Impact and Visibility: Challenges for Development Cooperation in Times of Globalization
Karin Marita Naase

Resumo

A cooperação para o desenvolvimento está acontecendo dentro do contexto da globalização acelerada. Ao mesmo tempo, a cooperação internacional é uma das características da própria globalização. Os projetos e programas da cooperação internacional hoje em dia estão inseridos nas estruturas administrativas e/ou executivas dos respectivos países. Os projetos tentam alcançar objetivos mais ambiciosos, como influenciar na formulação de políticas públicas ou na reorganização da administração pública e da assistência técnica governamental. Ao mesmo tempo em que as metas da cooperação para o desenvolvimento ficam cada vez mais exigentes, os recursos disponíveis para a contratação de peritos técnicos e para a implementação dos projetos concretos são cada vez mais escassos. O propósito desta contribuição é mostrar algumas das pressões às quais os profissionais dentro da cooperação estão submetidos e mostrar as estratégias dos peritos para alcançar os objetivos dos projetos, dado o cenário complexo dentro do qual a atual cooperação para o desenvolvimento está atuando.

1 Anthropologist (Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from Freie Universität Berlin, Germany), associated researcher at Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi (MPEG), Belém, Brazil. Address: Museu Paraense Emílio Goeldi (MPEG), Coordenação de Ciências Humanas (CCH), Campus de Pesquisa, Av. Perimetral, 1901, 66.040-170 Belém – PA; e-mail: karin@amazon.com.br
Abstract

Development co-operation takes place under conditions of accelerated globalization and is, at the same time, one of its characteristics. Currently, development programs and projects are inserted within development countries’ administrative and/or executive structures and try to attain more ambitious aims, such as influencing the formulation of public policies or organizational rebuilding in (public) administration and assistance. At the same time, as aims of development co-operation increase, staff and funds for individual projects diminish. My intention is to show some of the pressures placed upon professionals working within development co-operation and their strategies to reach project goals, in light of the complexities of current development co-operation.

Key words: Anthropology of Development, globalization, development co-operation.

Introduction

This paper was prepared from the wealth of experiences gained by development aid organizations in bilateral German aid as well as in international development agencies in different countries (Germany, Chile, Bolivia, and Brazil). My intention is to clarify some aspects of the development industry and to show the pressures placed upon professionals working within them and their strategies to reach project goals.

Development co-operation currently takes place in conditions of accelerated globalization and is, at the same time, one of its characteristics. Globalization is understood as “[...] the increasing transnational
movement of capital, goods, people or ideas, and cultural practices; this process is now so accelerated that these resources, groups, ideas, and practices now seem to circulate without any specifically localized base, taking on, as it were, a life of their own.” (Sampson 2003:309). There is globalized discourse on democracy, human rights, ‘one world’, environmental protection, development and empowerment of the weakest groups of developing countries’ populations. NGO activists and development co-operation consultants are, amongst others, actors in the global arena (idem, ibidem: 309-310). Transnationally connected international social movements and NGOs currently transcend national states and empower local communities in order to contest the state and to demand improvements (Ferguson & Gupta 2002:988). International development co-operation undertakes similar efforts, and works in conjunction with NGOs\(^2\). These global forces can be called “transnational civil society” and social movements as well as compromised development co-operation should be seen in terms of their “ambivalent relationship” (Sampson 2003:310-311) toward the state by empowering local communities to contest the state. This relationship can both undermine and consolidate the state at the same time.

The standard instrument for development co-operation is the project. As Sampson (2003:317) argues, “Projects are specific activities implemented by a group of actors having a specified goal over a limited period of time”. They are of limited duration in contrast to ‘policy’. They have to be renewed constantly and/or incorporated into new projects or programs. As policy discourse in aid agencies may change, the key words of development discourse also change. This redefinition results in redi-

\(^2\) See for example in the Amazonian case the GTA (Grupo de Trabalho Amazonico / Amazon Working Group), a conglomerate of NGOs which gives advise to World Bank and other organisations of the Group of the Seven, that promotes the Pilot Programme for the Protection of the Tropical Rainforests (PPG-7).
rection of financial resources, and projects must therefore adapt accordingly. Project officers thus must constantly be aware of the fluctuating market of ideas and concepts, inside and outside of their (home) organization. Development professionals who want to ‘survive’ in their employment have to be aware where discourse mainstream is going. Furthermore a project should be seen as a political system in which different players try to gain influence and authority. It involves different actors and ‘stakeholders’ (World Bank terminology), with different interests, concerns and priorities. Projects can also be understood as unstable consensus creations between the different involved parties (Mosse 2001:159, 160) and consensus must be constantly negotiated and renegotiated, not only within the arena of the concrete project itself, but also between expatriate project staff and their superiors in their home organization. Development projects require funds, personnel and know-how, cultural practices and discourse, which have to be allocated according the priorities of Western or transnational organizations (in the case of UN-agencies or large international NGOs).

The short-term or fixed-term international and local consultants, contracted to execute project activities, have to provide fresh ideas, know-how on project management and monitoring and evaluation. Target groups of activities may be the urban and rural poor or – as a trend over the last years – non governmental or governmental service suppliers (Sampson 2003:317-318). Projects imply a relationship between target groups, state and development agencies and must be analyzed against this background. Furthermore, development co-operation must be seen as a social and political arena where different (bureaucratic) cultures clash and where interests have to be negotiated. Therefore the influence and importance of actions by the home organization and labor environment on expatriate staff has to be taken into account when ana-
lyzing development projects and not only the discourse level of projects and programs.

**Development co-operation has changed in the last two decades**

The approach of post-war models to development was using the term “to mean the process of transition or transformation toward a modern, capitalist, industrial economy”. This usage had been changed in favor of a second meaning, referring to “‘quality of life’ and ‘standard of living’, and refers to the reduction or amelioration of poverty and material want. The directionality implied in the word ‘development’ is in this usage no longer historical, but moral” (Ferguson 1994:15). In the past, until the 1980s, development co-operation – especially technical co-operation - implemented projects in development countries like small enterprises. Instruments, material, infrastructure and personnel were delivered by the donor agency. Project activities with local populations – rural or urban poor or other immediate ‘target-groups’ – were somewhat autonomously carried out by (foreign) project staff. This practice had as a positive effect the fact that immediate contact with local target-group was made and that material input was available without long conversations with local partner institutions and delay. Additionally, with efficiency and good intentions – based substantially upon their first-world salaries – project staff succeeded in gaining apparently surprising results in improving some aspects of local populations’ living conditions in a relatively short period of time. However after the project staff left, nearly all this vanished. Later in development history, well trained local personnel, growing self-confidence of development countries and shrinking
financial means for individual projects, as well as a growing market of NGOs as competitive service enterprises, led to a redefinition of projects. On the other hand, “The outsourcing of the functions of the state to NGOs and other ostensibly non-state agencies [...], is a key feature, not only of the operation of national states, but of an emerging system of transnational governmentality.” (Ferguson & Gupta 2002:990). Together with the old developmentalist state and transnational international political organizations these organizations form a “transnational apparatus of governmentality” (idem, ibidem) and changed conditions for development co-operation sensitively.

As a consequence new concepts and ideas on development co-operation emerged. Starting in the 1980s, participation has become one of the buzz words in the development business, which ideally transform local poor, passive populations into active participants in the economy and in the modern state, accustomed to entrepreneurial behavior. Critics claim that this approach suggests that, “people were not economically and politically active before development came along.” (Nelson & Wright 1995:2). As an additional result of rethinking development co-operation - a sort of lessons learned - trends in development aid went towards implementation of projects within ‘partner structures’. Today development programs and projects are inserted within development countries’ administrative and/or executive units. In contrast, projects formerly consisted easily up to six or eight expatriate experts located in developing countries. Nowadays, there is only one foreign consultant in charge of one or several projects. Therefore local staff has substituted the foreign project worker and carries out project activities. At the same

---

3 In development cooperation the term ‘structure’ very often is used in a nebulous way, referring among other things to public policies, administrative procedures and power relations in state and society.
time the national counterpart of projects has become a key-figure in project activities to facilitate the progress of projects.

**Project reality**

Start-up of project activities (after a long period of preparation and negotiation) is in itself an aim, since many projects planned never see the light of day. Apart from the stated aims that a project is committed to attaining, there are other not verbalized goals that projects have to address. As mentioned earlier projects are arenas in which encounters between state and people take place. One aim of development organizations and projects is premised on the need of the state to turn an ‘unreliable citizenry into a structured, readily accessible public’ (Selznick 1949:220 quoted in Robertson 1984:4). “In fact, they become the site of a contest between people and officials in which two styles of organization, ‘community’ and ‘bureaucracy’, merge in complex patterns of idea and activity” (idem, ibidem).

The competition for approval of expatriate’s superiors is present since the day of project start-up. The high diversity of conditions of individuals, interest groups and organizations involved in projects creates conflicts and obstacles and exerts high pressure upon project personnel to gain consent among different parties. Much effort therefore must be made to reach a certain degree of consent among them, in order to create a platform for future activities, above all in target group oriented projects. An aggravating fact is, that “Development efforts commonly proceed from a presumption of consensus, of shared interests and understandings of what progress is about. In reality, development is
transacted on the basis of fragmentary understandings and mutual incomprehension” (Robertson 1984:183).

Additionally the diversity of conditions and underlying assumptions in development projects can be described in the following general terms: The participants are attached to heterogeneous (bureaucratic) cultures⁴. They want to attain different things through development projects (goals). They demonstrate different degrees of commitment to the stated project aims and are endowed with different financial conditions and capacities. Furthermore, international aid imposes ambitious diversity of aims onto projects like poverty reduction and democratic governance, which for the individual project are nearly impossible to attain. These aims often remain in the concrete project mainly on the discourse level and they thwart credibility of project philosophy and practice.

Conflicting interests in projects remain latent, because reality and interests of involved parties are complex and diverse. The specific conditions and characteristics of project players can be described in the following terms. Additionally to the outspoken project aims, the foreign experts try to secure and protect their professional reputation within the home organization. As the great majority of ‘field’ jobs are fixed-term contracts, professionals must be constantly aware of the ‘project after the project’. As job opportunities in this special employment segment are diminishing due to budget restrictions in donor countries and as there is a surplus of well trained and experienced labor force available in the fluctuating labor market of development, struggle for professional survival has become a constant in the lives of development workers. For this reason, they are interested to quickly deliver evidence of project pro-

⁴ Even as Robertson’s argument is also valid, that bureaucracy is universal (Robertson 1984).
gress to superiors in order to ensure project continuity and their own future employment.

The group of local partners consists on the one hand of Government agencies and national civil servants and on the other of the heterogeneous group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The latter-mentioned may be an appendix to a political group, an organization related to the Church or a relatively autonomous service enterprise. Projects may work exclusively with one of those groups – governmental or non-governmental organizations – but at least in Brazil it has become very common to work with both of them together within different frameworks. Obviously the two groups have different – conflicting – interests. Government agencies want to maintain control over services to be delivered in projects and NGOs want to have a piece of the cake (project budget) and carry out project activities within what was formerly governmental domain. As NGOs normally are more vocal in a critical attitude toward social and political issues of Government activities, a certain tension exists between the two parties and national civil servants are not eager to have them as long-term players in the projects. Despite this, it is true, that “Politicians may come and go, but civil servants are usually more durable, and the apparatus of the state more permanent than either. […] State officials may exercise the power at their disposal for the benefit of a very small number of people (possibly themselves) or may make conscientious efforts to improve the welfare of all citizens equally.” (Robertson 1984:88). This assertion is also valid for development project staff in comparison to civil servants.

Government agencies as counterparts of bi- or multilateral development projects normally suffer from budget restrictions and from a lack of security in relation to the timely delivery of financial and personal resources as counterpart contributions to projects. Normally counterpart positions in development projects are due to political indications from
the top of the Government agency or even from the ministerial level. This practice opens possibilities for all kind of good or bad interference. At best, paths to decision makers at Government level are shortened. At worst, a client of the ruling group has to be appeased through concession of a national project counterpart position and there will be no future benefits for him and the project he is working in. A common practice is also to 'promote' undesired personnel from national bureaucracies into project counterpart positions to get rid of them in line positions. Often they are not able to fulfill their function as facilitator between (foreign) project staff and national decision makers in a satisfactory manner. In this sense the performance of projects also depends on the importance that national counterparts ascribe to projects and on project progress.

As the last (even in the literal meaning of the word) interest group in the development play, there are the rural and urban poor, the so-called target groups. They often are characterized as being politically inexperienced, living in poverty, lacking knowledge in technical and administrative issues, often without political representation and normally far away from decision centers. They may desire improvements of their living conditions and deeply mistrust civil servants and bureaucracies. They normally are referred to as 'the farmers', the 'poor' or simply in terms of 'community'. As problems related to the community concept, Nelson & Wright (1995:15) emphasize "Too often homogeneity of interests is assumed, whereas an intervention, however 'participatory', will benefit some people while others lose out [...] Community is a concept often used by state and other organizations, rather than the people themselves [...]". As real target-groups show a wide variety of characteristics, it is difficult or nearly impossible to ascribe further general traits to them. For my purpose here it is sufficient to bring out that although they are the raison d'être of foreign aid, they normally do not play as prominent a role in the project arena as perhaps is presumed.
In light of this background and of this diversity of interests and difficulties one is tempted to ask how projects can progress at all. In the following sections of this paper I try to show which strategies project officers apply in order to reach project aims as well as protect their employment interests.

**Planning**

One of the major instruments of development projects as a buffer against conflicts in projects is planning. Planning is a “sine qua non of bureaucracy” (Robertson 1984:150) and is supposed to create common sense among the parties involved. It is a ritual in every bureaucratic organization and an important media to exercise state influence. Furthermore national development planning is identified “as a major institution of the twentieth-century world” (Robertson 1984:2). A key function of planning is creating initial consent among the different players in projects – during the so called planning workshops.

The planning process is supposed to allow active participation of all relevant players and, above all, of the target group. Participation is currently a key demand by donor agencies. The assumption behind this concept is that projects have a greater chance of succeeding when target groups (whoever they may be) appropriate ownership of projects.

---

5 Robertson (1984:4) argues: “It is at this level that we are reminded forcibly that planning is politics. National planning both expresses and reinforces the power of the state, but it makes an issue of public participation. This in turn generates conflicts of interest as well as of understanding.”

6 In sight of the complexities of project realities and in sight of the overweight of institutions and administrative procedures in projects, this demand very often remains unfortunately wishful thinking.
Participation as a key element of planning requires the selection of representatives of different strategic groups directly or indirectly involved in project activities. In Brazil, for example, it is common practice to congregate representatives of ‘civil society’ in ‘project committees’. Sometimes the legitimacy and representativity of the selected groups and individuals is dubious, but it complies with donors’ requests for ‘target group participation’.

The planning process should create visibility and transparency of project aims and activities, two important issues in development projects. Planning is an important channel (at least theoretically) for the distribution of project resources. The expectation to gain some control over financial resources is the ultimate goal of NGOs and target group representatives to participate in exhaustive planning workshops which may take place over a period of several days. Transparency of utilization of funds in the Brazilian case has become very important in the context of decentralization and municipalization. Through decentralization, important amounts of regional and federal Government funds are channeled to community treasury departments. Nonetheless, it is still common practice in Amazonian communities that mayors handle public funds as if they belonged to their private property. Therefore public discussion about priorities on fund spending, on the other hand, is a very important practice in development projects.

Planning workshops normally start in the first months of project implementation and are one of the very first public activities of projects. Nevertheless, plans are social constructions and the goals chosen comply

---

7 I myself participated to conversations with the agricultural secretary of a mid-sized Amazonian town, where he confessed not to know the amount his department could spend. As in colonial times it is only the chief (mayor) who knows the value of taxes, funds and Government transfers, which he manages at his disposal.
with the underlying ideology of project coordinators (foreign aid and local executors). It is local practice that much planning takes place at the headquarters of donor agency before the start-up of project activities – for example, defining general direction of activities, target groups and collaborating service enterprises and consultants. That is why, despite of lots of different ideas and demands of the participating parties, project logframes generally generate results very similar to headquarters stipulations and targets. This is due to global bureaucratic culture, which delivers and spreads blueprints all over the world with standardized problems and standardized solutions for problems of Third World peoples.

With reference to planning procedures in Brazil, civil servants, NGO-employees and local politicians are accustomed to planning rituals within the Brazilian State structures themselves. They are familiar with planning procedures, where noble aims are formulated, but rarely fulfilled. Control items, for example the identification of funding sources and the definition of accountability for results are often omitted. This practice is a result of an authoritarian, non-democratic use of public assets in Brazilian history and people still expect that project reality will not differ much from these well known patterns.

Next step: implementation of project activities

After a long period of preparation and planning, project ideas are translated into actual procedures. This implies the execution of a long list of prosaic activities such as purchasing furniture, computer equipment, and cars and so on. A lot of time is spent in coordinating the purchase of consumer goods for project infrastructure and for accountancy. We must
not forget that one of the most important activities of development practice is accounting, because projects disburse public funds which come from the taxpayers of donor countries. The concrete technical advice to target groups may be conducted by local technicians from a public administrative body or by technicians especially hired for this purpose. Currently, as part of donors’ development co-operation philosophy, partnership principles are in force. This means that funds must equally be provided by the donor country(ies) and development country. This, in practice, may conflict with budgetary policy and fiscal regulations in the developing country and may cause problems during execution of the project.

After all, certain structural problems, known since the assignment of official project documents by Governments, will re-emerge as project leaves the stage of mere planning and enters into the implementing stage of activities. These problems are above all budgetary difficulties and missing financial means necessary to fund running costs of project activities by national Government bodies, problems related to commitment to project aims and – linked to this – the request of ownership of the project as a whole. Further items are how to ensure continuity of activities, above all after the pull-out of foreign aid, and to bridge the gap between ambitious aims – introduced by foreign aid – and contradictions in local commitment and reality.

Budgetary bottlenecks may lead to temporary shut-downs of project activities or even to the complete closure of projects. The latter consequence is relatively rare, as none of the parties involved is really interested in undertaking such a drastic measure. Whereas missing commitment of one of the participating parties – this may also include foreign

---

8 For example, according to German Governmental development aid philosophy projects belong to the developing country. This paradigm may sometimes be neglected by project reality.
consultant experts - may be related to overly-ambitious aims, formulated and imposed by foreign aid, which contradict to local realities and local demands. This contradiction may provoke only weak commitment to project measures by local partners (Government body, local staff, target groups or other project partners) and may endanger project continuity. Another difficulty in development co-operation can be a certain incompatibility between local staff (including the political and administrative decision-makers) and foreign expatriate experts. The reasons may lie at the hierarchical level, concerning differing opinions regarding development, target groups and procedures themselves or may simply consist in a certain incompatibility among partners. As the employment situation of foreign experts is generally somewhat delicate and their promotion or continuity in the development organization depends on their performance and evaluation by their superiors in their home organization, they will try to avoid confrontations and try to smooth contradictions with local staff and national counterparts. As project approval and continuity depends on mid-term evaluations, foreign consultants are eager from the day the project starts, to show a positive image of ‘their’ project. Additionally, continuity of project activities may be at risk because of organizational changes in counterpart administrations or due to political or career changes in public administrative structures.

Another danger to project continuity is the lack of appropriate local technical staff. This often is due to the special situation and position of projects in the so called ‘partner structures’. This means that despite the fact that projects are incorporated into public administrative bodies, they normally form special task units with their own rooms, staff and budget. Very often, this fact causes friction with existing units at the hierarchical, decision-making and funding level in national counterpart organization. Therefore, it is often difficult to incorporate appropriate technical staff from line functions into the new created unit that is under a differen-
tiated regime\textsuperscript{9}. Project coordinators (national and foreign) spend a considerable amount of time and effort in trying to create a functioning project team, despite the fact that this item has normally been agreed upon during the initial negotiations at the governmental level. A full year or two of project duration may easily pass before these fundamental requisites for project activities have been solved\textsuperscript{10}. As donor agency and foreign project staff are interested in project progress, they have to deal with these structural difficulties and pressure for start-up and continuity of activities and assume leadership of projects, despite the official discourse on national country’s project coordinator being leader of projects. As a consequence, projects may effectively be seen as the domain of foreign experts, which on one hand may facilitate procedures but which on the other hand may complicate commitment and involvement of national partners and local populations.

**Solutions and the consequences**

As seen above, a number of difficulties emerge during project execution, which may force foreign expert to act contrary to the official discourse of ownership by national and local project partners. The project officer’s task is to find solutions for the above mentioned problems. The problem of an insufficient number of appropriate personnel may be evaded by contracting external staff or technical services and advice by (foreign) project funds. NGOs and independent consultants may be hired. One consequence may be that State (development country) does

\textsuperscript{9} A project often can offer benefits such as training, travels and extra daily allowances, and may be attractive to local civil servants.

\textsuperscript{10} It is even possible that this never takes place.
not need to improve public services and technical assistance by creating a parallel structure to Government institutions\textsuperscript{11}. Arguments for and again this solution are numerous and depend on each case. We also must keep the argument in mind, that the outsourcing of Government functions not necessarily weakens the local state (Ferguson & Gupta 2002, Sampson 2003). To ensure ongoing activities co-operation may finance project expenses to a limited degree. This solution may contradict the donors’ own principles (non-payment of State’s services expenses as running costs) and make a habit and create a dependence which will be difficult to overcome. The problem of overly-ambitious aims and the contradiction to local reality may be addressed by a more realistic redefinition of project aims or by adoption of the development discourse to a certain degree by local players and target groups\textsuperscript{12}. In order to participate in the competition for project resources, target groups must become acquainted with development discourse of projects, what may create a certain alienation from the target groups’ vision of their own reality.

As a way out of lethargic, non-functional partner structures, the foreign adviser may try to detect allies in the local project environment. She may wish to accelerate the implementation of project activities by allying with a local pressure group (within Government structure, together with a social movement, with a specific sub-group of the target population or within political groups). In this respect Robertson according Selnick (1949:262) warns that “[...] large development projects

\textsuperscript{11} Nelson & Wright (1995:13) argue in the same direction “‘In establishing institutional links between villagers and wider systems’ Scoones and Pretty warn against creating a parallel structure to that of the state through what amounts to local non-governmental organizations. Because these may not be elected they would not be accountable; they can be subject to corruption and are unlikely to persist”.

\textsuperscript{12} In Amazonia for example the concepts of ecological or economic sustainability are already part of the discourse of grassroots movements and rural poor.
depend more on political relationships with interest groups than with individuals. Working through these ‘administrative constituencies’ [...] can be problematic, providing a necessary basis for public support but at the same time restricting the access of other ‘uncoopted’ groups and individuals. [...] The rational, technical ideals of bureaucracy usually offer little guidance on these strategic issues which ultimately determine the success or failure of a project” (Robertson 1984:158).

Another solution to problems faced by development co-operation has been the introduction of the concept of so called “systemic advice” which should produce synergetic effects at regional and national levels in development countries. This means that projects do not principally strive to improve living conditions of a concrete and relatively small group of urban or rural poor, but instead help to reorganize and rebuild procedures, institutions and organization of national public services and administration. A further aim is to influence definition of public policies. As one result of this approach, the concrete project becomes less dependant on financial shortages of national counterparts and freer from other disturbances of daily project routine, but on the other hand the project manager has to propose solutions at political and decision-making levels. How to get there is a big challenge for project managers and to a certain degree something of a ‘black box’. One collateral effect may be that sound evaluation and success criteria become difficult to formulate. As aims are more on behalf of partner ‘structures’, public policies, bureaucratic and decision-making procedures, proof of fulfillment of objectives becomes even more difficult and sometimes impossible.

As another consequence of the shift in development policy and discourse, evaluation of project performance depends more on interpretations. It has become hazardous to analyze what are really improvements due to positive action on the part of projects. Project evaluation
Impact and Visibility

has become an object of bargaining and negotiation and project managers are more vulnerable to critics (internal and external) and therefore need to protect themselves against criticism. Furthermore, as job opportunities in development organizations are relatively scarce, there is more pressure on development workers and project officers to protect their own employment stability. Robertson (1984:158-159) argues in the following terms: “The development officer is usually obliged to play more than one game simultaneously, seeking gains both among his local clients and in that lifetime contest of his bureaucratic career”. It is understandable that project officers want to reduce risk due to their prominent exposure in project management in order to shelter their (career) interests.

In view of the changing conditions for development co-operation – diminishing resources for individual projects, demands by developing countries regarding projects being conducted in their territory, greater pressure and critical questioning on development co-operation in donor countries and consequently increased pressure on development policies and agencies to deliver significant evidence of their performance and success – greater visibility of project activities in public is desired (and necessary) in developing countries as well as in donor countries. Even for NGOs it has become important to continuously demonstrate results of their performance show their “product” to donors and offer their services constantly as a survival strategy. Furthermore, to a certain degree NGOs, governmental development co-operation and national (development country) public services are competing within the same market segment. Additionally, a free-market attitude concerning projects (limited jobs and job security, competition inside development organizations and with funding agencies for project funds and resources) has placed a considerable part of the burden and risk on project managers and development workers. It is important to underline that development co-opera-
tion has explicitly left the mere technical and entered into the political arena, if it ever had been on the mere technical side.

In order to protect their interests and in order to reduce risks project managers have elaborated different strategies. One of these is the construction of solid networks within and outside their home organization. Networking has become increasingly necessary for project personnel, as evaluation criteria of project and job performance are somewhat volatile. Construction and maintenance of alliances may consume a considerable amount of experts’ time budget. Furthermore, participation in relevant public events (in the development arena), in order to gain project continuity and to secure personal careers, is an important item of daily project routine. PR-instruments must be used to gain public approval. Therefore, PowerPoint-presentations have become one of the most important means and PR-instruments of the development industry. This is not only true for foreign development co-operation, but also for local and international NGOs, which increasingly have to compete for funds in the national and international development scenario.

Conclusion

Currently, project reality and development discourse is very complex, due to the diversity of participants in the development game and due to the number of requirements imposed on concrete projects and programs. Many projects are well intentioned, but development staff are not always able to assume all the implications of participatory and sustainable development, which are meant to produce quick improvements in the living conditions of target groups and which - at the same time - should reorganize public policies and public administration and
create synergetic effects with other projects and programs of the (international) donor community. Much remains to be done to bridge the gap between programmatic aims (and agencies’ discourse), limited means (financial, personnel), objective conditions in partner countries and the real possibilities to achieve project aims.

Furthermore, substantial aims are often extremely ambitious in light of available know-how and time frame ‘to do the job’. As a consequence pressure upon staff in this special employment market segment is extremely high. To compete, networking and the use of PR-instruments have become more and more important to the business of projects, which assumes a major role of project activities. As marketing arguments have become very important for project approval and for the survival of development consultants, the PowerPoint-presentation is becoming the project in extreme cases.

In sum, development policies and projects have reached their limits; pressure and expectations are high, budgets are diminishing, number of staff members is lowering and the range of topics and the complexity of project reality are increasing. As a consequence, despite the good will of a lot of committed development worker, target groups have sometimes become mere footnotes of project activities.

Literature


