, in their paper *Measuring the performance of voluntary organisation activities*, talk about the role of the voluntary sector in contributing to the range of services available to users.
In some cases local residents become enthused by a particular issue or activity, and are keen to be involved in the future, making it more likely that the project will be sustainable. The Lansbury Festival for example, resulted in many residents forming a group to organise a smaller scale event in future years.

“People are feeling a lot more comfortable about the Lansbury area and they want to do more about developing Lansbury.”

– Member of staff, Poplar HARCA (housing association)

“We’ve got a very proactive community who want to do the festival [again], but instead of being co-ordinated by us it will be co-ordinated locally by the residents.”

– Member of staff, Leaside Regeneration Ltd

Similarly, involvement in the festival resulted in one resident going on to take up a position of responsibility on a local steering group. Also, some groups who took part in the festival have been encouraged to apply for SRB funding themselves. One very positive long-term impact is employment and skills development by people who were involved as volunteers. Lea Rivers Trust for example, trains volunteers with a view to eventually offering them paid employment.

5.3.8 Negative impact

Respondents were often unable or unwilling to offer ideas about the possible negative impact of the various projects. Some talked about the negative impacts of other activities in the area, or the ways in which particular projects did not work as well as they might have hoped.

Interviewees thought the injection of regeneration funding could have a negative impact on surrounding areas. People feel left out if they see money being spent on other areas but not in their immediate neighbourhood. Sometimes this may be the case even if there is money being spent in a particular area, but it is not visible or known to local people. Big business developments in the area tend to have a similar adverse impact on local people, creating a feeling of bitterness. People see big developments happening around them and feel that there is no financial or social benefit to local residents.

It was suggested that one negative impact of regeneration funding in general is that it can result in people becoming more affluent and then leaving the area.

“People up and leave once you’ve helped them to become more affluent.”

– Member of staff, London Development Agency

However, it was also suggested that as long as there is a continual, rolling programme of improvement there will be a constant stream of people benefiting. There is also a danger that SRB funding might create a dependency culture among recipient organisations.

It was thought that one specific negative impact of the Lea Rivers Trust biodiversity project was that, as with much environmental regeneration work, it attracts a very specific volunteer group. Their volunteers are almost exclusively white, meaning that the project could be said to be contributing to an undiverse volunteer culture.
Critique of methodology 5.4

A number of lessons were learnt as a result of this approach for identifying different impacts. Some concerned the use of a qualitative approach, whereas some were specific to the regeneration partnership.

5.4.1 Qualitative approaches
In a study where interviews are being used to establish the range of impacts resulting from particular activities, it is sometimes difficult to know to what extent the full range of possible impacts has been successfully captured. Similarly, we will never know whether the full range of stakeholders has been identified.

Another problem with this type of approach is that it is not always possible to know whether interviewees are simply quoting from their organisation’s plans or objectives, and giving the ‘accepted line’ as regards particular types of impact. However, these issues can be addressed by careful use of interview techniques.

5.4.2 Issues of unanticipated, collective and long-term impact assessment
Interviewees admitted that they don’t actually know what the impact of their work is. This perhaps explains why, when asked about impact, people often talk about intended impact and what they hope to achieve. There is an admission too, that knowledge of a project’s impact often comes from hearsay, the sources of which may not be reliable. Sometimes the very nature of a project means that some elements of its impact will not be directly visible to those involved in delivering the project. Another problem is that assessing impact is particularly difficult when the activity’s aim is to slow down a negative effect or prevent something from happening.

It was hoped that this approach would prove a successful means of capturing unanticipated (including negative), collective and long-term impacts. As a whole the approach worked well, but there were some limitations, particularly with regard to long-term and collective impact.

People found it hard to talk about the possible future impacts of a particular activity or organisation. There was a general tendency, when talking about the future, to say things like “well, what we hope to achieve is…” and “what our plan states is…” . In the absence of any anecdotal evidence to illustrate the long-term or future impact of a project, people tend to fall back on quoting the planned impacts, or objectives.

Identifying collective impact also proved difficult. An assumption was made that the projects would consider themselves to be part of a larger whole or entity and share common aims. It seemed however, that while projects certainly shared some common objectives and aims, most objectives were organisation-specific. As a result, establishing collective impact in terms of common aims was not possible. It was more relevant to explore the existence of collective impact generated by the chosen projects and other funders or partners. These included development agencies and other partnerships. Here, relationships and shared objectives tended to be strong, and project managers had a clear sense of how they worked together to achieve things that would not otherwise have been achieved.
Measuring negative impact was also a challenge. There was a general reluctance by interviewees to think about the possible negative impact of the projects in question. In general, the less central to a particular project a person was, the more likely they would be to talk about negative impact, but the examples given would tend to be generic and not project-specific.

### 5.4.3 Different perceptions of impact

A numbers of factors influenced people’s perceptions of impact. For example, a person’s role and status influenced the extent to which they thought of the projects as being part of a collective entity. People involved directly in projects tended to think of it as a project with many funders, one of which is the SRB. Others, more central to the partnership, are more likely to think of all the SRB-funded projects as a functioning whole, working towards a common goal. This difference in scale and vision influenced their perceptions of achievements.

A person’s position in the SRB partnership and its funded projects had an effect on the kind of impact they talked about, and the kind of language they used. As a general rule, staff and volunteers directly involved in project delivery would concentrate on social impact and benefits to people. Project managers and people more involved in the funding or co-ordination of the partnership, but not involved directly in the projects, are more likely to talk about funding issues and meeting measurable objectives. Those more detached from the actual delivery of projects were more likely to talk about negative impacts, and the impact of the projects in relation to regeneration policy and long-term strategy.

### 5.4.4 Techniques that worked well

A number of elements of this approach worked well. Asking interviewees to draw how they visualised the partnership and the relationships and links between organisations and groups or types of beneficiary is one example. This also provides a useful demonstration of how people’s understanding of relationships between organisations differs, depending on their position in the system.

Getting people to mark where they live on a map is also a useful technique. Not only does this give you an idea of the area they mean when they talk about their neighbourhood, but it gives both interviewer and interviewee something to refer to throughout the interview.

Also, the use of the system or network idea worked well in this study. The ‘no organisation is an island’ approach meant that it was possible to avoid the trap of focusing only on anticipated impacts and intended beneficiaries.

### 5.4.5 Identifying versus measuring impact

One idea that arose throughout the study was that it is not always feasible or necessary to measure impact when one could settle for identifying or demonstrating it. Indeed, the broader question arises as to whether it is even possible to measure certain types of impact, particularly the intangible impacts that have been the focus of this study. The term ‘measurement’ is usually used for things that are quantifiable. The fact that many aspects of impact cannot be studied using quantitative methods suggests that it would be realistic to move away from measurement and towards identifying, or demonstrating impact. This in part explains our increasing use of the term ‘impact assessment’ to collectively describe the measurement and demonstration of impact.
Conclusion

Clearly there are some aspects of impact that are difficult to measure or identify using the range of available tools. This study aimed to test the feasibility of identifying three of these (unanticipated, long-term and collective impact) using an approach consisting of loosely structured interviews with a range of stakeholders. Some aspects of this approach worked well; primarily the idea of recognising the context or system in which an organisation operates in order to avoid the trap of focusing on intended beneficiaries. Perhaps there is a case for incorporating this idea into any approach that an organisation uses to measure or demonstrate their impact. This is discussed further in Chapter 8.
Impact assessment involving users

Ruchir Shah, SCVO

This approach pilots research tools to assess the social impact of a voluntary organisation working with Glasgow’s recent arrival community (refugees, asylum-seekers and dependants not schooled in the British education system). The study again uses the systems approach, as well as stakeholder participation and user involvement. The main aim is to identify those indicators of impact that are meaningful to stakeholders and beneficiaries.

Introduction

6.1

Programs that appear from the outside to be similar in terms of clients, mission and service delivery strategies often have very different intended outcomes. Yet many approaches to impact demonstration advocate the use of general, off-the-shelf indicator sets. In order to understand impact (and particularly social impact) in the voluntary and community sector, a context-sensitive, user-driven approach is required. The aims of this study are to:

- test an approach that directly engages stakeholders and particularly service users;
- focus on the social impact of voluntary and community organisations;
- identify characteristics and indicators of impact that are meaningful for stakeholders in an ethnic minority project.

Ethnic Minority Enterprise Council (EMEC)

Founded in 1993, EMEC aims to address the employment and business development barriers faced by Glasgow’s ethnic minorities, which include a diverse and multi-lingual recent arrival community. EMEC aims to help individuals gain sustainable employment. To achieve this aim, it provides employment counselling, vocational and skills training courses, and enterprise advice. EMEC believes that much of its value comes from its extensive referrals, the organisation acting as the hub of a wider network of needs provision for ethnic minorities. This includes refugees and asylum seekers, groups who rarely come into contact with an employment enterprise centre.
Methodology

A three-stage plan was developed as the framework for the study. Three members of the refugee community were trained to act as research assistants. These were either ex-service users of EMEC or had some personal experience of the recent arrivals community.\(^{12}\)

The three principal components of our approach are identified in the following sections.

6.2.1 Stage one: Understanding the organisation and its context

A key issue for many voluntary and community organisations is that the environment within which they operate is suboptimal (for example, providing services where market failure has occurred). So, identification of the operating context is key to understanding how the organisation makes a difference. It makes sense then, to begin with a mapping exercise to identify the context in which the organisation operates and the other organisations and stakeholders involved.

This mapping exercise is based on consultation with key stakeholders, including project workers, partner organisations and other service providers. A ‘snowball’ approach was used to identify these stakeholders, starting from an initial set of contacts provided by EMEC and other Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) contacts. Preliminary face-to-face interviews were then carried out up to one level beyond the initial contacts, i.e. initial stakeholders plus a selection of stakeholders identified by them.

The research co-ordinator conducted interviews with ten project co-ordinators from voluntary organisations identified on the stakeholder map, five counselling and managerial staff from EMEC and an associated project. At each interview the developing network map was shown to the interviewees for comment and amendment. The size, proximity and direction of relationships, as represented by arrows, were subjective and based on stakeholders’ perceptions of the nature of the relationships and the interrelation between activities.

Contextual information from the other stages also informs this mapping exercise. A comparison between these stakeholders’ perspectives helps to map the organisation and its web of relations and partners. Figure 6.1 (overleaf) shows the system map as developed during the project. It shows the wider system in which the organisation is situated, and is based upon organisational networks.

The diagram illustrates that voluntary and community sector organisations like EMEC are involved in a range of partnerships with public, private and academic sectors as well as joint initiatives with other voluntary organisations. This kind of mutually inclusive activity appears to be mediated by a series of networks (white circles in Figure 6.1) and joint-partnership projects (grey circles). Interviews with the service providers pointed to an extensive system of client referrals between the voluntary organisations on the map. The model suggests a distinct role, whereby voluntary organisations such as EMEC appear to fill in gaps in service provision rather than trying to compete with each other.

\(^{12}\) See Tomlins et al, for study using ethnic minority research assistants.
6.2.2 Stage two: Using interviews to develop thematic areas

In order to identify the characteristics and indicators of impact, an interview-based approach was used. From the organisations identified in stage one using the system map, a further group of voluntary sector service providers was recruited for interview. Their selection was not random, but based on their relevance to the beneficiary group and their understanding of the impact experienced by service users.

These organisations in turn were asked to identify interviewees who had benefited from the activities of a wide range of voluntary sector service providers. Selection was again not random, but based on their engagement with the organisation and its activities. After refusals and cancellations, interviews were conducted with a diverse group of 21 service users.

Other related service provider organisations

EMEC works with recent arrivals within the context of other major service providers from the voluntary sector. The following are the other key providers whose service users were interviewed in this study:

- **New Futures Inclusion Partnership (NFIP)** is an independent project set up by EMEC in partnership with other key providers that services ethnic minority individuals with alcohol or drug addictions. As the organisation’s staff shares office space and is line-managed by EMEC, the two organisations work very closely.
- **Positive Action in Housing** assists ethnic minority and refugee communities to overcome homelessness, racial harassment and poor housing through a casework/advocacy service. The organisation sometimes takes on trainees from EMEC under Positive Action in Housing’s Path project.
- **San Jai Project** aids and advises Glasgow’s Chinese community and asylum seekers who speak Chinese languages.
- **The Meridian Black and Ethnic Minority Women’s Project** provides courses, respite and development for Glasgow’s ethnic minority women over a wide range of ethnic minorities.

These interviews started with the question “what are the needs of service users that are met by voluntary organisations?” We were particularly interested in the different perspectives of what impact might be. When designing the interview schedule our starting point was a framework for these different perspectives:  

- **Structural system**: the interviewee’s view of how the activity works in terms of inputs, outputs and outcomes, as well as who is involved in the activity.
- **Political system**: the role of power relations and levels of self-determination in these activities. How does the interviewee see their role in relation to others?
- **Social system**: group activities, and how they impact on people’s relationships.
- **Cultural system**: the interviewee’s feelings about the value systems, ethics and knowledge of the organisation.

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13 These four perspectives are loosely based on Checkland’s (1990) three streams of enquiry in the tasks of ‘finding out’ the problem situation in his description of Soft Systems Methodology.
These questions were used at an early stage to inform the design and focus of face-to-face interviews with service providers and service users. Although this framework would have inevitably influenced the balance of the interview discussions, which were otherwise left unstructured, they were not allowed to restrict the emerging themes and interviewees’ perceptions of impact.

During the interview stage, the research assistants were matched to service users of similar ethnicity and gender, while the research co-ordinator conducted interviews across these groups.

At the end of the interview stage, a group feedback session was held with the research assistants. A consensus was sought regarding the common themes and issues that the team had identified and agreed. These findings were used to build a picture of the main types of impact relevant to service users.

6.2.3 Stage three: Assessment of the findings

The purpose of developing thematic areas or indicators is to assess the difference made by a particular organisation, taking into account the context in which it operates. Moreover, as the themes are developed largely from the perspectives of the service user, notions of ‘effectiveness’ and ‘quality’ take precedence over ‘efficiency’.

While thematic areas were identified in the previous stage, factors outside the control of the project restricted the time needed to develop from these themes a set of indicators specific to the project. In order to do this, the thematic areas would need to be taken back to the original service users and providers, who could elaborate or contest the analysis of the researchers. A consensus would then be sought on these main types of impact, which would be used as a basis for discussion to establish project-specific impact indicators. This would have involved focus groups with the service providers and service users who had originally taken part in the face-to-face interviews.

A logical next step would be to apply these indicators to a wider sample of stakeholders as identified through the mapping exercise in stage one, to allow an assessment of the case-study organisation’s impact.

Findings

This section summarises the key findings that emerged by comparing the viewpoints of staff in the service providers with those of service users. It became obvious that:

- impact is perceived by stakeholders at three distinct levels – personal, community and organisation level;
- the extent to which the service users concerned themselves with impact on their community (going beyond impact on their personal situation) reflects gender and cultural differences;
- each stakeholder appeared to have a clear perception of the organisational context within which particular organisations operate. This influenced the kinds of changes that front-line staff attempted to make as well as the expectations of service users.
6.3.1 The influence of stakeholder type on perception of impact

There were some differences in the way each stakeholder (service providers, service users and front-line staff) identified the impact of organisations.

Service users were clearest on how the organisation made a difference to their personal circumstances. They had a limited awareness of the alternative options (such as local authority social services), but were clear that different organisations offered different services. Some users expressed an interest in the way in which the organisations might help with the development of their community. The organisation was then presented as the vehicle by which they could make a difference at the community level.

Front-line staff had built their own perception of the differences made by both their own and other organisations. It predominantly focused on the community level of needs and concerns. They had a very clear and coherent view of the community needs met and not met by the services accessible to service users. This appeared to be their primary way of seeing impact, within which they fitted the personal circumstances of clients. However, they also had their own personal network of front-line contacts in other organisations, to which they would refer clients. Their perception of the organisational context within which they worked was based on this informal network of contacts. It follows that their broader view of impact at the level of the community, combined with their own contact network with other front-line staff, influenced the way in which they used the activities and resources of the organisations to engage service users. For example, they might use the resources in other ways to their original purpose, such as using training courses to “get the service users away for a while”, or using the employment counselling sessions to “help service users get over their resentment at their situation”. This is a particularly important learning point for the delivery of public services, as it suggests that organisations with the necessary flexibility and devolved decision making have a greater potential to achieve impact at the local level, where services are ultimately delivered.

By contrast, project co-ordinators focused on sustaining their organisations, and ensuring the uniqueness of their organisation’s services. They were likely to think about how they could grow, develop and sustain their organisation, and how they engage funders. Their internal map appeared to be based on the organisation’s key partnerships with public sector and other voluntary sector agencies. Consequently, their view of impact was based around the contribution of (and impact on) their organisation in relation to other key partnerships and agencies.

6.3.2 The relevance of gender and ethnicity on perception of impact

Service users are a heterogeneous group, with gender and ethnicity being key lines of division. This needs to be taken into account when planning any kind of impact assessment. Perceptions of impact among service users and front-line staff seemed to vary depending on gender and cultural background. Voluntary organisations were perceived by minorities to be particularly helpful, as they were more able to relate to users’ cultural needs and values. This was particularly the case where previous users or community members had been recruited into the organisation.
Other service users also showed a major distinction by gender. Among the Asian community, women valued the organisation’s approach to developing their skills and confidence, and valued the opportunity to try new activities. They felt that the voluntary organisation added ‘weight’ rather than ‘wait’ to their job applications. Asian men stressed the importance of community development. They were keen to get involved in helping others in their situation as service providers (mostly as volunteers), regardless of their personal circumstances. Although their original reason for seeking out EMEC or Positive Action in Housing was to access more suitable jobs, they found that voluntary organisations provided an environment within which they could use their existing skills to help others.

**Critique of methodology 6.4**

The conclusions concern two main areas: understanding how the perception of impact varies; and the methodology for identifying and capturing this variation.

System mapping demonstrated differences in how the service users, front-line staff and project co-ordinators perceive the context within which an organisation operates. This appears to be related to their location in the hierarchy of the organisation and seems to result in differing perceptions of impact. The system-mapping stage was a useful way of uncovering these differences.

A key finding was the variation in perceptions of impact, and the need to recognise that impact themes vary significantly according to the individual and their position and circumstances. As such, impact is arguably a subjective, social construct. While this has implications for impact measurement, it means that qualitative approaches need a coherent framework for analysis.

Moreover, the continuum between service users and service providers demonstrates an increasing awareness or concern for community impact. It follows that the way in which the stakeholder sees themselves (service user or service provider) will also influence the kinds of impact they perceive. Therefore, the key to assessing impact lies not just in fielding stakeholder perceptions, but understanding the changing contexts that can alter them.

The study found two key and interconnected dimensions of impact that have the potential to provide a framework for the development of indicators:

- how impact is perceived at personal, community and organisational levels;
- how these perceptions differ according to gender, culture and stakeholder type.

**Conclusion 6.5**

A number of conclusions could be drawn from this study. The needs of service users, and the ways in which front-line staff attempted to address them, extended beyond the specific aims and objectives of the organisation (i.e. some impacts result from the willingness of voluntary organisations to go the extra distance, as they are concerned with maximising benefit, not profit). It appeared that perception of impact varied according to a person’s role in the organisation, resulting in a focus on either personal, community or organisational level impact. Furthermore, wider stakeholder involvement, not just across organisations, but also down the hierarchy of the organisation, can be used to develop indicators that offer a fuller picture of impact.
The development of indicators for impact assessment

Siobhan O’Hagan, NICVA

The main aim of this study was to design and test an approach to assessing the impact of one organisation (Ardoyne Focus Group) within a deprived area in Belfast. The study captures the perspectives of multiple stakeholders on the activities undertaken by the organisation and, through an interview-based approach, develops indicators of impact in terms of both social and human capital.

Introduction 7.1

It is often difficult to explore the less tangible types of impact that organisations can have; the types of impact that have a bearing on the generation of human and social capital in a community. This study aimed to pilot the use of systems theory for developing appropriate indicators by:

- developing a methodology for measuring the impact of a voluntary organisation on an area suffering from deprivation;
- developing indicators representing the impact of this voluntary organisation.

It did this by focusing on:

- The network of relationships that exist between a voluntary group and other stakeholders within the same community;
- The activities or projects undertaken by the case-study organisation.

The chapter discusses the methodology adopted by NICVA, summarises the findings, and finally reviews the approach itself.
Methodology 7.2

7.2.1 Background: Ardoyne Focus Group (AFG)
Ardoyne in Belfast, an area synonymous with street violence and killings, is representative of the deprivation typical in Northern Ireland. The area is characterised by a Catholic population, with a much larger Protestant population in neighbouring areas. Conflict between the two communities resulted in the erection of a number of peace walls – a government attempt to reduce conflict. Clear boundaries now separate Protestant and Catholic communities living next to each other. Although the peace walls stopped some of the violence, they restricted the natural growth of the area and prevented access to services such as leisure facilities, play resources and shops. The area of Ardoyne often receives negative media coverage.

Ardoyne Focus Group was established in 1996 to network and co-ordinate the various community groups operating within Ardoyne. Previously, competition for funding fuelled segregation of these community groups. AFG has been responsible for various initiatives in the area, but its primary role is one of consultation, support and capacity building. This recently included a project to address skills deficiencies in the Ardoyne and Marrowbone communities. AFG has also attempted to address the severe deprivation in Ardoyne by uniting groups that were previously not willing to work together. This study focuses on AFG’s work to tackle the many aspects of deprivation, and the impact of this work.

7.2.2 Using the systems approach
The study aimed to ensure that all the stakeholder groups involved with the various activities carried out by AFG were included. Stakeholders were identified through meetings with the co-ordinator and staff of AFG.

The production of a network or system map provided a useful starting point. Drafted with the help of AFG staff, the map showed how AFG related to its stakeholders. This map was an important aid to identification of stakeholders, as it triggered thinking about related groups.

Stakeholders included:

- residents of Ardoyne;
- groups affiliated to AFG;
- groups working in Ardoyne who are not affiliated to AFG;
- voluntary groups from surrounding communities; and other private and public sector organisations.

The second stage involved the production of a model representing each stage of the community development process (i.e. the activities of AFG). This was then used to assess how the activities carried out by AFG and described in the interview process fitted with the overall aims of the organisation.
7.2.3 Interviews and focus groups
Background information was collected at this stage. This included data on AFG’s organisational structure, number of employees, funding, and geographical remit; together with project-specific data such as courses available and numbers of people attending courses. These input and output measures provided the contextual information for the impact study.

When carrying out a study of this nature, it is vital that the organisation and staff work closely with the researcher. In this case-study it was NICVA who approached AFG to take part in the research. It was important to explain the whole process, from identifying appropriate stakeholders to the benefits that could be gained for their organisation. In the case of an organisation carrying out its own impact analysis the full participation of the staff will be equally important.

Focus groups and unstructured interviews were arranged with staff and groups affiliated to AFG. They explored with participants their perceptions of the organisation’s overall impact, focusing on the concepts of human and social capital.

7.2.4 Selecting an existing analytical framework
A significant aspect of the voluntary sector’s impact is its contribution to social capital, including trust and civic participation, and to human capital, such as confidence and new skills. In order to capture these different types of impact, an analytical framework was selected which focused on both social and human capital, namely the framework developed by the New Economics Foundation (NEF). Another similar framework considered but not used was that developed by Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (a community-based evaluation organisation) which was based upon categories devised by the World Bank, and tailored to the Northern Irish context.

One of the advantages of the NEF framework is that it also captured relationships within and between organisations. As the project developed, the framework headings were tailored to meet the needs of individual and group interviews, and extended to include a wider range of possible impacts.

Indicators were developed from themes that recurred in the interviews. These were then grouped under the framework headings and under any additional themes identified. Indicators were developed for each of the sets of stakeholders identified in the system. Care was taken to ensure that they were clearly worded and relevant to the organisation and that they covered the full range of the organisation’s activities.
Findings

This section highlights the themes that arose from the interviews and in turn facilitated the formulation of indicators. Findings are broken down into categories: human capital, social capital, and other elements of impact.

Each category is divided into themes, or types of impact. Each of these themes is represented by three indicators (more indicators were possible, but excluded here for the sake of brevity). Each of these indicators is related to the five sets of stakeholders in the key below. The cells that are ticked show that the indicator is applicable to that stakeholder.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KEY</th>
<th>GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>R</td>
<td>Residents of Ardoyne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GA</td>
<td>Groups affiliated to AFG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GNA</td>
<td>Groups not affiliated to AFG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GFOC</td>
<td>Groups from other communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NVO</td>
<td>Non-voluntary organisations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3.1 Human capital

Self-esteem and self-confidence: Self-esteem and self-confidence were probably very low due to the continued civil unrest in Ardoyne, a problem AFG has tackled and improved. For instance AFG has helped many community groups to get started. As one stakeholder said, “the greatest thing you can do for someone is to let people think that they have done it themselves”. These indicators summarise how AFG is seen by groups and individuals in terms of building confidence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>GA</th>
<th>GNA</th>
<th>GFOC</th>
<th>NVO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel less isolated in the community</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel better about the future</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to help improve the area and myself</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Civic pride: Ardoyne has been badly affected by the Troubles. Clashes on the street and graffiti on the walls have meant that residents and groups have lost interest in the area. These indicators summarise how AFG has contributed to the way the area is seen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>GA</th>
<th>GNA</th>
<th>GFOC</th>
<th>NVO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ardoyne is becoming a better place to live</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The physical environment in Ardoyne has improved</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension has been reduced in Ardoyne</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Skills and knowledge: Before individuals and groups can move forward there is a need for improved capacity building within the area. These indicators summarise how AFG has contributed by providing courses and passing on skills.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>GA</th>
<th>GNA</th>
<th>GFOC</th>
<th>NVO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel empowered to tackle new problems</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a better chance of improving my employment status</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My skills are useful in many situations</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trying new things: New projects and initiatives are necessary if Ardoyne is to move out of the culture of the Troubles. These indicators summarise how AFG has contributed by suggesting ways in which the community can be improved, providing support for those who are taking part in these projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>GA</th>
<th>GNA</th>
<th>GFOC</th>
<th>NVO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have the skills to tackle new projects</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The community will benefit in the long-term</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources can be shared</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7.3.2 Social capital

Trust: As a result of the Troubles in Ardoyne there was a lot of mistrust among groups and individuals. Among community groups in Ardoyne this mistrust manifested itself in the form of competition for funding, and an unwillingness by groups to share ideas and information relating to funding. As one group put it, following the intervention of AFG, “groups are not doing things for their own good but for the good of the community”. These indicators summarise how AFG is seen by groups and individuals in terms of building trust (e.g. by improving communication within the community about what is happening).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>GA</th>
<th>GNA</th>
<th>GFOC</th>
<th>NVO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyone is working towards the same goal</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competition has ceased</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone is sharing the same problems</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standards of behaviour: The trust that was increasing in the area was facilitated by open communication between groups and residents. There is now an expectation that all groups let others know what funding they are applying for. These indicators summarise how groups and individuals see AFG in terms of setting standards of behaviour. For example, street violence is frowned upon, and AFG has worked to persuade those involved in violence that it is only harming the community of Ardoyne.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>GA</th>
<th>GNA</th>
<th>GFOC</th>
<th>NVO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I accept that all groups share all information</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-social behaviour is not acceptable</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a sense of civic pride</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Civic participation: In a community where violence was rife, many residents and voluntary groups have become quite insular in an attempt to escape what is happening in the outside world. The peace process means that residents and voluntary groups are more willing to go out to work within the community. These indicators summarise how AFG further encouraged civic participation by asking residents what they would like to see within the community, and supporting this through courses and events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>GA</th>
<th>GNA</th>
<th>GFOC</th>
<th>NVO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of events taking place in Ardoyne</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I have a part to play in the development of Ardoyne</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is more social cohesion within the community</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cultural awareness: In order for voluntary groups to work together it is essential that cultural differences and political differences are understood and accepted. These indicators summarise how AFG has helped voluntary groups to accept that there are differences, but by working together they can learn and achieve more. However, there is still an unwillingness to accept cultures of neighbouring communities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>GA</th>
<th>GNA</th>
<th>GFOC</th>
<th>NVO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I accept that others within Ardoyne have different opinions</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We can learn from other cultures</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are willing to accept other cultures</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7.3.3 New themes

The study identified other themes not covered by the framework:

- *community representation* – bringing groups together;
- *providing advice* – reducing isolation;
- *preventing duplication* – clarifying roles and responsibilities.
Critique of methodology

The study has explored the use of elements of a systems approach for developing indicators to capture an organisation’s impact on social and human capital. This section will summarise what has been learnt from this approach.

7.4.1 Systems approach
The use of a systems approach for developing a network map provided a structure on which to base the interview plan. It provided a structure for dividing interviews into categories of stakeholders. It also helped to identify groups working with AFG. This is useful for any organisation as it shows outsiders the range of stakeholders that the group is working with.

7.4.2 Use of qualitative methods
Until fairly recently, organisations have tended to measure direct outputs such as numbers of courses run and numbers of attendees on these courses. This study did use quantitative data but went further by using interviews and focus groups to provide in-depth knowledge from different perspectives, of the effects of projects carried out by AFG. Furthermore the interviews and focus groups carried out within the stakeholders’ own environment, provided first-hand evidence of the effects of AFG.

Voluntary groups carrying out their own impact assessment may be limited by resources, which may reduce the number of stakeholders that can be interviewed. However, appropriate selection will mean a sufficient range can be interviewed. The combination of quantitative and qualitative data has meant that the work carried out by AFG can be assessed reasonably fully.

7.4.3 Social capital framework
Problems did arise with the use of the social capital framework as some interviewees, aware that AFG was being studied, tried to relate effects of AFG’s work to positive aspects of their own work. To some interviewees it did act almost as a tick-list to which they must reply with something. Despite this it is felt that aspects of the impact would have been missed were it not for the framework. As can be seen from the findings, there were other types of impact not covered in the framework that arose from the interviews.

7.4.4 Indicators as measurement tools
This case-study achieved a set of indicators that can then be used to measure the impact of any organisation. However it could be argued that by quantifying the data one loses the value that was gained from interviews and focus groups. Nevertheless, in a competitive funding environment, there may be a need to ‘quantify’ the impact a voluntary or community group has on the community.

7.4.5 Negative impact
The themes that emerged from the interviews and focus groups were mainly positive. Negative aspects would have been included if they came up. However it was thought that since AFG is a relatively new group, negative impacts are less noticeable than positive aspects. Also, the stakeholders were identified from AFG and may represent a more biased view than if they had been identified through other means. However, discovering negative impact may be a useful future development of this approach.
Conclusion

The main conclusion from this study was that it is important to attempt to cover the full range of activities and stakeholders that a group is involved with. The systems approach was a particularly useful tool for achieving this aim and its basic principles could be incorporated into any organisation’s impact assessment process.
Lessons learnt and guidance for future work

Karl Wilding, NCVO and Marion Lacey, SCVO

This final section draws together a few conclusions about our experience of assessing the impact of the voluntary sector, from sector level through to individual organisation level. It also highlights the common approaches to impact assessment that worked for us. However, it is first worth summarising some of the impact themes uncovered in our findings, and these are the focus of the next section.

Summary of the main impact themes

One of the main issues highlighted by the four studies is the diversity of impacts achieved not only by the sector as a whole, but also by individual organisations. The studies also highlighted how organisations impact on other organisations, individuals, and the environment. The process began by thinking in terms of social, economic and political impacts, but organisations highlighted themes using quite different language: quality of life, improved health and well-being, enhanced cultural life, improved local environment, new skills and opportunities, and community involvement and cohesion. The different language suggests that organisations are not output-oriented.

However, there was also evidence of hard thinking about the economic impact of organisations’ activities. The case-study organisations recognised that their work indirectly reduced demand for government services or welfare benefits – although no quantification of these impacts was undertaken.

Given the diversity of areas where the sector and organisations can achieve impact, an overall summary is problematic. Table 8.1 attempts to summarise areas of impact by looking at the relationship between voluntary and community sector functions, and three main groupings of those impacted upon (a typology developed in Chapter 4).
Table 8.1 – Impact themes and voluntary and community sector functions

This is obviously not an exhaustive list, but it does provide a template for thinking about the impact of either an organisation or a cluster of organisations. For example, the table highlights that the service provision function of the sector in the first instance might result in additionality (the provision of services that otherwise the state would not or could not provide). It might also bring new ideas and practices that can be shared with other organisations, such as state providers. The impact of service provision on the community includes the ability to choose (welfare pluralism), which might otherwise not be possible, and the inclusion of hard-to-reach groups.

Following the identification of broad themes, the next stage for an organisation will be to think about the tools and approaches available. Our learning in this area is discussed in the following sections.
Impact assessment: basic guidance 8.2

Before going into more detail about specific methods, there are some lessons that might underpin any approach to impact assessment:

8.2.1 Be realistic
It is very easy to get carried away with the idea of impact assessment and think that an exercise should measure or demonstrate every impact of everything that an organisation does. However, no single tool exists which is capable of such a feat, and besides which, impact measurement can be an expensive business. With this in mind, it is important to be selective and realistic about the kinds of impact that you want to measure. In order to do this, you need to be clear about the reasons for measuring your impact. Why are you doing it? Is it for a funder? If so, what will they want to know? Is it for internal motivation or continuous improvement? Also, is it necessary to actually measure or quantify impact, or is it enough to simply identify or demonstrate it? And how will it be reported, and to whom? Questions like this will help an organisation to focus on what is really important for them, and to choose their approach accordingly.

8.2.2 Make use of existing tools
Despite the decision by some organisations to develop impact measurement methodologies for themselves, this is not usually necessary. A wide range of tools exists, many in the form of off-the-shelf methodologies or guides. As Chapter 2 noted, some are tailored to a particular aspect of impact, such as features that are unique to the voluntary sector, or a particular size of organisation. The wealth of literature and approaches available need not prove daunting. Overviews (such as the companion to this report\(^\text{14}\) already exist, so organisations do not need to start from square one. Being realistic about what impacts you want to assess, and the reasons for doing it, will help in the selection and adaptation of an appropriate tool.

8.2.3 Fit for purpose?
Whichever tool you select or modify, think about whether it is fit for the purpose for which it is intended. For example, a series of indicators designed to assess impact from the perspective of trustees may not be appropriate for assessing impact from a user perspective. One way to address this question is to think about what dimension of impact you wish to measure (Figure 8.1). Different points on each continuum will lend themselves to different strategies for assessment: for example, assessment of unintended impact might necessitate the inclusion of a broader range of stakeholders than the assessment of intended impact.

What worked? 8.3

One thing that worked well was that impact assessment was a process that contributed to capacity building. By using a participative approach we were able to align our aims with those of the major stakeholders, which meant they were willing to take part in the process. Bringing people together in focus groups promoted the development of inter-organisational working, reflective learning and strategic planning. Therefore, undertaking an impact assessment was potentially a very useful process.

The experiences from these four studies can be translated into practical points for organisations embarking on impact measurement:

- think of an organisation as part of a system or network, taking into account all stakeholders and activities carried out by the organisation. This will help to highlight “impactees”, and prevent you from thinking about the intended beneficiary group as the only people who are impacted on;
- make use of existing tools where possible (adapting where necessary), and the basic common principles upon which existing tools are based. This will save time and effort trying to develop new ones;
- if interviews are being used, keep the structure flexible, allowing unanticipated impacts to be uncovered;
- use visual aids such as a network map which represents where the organisation sits in relation to its stakeholders. This is a useful prompt during interviews;
- if appropriate, use research assistants from within the community as they will be more aware of the emotional experiences of certain stakeholders.
- be realistic about what is to be achieved with the time and resources available;
- to ensure that the impact analysis runs smoothly, try to keep everyone who is involved informed about what is happening and why the analysis is being carried out.
We tested a range of approaches in our four studies and, unsurprisingly, some worked better than others. Organisations will obviously need to think about the constraints in their own particular environment (resources, skills, access to information) when weighing up the pros and cons, but we have tried to assess the utility from the perspective of a small organisation with no dedicated research or evaluation function. Finally, this is not meant to be a critique of quantitative or qualitative methods, but a reflection on what might work in a voluntary and community-sector environment.

8.3.1 Questionnaire-based approaches
Using questionnaires to identify either perceptions of impact, or where and how your organisation has had an impact, is a relatively quick and cheap way of assessing impact. However, the problems may outweigh the benefits: respondents’ interpretations of questions vary significantly, while responses are obviously limited to the questions asked (so there is little scope for identifying unintended impact). Finally, for all of you suffering from consultation fatigue – do you really want to fill in another questionnaire?

8.3.2 Interview-based approaches
Given the diversity and unpredictability of the themes outlined in Chapters 4 to 7, we believe that the assessment process must focus upon a qualitative appreciation of the impacts achieved. Interviews and focus groups worked particularly well for us, as this was a new and exploratory piece of work.

With a loosely-structured, flexible interview schedule, each new interview can be used to inform subsequent ones. As a result the structure and themes evolve, leading to a broader view of impact. In effect, every interview is a pilot. This means that recorded interviews need to be transcribed and undergo basic analysis very soon after the event as new themes often emerge during the transcription and analysis stage.

There was however an obvious drawback to this approach: the intensive use of time and resources. The time taken to undertake interviews was not adequately anticipated, and as a result two of the projects had to reduce the number of case-studies. To be useful this issue needs to be properly considered, especially as each case-study ideally needs interviews with each of the main stakeholder groups (paid staff, volunteers, trustees, users, partner organisations etc.).

8.3.3 Use basic systems principles
Another key learning point from the studies is the notion that impact is a social construct; that is, it varies according to where an individual or agency sits in relation to the activity under review. So, mapping out where stakeholders are in relation to that activity, and what their relationship is to that activity, is crucial in understanding how impact is both perceived and received.

A formal ‘systems’ approach is not necessary to achieve this. However, the basic ideas used here can be incorporated into most types of impact measurement. Many approaches to impact assessment advise that you identify the intended beneficiaries and from this group select interviewees. The danger here is that you will fail to acknowledge any of the unanticipated impacts, and may introduce a positive bias. Allowing yourself to think about the system in which an organisation operates will reduce the likelihood of this happening and encourage you to think more broadly about possible impacts and impactees.
8.3.4 The use of visual techniques: systems mapping

Visual or interactive techniques incorporated into an interview can change the whole feel of the interview. Incorporating something visual into an interview like a diagram or a map can draw attention away from the interviewer, making the interviewee feel more relaxed. It may also prove useful as something to refer to throughout the interview. Asking the interviewee to draw a diagram can be a good way of seeing how different people have different perceptions of the same thing. It can also prove a useful tool for identifying potential interviewees.

We found that the technique of mapping the different agencies in a system, and the relationships between them, was a particularly useful tool throughout the assessment process. The map suggested a logical interdependency between organisations/activities that helped interviewees understand where impact might occur, while introducing notions of collective impact. It also enabled interviewees to see how their organisation related to other key players and think about their role in relation to other groups or organisations. This was important, as a key characteristic of impact for some organisations is how they provide a service differently to other agencies. The main drawback of using a system map is that it can be complex to produce, especially for organisations engaged in a wide range of activities in partnerships. The other main disadvantage is that there is a danger that it can become ‘egocentric’ – by leading to the assumption that any social or economic change can be traced back to the actions of the organisation at the centre of the map.

8.3.5 Users as research assistants

We assumed that the use of service users as research assistants would be a good way to involve the user communities in the research process. It was hoped this would create trust with other service users and ensure a sensitivity to any difficult issues. However, we were concerned that the quality of information would be variable, and that there would be issues around service-user confidentiality. In practice the research assistants added both depth and breadth to the research findings. They were also more able to pick up on interviewees’ fears and concerns, while differences in background enabled them to draw very different conclusions to those we may have drawn.

8.3.6 Using interviews to develop indicators

Two of the studies aimed to develop indicators, or at the very least themes, which could form the basis of voluntary organisations’ impact measurement. It is clear that the kind of indicators developed need to be able to capture the dynamic aspects of impact, which suggests the use of context-specific indicators. Rather than finding out whether an organisation meets these needs better than another organisation, a contextual indicator could aim to measure the extent to which a particular organisation meets needs not met by other services. Contextual indicators could assess impact by isolating the role that an organisation plays in meeting a need specified by the beneficiary group itself. These indicators can then be used by an organisation to more closely realign its aims and objectives with the actual impact identified by the service users. However, since such an approach would vastly stretch the resources of any one organisation, one option might be to encourage organisations to get together with other organisations with which they are in partnership to carry out a joint impact assessment.
What works: is there a hybrid of the different approaches?  8.4

The components of a successful impact assessment might constructively use a mix of the different approaches used in the case-studies. When combined with data collected for other reasons (e.g. monitoring and evaluation), they could work as ‘triangulation tools’ for a more grounded, realistic assessment of impact. A hybrid approach therefore might employ the following:

- use of systems maps of stakeholders;
- use of one-to-one interviews with randomly selected representatives from each stakeholder group, but particularly providers and beneficiaries;
- use of existing approaches, many of which offer lists of indicators which can be used as they are or adapted;
- use of focus groups to develop interview or questionnaire themes;
- development of context-specific themes or dimensions of impact;
- the development, in conjunction with stakeholders, of ways in which to represent impact in terms of a selection of these dimensions.

It is clear that any hybrid approach needs more thought on how to capture longer-term and negative impacts. The former may simply be a question of resources and building impact assessment into organisational planning; capturing negative impact may be a reflection of the skills and abilities of the interviewer.

Moving forward: what still needs to be done and why?  8.5

Our recommendations for future work centre around two broad issues: mapping types of impact to particular voluntary sector functions or sub-sectors, and further development of context-specific tools for impact assessment.

Further investigation still needs to be undertaken to produce what ultimately might be a typology of impacts. This would build on Table 8.1, with each cell populated by function-specific case-studies. Interestingly, there may be another, sub-sectoral dimension. By being able to map types of impact to voluntary and community sector functions, organisations might then have a much better starting point than we had when thinking about the impact of their specific organisation.

In order to complete the case-studies for this table, work needs to be undertaken to refine and test the hybrid approach loosely outlined above. This would include the development of specific tools for non-researchers, including sample interview schedules and generic stakeholder maps. Our limited resources mean that the approach would of course need to be tested in a much wider range of environments. Finally, we recognise that much more work needs to be done with regard to the presentation of findings: it remains the case that policy change is easier to implement when the evidence base is predominantly quantitative.

The beginning of this report argued that impact assessment need not be complex or expensive. We believe we have gone some way to demonstrate the former, although the question of resources still has to be fully addressed. The development of a more comprehensive ‘how to’ guide will go some way to addressing this, and will therefore be the focus of our future work in this area. In the meantime, we welcome the feedback and comments of those who are also working in this area.
This is a brief review of the resources and research available. The companion to this volume, *Measuring Impact – A Guide to Resources*, should be consulted for a longer review of resources.


Bowes, A. and Dair, N. *Family Support and Community Care: A Study of South Asian Older People Social Work Research Findings No. 38*


Pearce, J., Raynard, P. and Zadek, S. *Social Auditing for Small Organisations: A workbook for trainers and practitioners.* NEF Publications


Tomlins, R., Johnson, M. and Chouhan, K. *Minority ethnic communities and capacity building through a model of social action research.* De Montfort University and The 1990 Trust


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