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Impressions on Evaluation

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Evaluations vs. studies

There is a marked difference between FR perceptions about, and involvement in, individual project evaluation and monitoring exercises--as opposed to cross-project, cross-country, or impact evaluations. For purposes of simplicity, I will arbitrarily refer to the former type of evaluation as "evaluations," and the latter as "studies."

Most people seem fairly satisfied with the process of evaluation. They experience no scarcity of funds or management support for evaluations--just as they experience no scarcity of funds for projects. With some exceptions, they report few problems in finding adequate evaluators in the grantee country (or from elsewhere in Latin America, or North America)--and do not describe the task of finding and supervising evaluators as a burdensome one. (Some FRs did mention a clear gap in their evaluator "networks" with respect to technical expertise in certain areas--like crafts, women's projects, appropriate technology, etc.) In general, FRs did not have anything to ask of ORE in the area of evaluations--with the marked exception of research projects, for which FRs felt that ORE had expertise and was able to give very useful advice both on projects and potential evaluators (with the strong caveat, some said, that ORE should not itself generate research-project proposals).

FR evaluation activity is directly tied to the need for information for monitoring, for deciding whether to go ahead with a new proposal, judging a proposed amendment, or for providing the backup necessary to get the project through the review process in Washington. Most FRs reported satisfaction with the evaluations they contract out in serving these immediate and concretely-defined needs. They define their evaluation concerns, that is, as limited to the process of making decisions about projects--and not in terms of finding out what the impact of a project has been, or in terms of general lessons that might be learned from this particular project experience.

FR perceptions about, and involvement in, studies are just the opposite to that of evaluation. Very few studies have been undertaken by FRs. Those who have comment on how unexpectedly time-consuming the experience was (though not unsatisfying); in some cases, they ended up with a less broader study than they had hoped for, because of (1) the constraints on their time, (2) the greater participation by and coordination with other FRs that was required of a cross-country study (people were away on trips, they were too busy to come to meetings), and (3) the more difficult intellectual task of thinking out a cross-country or cross-project study, and of choosing and interacting with the consultant. Finally, some FRs expressed a strong need for studies and a desire to initiate or participate in them (though a significant minority did <u>not</u>). They felt, however, that Foundation management was dedicated principally to "pushing projects," and that evaluation was not of prime importance to management. People felt they were under strong pressure from management to keep project proposals coming in and were warmly supported for doing so, but were under no pressure to carry through with evaluation efforts and got no recognition for them.

FRs complained about pressures to move money, or lack of recognition from management, when they talked about studies--but not in relation to their own evaluation work. This is perfectly understandable: evaluations contribute directly to an FRs ability to "push projects" and keep up on monitoring, whereas studies contribute only indirectly. In the end, of course, studies may contribute even more powerfully than evaluations to FR performance, in that the studies may produce a set of guidelines for thinking about future projects that will allow one to more efficiently separate out the chaff from the wheat; nevertheless, the immediate needs of the FR job do not generate a study, the way they do an evaluation. This is very similar to the economist's concept of "market failure," when the market will not give rise to the production of a good that is desired by many, because no single producer has the capital to make the investment, nor the means to recoup or internalize the profits (i.e., spillovers are high). It is in this situation, according to neo-classical economics, that government intervention or production is required. Similarly, ORE will have to play an initiating or coordinating role in the area of studies--which are highly valued by FRs but not initiated by them because of the "market-failure problem."

Even though FRs may value studies highly, and even though studies might contribute to their project-pushing capacitites (not to mention to the quality of their work life), they do not initiate them because of the high investment of their time in relation to the return. If ORE took the work burden of the studies off the FRs, then the benefits of studies could be realized without causing FRs, or management, to seriously compromise project-pushing goals.

Studies and interaction

The dissatisfaction of many FRs (though not all) with the lack of study-type, generalizable findings about IAF projects can be seen as one aspect of a larger yearning for greater interaction within the Foundation about project-related issues--for more chances to tell one's story in a general setting that gives it broader meaning. Indeed, the frustration expressed about the lack of interaction is greater than that expressed about the lack of general findings about projects. Many FRs want to know more about what is happening outside their region, about the experiences of other FRs with projects similar to their own. Some point to the reduction in the number of project-review meetings as a disappointing sign of diminished interaction; some point to the retreats of a previous period, and other Foundation-wide meetings with management, as something they miss. Many say that seminars organized around evaluations, or other project-specific or country-specific matters, are disappointments; they end up being a "show-and-tell" about a particular project or country, and therefore boring. 1 That's why attendance is often low, they say, at the project-specific or country-specific seminars.

The more interesting issue-oriented seminars and studies, people say, take a lot of work if they are to be successful. Somebody has to prepare an agenda or a short paper, and confer with others about the desirability of such an event; and people who attend will have to read something before the seminar. Since such work is seen as "extra-curricular" in comparison to project-pushing activities, people look at it as too much work. At the same time, they yearn to interact with each other in this kind of forum, and to be able to talk about what they experience in the field to others who can understand. Again, this is an area where ORE can step in--another case where the "market" has failed to provide a highly valued activity.

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1. One FR from outside the Andean region, in commenting on the criticism I raised in my seminar about the Bolivia paper as having had not enough "context," said that he felt that he liked the paper precisely because of its lack of country-specific information; he wouldn't have spent time reading it, or have been interested, if it seemed to be about Bolivian projects in a Bolivian context!

I have put the topic of studies together with that of the desire for interaction because I think that studies, unlike many evaluations, can serve as a focus for interaction of the kind people want. As soon as one looks at more than one project, and more than one country, one is led by the structure of the exercise to think of things in a comparative way, and to see the emergence of issues and general features, as opposed to project details and country-specific outcomes. Structured properly, moreover, the study experience will provide at least two occasions for Foundation-wide interaction around issues--before the fieldwork is done and after. In addition, a smaller group of interested FRs can accompany the study--the development of a scope of work as well as the findings--all along.

Though the relationship between interaction and studies may seem obvious, I stress it here because (1) people tend to think of studies as corresponding to a need for written learning, and (2) people see the output of studies as taking a written form. As in many organizations, however, much learning takes place through talki g rather than reading; this seems to be particularly true at the Foundation because of its small size, the congeniality of the work atmosphere, the commitment to a cause that binds staffers to each other, and the remarkable lack of bureaucratic defensiveness when project failings are discussed.

Many of the learning experiences reported by staffers had to do with seminars and meetings, in addition to their own field experiences, rather than through reading. Though everyone longs to read more, and bemoans the lack of time for it, people also see reading as a luxury--not a serious "work" activity. So they leave it for leftover hours, or for vacation time, and it never gets done. Going to meetings, however, does not have the opprobrium of being frivolous; people consider it part of their work (even though they may learn less than the equivalent time spent reading a book or an evaluation report), and even though long meetings may cause them to have to stay late to complete their work. (This is not to say that people did not complain about "overkill" in terms of too many "interesting" seminars scheduled over short periods of time.)

It is not only that meetings are more "legitimate" forms of work, and therefore of learning. If interaction is good, meetings are much more pleasurable work events than reading (let alone then the more humdrum administrative forms of work) and are a very satisfying complement to the intensity and aloneness of an FRs work in the field. The interactional aspects of studies, then, are just as important as their written outputs in causing learning to take place, and improving the quality of the work environment at the Foundation. It is not only that interaction is required for the findings of the study to be seen as absorbed; but interaction throughout the study process will contribute greatly to the quality of the written findings. The interactional aspect of the studies, then, should be planned as carefully, and given as serious attention, as the study itself.

Evaluations

Though there is room for improvement in the evaluation and monitoring activities currently undertaken by FRs, such change may be difficult. FRs are generally content with the process as it now works because it is highly functional in helping them to measure up to the most important performance measure they perceive--the pushing of projects. Moreover, FRs evaluation and monitoring activities have turned out to serve other important Foundation objectives--as discussed below.

The important information-providing purpose that evaluations serve mitigates against their contributing to a cumulative learning process in the Foundation. The evaluation documents are often quite bulky, and filled with much detail and little analysis that would allow the project to be compared to others; they often do not have summaries. They are therefore not very welcoming or fruitful to potential readers, even those who have interest in this particular kind of project--as witnessed by the fact that they are read by few FRs not immediately involved in the project. These drawbacks are perfectly compatible with the fact that the evaluations adequately serve the needs for information of the FR sponsoring the evaluation.

The limited scope of each evaluation exercise makes it difficult to cumulate a set of them and then draw some general findings; the whole is considerably less than the sum of its parts.

The FR themselves do not see their evaluations as learning experiences for the other FRs, let alone outside people; nor do they see the evaluations sponsored by other FRs as something they want to or need to look at--at least, given the constraints on their time. They see the evaluation process as completed when the evaluation has been written, the evaluator has been talked with (if possible), and the information needed to make an immediate decision has been absorbed.

Another reason for the difficulty of turning the evaluations into a wider learning experience is the country and regional specializations of the FRs (as opposed to functional specializations), which tends to cause them to see country-specific explanations for project outcomes. The lessons of the evaluations done on the Chile and Peru projects, for example, were seen by many FRs as relating to an unusual political and economic environment in those two countries--and therefore not particularly applicable to similar projects in other countries. Yet many of the findings, to my cross-country eye, were familiar to me as being characteristic of certain types of projects and project designs, and hence of more general interest. (Witness my blind spot, in contrast, with respect to country "context"!)

Any attempts to improve the learning qualities of the evaluations might diminish their functional value to FRs, and therefore should be made only with caution. I make a few suggestions here with this constraint in mind--and with the recommendation that they might be offered to FRs as suggestions for those who are interested, and not mandatory: (1) when possible, evaluators might be asked to look at two or more projects, rather than one, in order to help evaluators to have more comparative findings; (2) evaluators might be asked to look at two projects in two different countries, so that they will be better able to see cross-country similarities, in contrast to country-specific features; 2 (3) evaluators should be asked to write a summary statement of the three or four main findings (a few sentences apiece), to comment on unanticipated or surprising findings, to speculate on causes of problems and achievements, and to suggest how they would have done the project differently if they were to start out again; this kind of speculating may produce wrong or trite results, in many cases, but asking the evaluator to do so will sometimes produce very good results; (4) evaluators should be asked to list the project's problems on one sheet, and its achievements on another; this will control against the over-positive and over-negative biases of many evaluators, and also reduce their concern about being "wishy washy," a concern that may cause people to write a blacker-and whiter-picture than they see.

Though these questions might seem a burdensome addition to the evaluator's work, the answers, if asked for in one-sentence, outline

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2. If this is too cumbersome, it could be done sequentially, as two separate project evaluations; for the second evaluation, the evaluator could be asked to make comparisons to the first.

form, should be easy to reel off once the larger document is written. If an evaluator is reluctant to make such bare assertions, she might present the summary sheet separately, or verbally in a meeting (somebody from the Foundation can write the assertions down). Many evaluators will appreciate the challenge of such questions, and the invitation to speculate, especially if they understand that it is not at the cost of the particular project at hand. If every evaluation carried two or three of such summary sheets, then this might represent a basis for some cumulative learning about projects. Though this cannot substitute for studies, the express purpose of which is to draw generalizations about projects, it certainly can "mine" the current system for more than it now produces, as well as serving as a source for the wider studies.

An important part of the comparative learning that results from an evaluation exercise may be in the FR's head--i.e., his reading of the evaluation and placing it in the context of his past experience--than from the written document itself. For this reason, it would be desirable for the "summary sheets" to come out of a post-evaluation conversation between the evaluator and the FR or FRs. In addition, FRs might be encouraged to reflect on their evaluation experiences in their trip reports--what was surprising, what was consistent with what they expected, what fell together with a lot of other things in the past to form a tentative generalization, etc. One of the most interesting aspects of my conversations with FRs was their response to questions about why a particular evaluation was good, how it affected their decisions and how it influenced their thinking. One might want to have an "evaluation excerpts" department in the Journal to reprint these impressions and reactions.

<u>The indirect benefits of evaluations</u>

One important reason that evaluations lead to little learning within the Foundation beyond the sponsoring FR is that some other important objectives are being served. These other objectives might be compromised if one tried to change the quality of the evaluations. First, local evaluators often turn out to play semi-advisory roles with the grantee, so that the evaluation experience turns into (1) a learning experience for the grantee, (2) the getting to know of a professional in a particular field who might be worth contracting in the future, (3) the gaining of access, through the evaluator's contacts, to other people struggling with the same kinds of projects in other parts of the country or other countries (e.g., Zalaquett on human rights groups). Since so many grantees are isolated from these kinds of contacts, and shy about making them, the setting up of such opportunities through the evaluation experience is an important outcome. Some FRs are explicit about this particular benefit. Through the evaluation experience, then, the FR can draw grantees into relationships or networks that will be of great use to them in the future, in addition to what is learned through the evaluation experience itself. This kind of evaluation exercise, with its resulting indirect benefits to the grantee, is probably difficult to combine with a more analytically powerful, comparative, and generalizing approach to evaluation.

A second favorable side effect of FR evaluations is the work, moral and intellectual support, and experience they provide to local persons and groups which the Foundation considers worthy of support. Evaluation work for the Foundation is a way of familiarizing local social scientists and "technocrats" with the stuff of grassroots development in their own country, creates links between these professionals and the groups, and gives sympathetic professionals a chance to develop their skills and work in this area. Given current adverse economic conditions in Latin America, and the retrenchment of the state in reaction, many technicians might end up working in private-sector jobs considered less fulfilling by them, or in inconsequential public-sector jobs, or leaving the country. Foundation evaluation work gives them a chance to stay working, and develop skills in the area of their commitment. This may be more important to the future of grassroots development projects in the grantee countries than analytically powerful evaluations. One needs both things, of course, but it may be better to pursue them separately.

Evaluation work may also help wean local social scientists from the excessively abstract and theoretical mode of much of Latin American social science, by giving them a good taste of empirical work. Again, this can contribute in the long run to a more socially valuable social science in the grantee countries. In a sense, I am citing the same advantages for the FR use of local evaluators as Hirschman cites for the use of facilitator organizations--i.e., the nurturing of IAF-type institutions and persons in the grantee countries. The payoff, however, is more indirect because the evaluators are not "married" to the base group, the way the facilitators are; but precisely because the evaluators are not dependent on the fortunes of the base group for their continued existence, the payoff may be even greater.

A third and final desirable side effect of FR evaluation activities is interaction between different grantees, and a sharing of experiences. Though this outcome seems to be infrequent, it is of great interest to the FRs, and is possibly of much greater social value than the other two effects--at least to the grantees. I cannot quite understand why, if FRs and regional directors are so enthusiastic about the idea of bringing grantees together to share experiences and advise each other, these comings-together happen relatively infrequently. (One of the few events of this nature involved the bringing together of four groups that previously did not know each other to discuss an IAF evaluation of them; the meeting resulted in an ongoing mechanism for these groups to get together on their own thereafter.)

I would imagine that the reason for the infrequency of such interaction between grantees, relative to the enthusiasm for it, is the same as for the infrequency of FR-sponsored cross-project and cross-country evaluations: arranging for such interchanges is a more burdensome task than for an individual evaluation--perhaps involving coordination with FRs in other countries, let alone between the groups in one country--and is not related to immediate FR needs for getting projects funded. The money costs of such interactions are too small to have them qualify as projects unto themselves, unfortunately, while the FR time inputs may be very high. (Note the way the press of project work in Bolivia contributed to the postponement of sharing my Bolivia paper with the four evaluated groups; the logistics and planning of the event--especially for two people as inexperienced at it like myself and Kevin--turned out to be very time-consuming.)

From talking with FRs, I feel that exchanges between groups represent innovative "projects" in themselves and ought to be thought of as such--rather than as a line item in a wider project. Not only can such exchanges be useful to the grantees, but they can yield very good material for studies--since they induce people to comment comparatively on their experience. Since the exchanges can be of such high value, and since everyone seems to like the idea so much, more encouragement and assistance might be given to FRs in this area. If it is true that FRs are somewhat "green" at how to set such exchanges up, then someone with experience in this area might be asked to provide some guidelines to follow--number of days, what to do about keeping the advisors or the leaders from dominating the conversation, where the meeting should be held, how the agenda should be organized, etc. John Hatch, for example, is a great believer in "participatory evaluation," and has considerable experience in Latin America in running these kinds of meetings.

Exchanges between groups, of course, need not be based on an evaluation, though they can serve as an excellent talking point. But when they do revolve around an evaluation, they again provide an opportunity to get more out of the evaluation than what was written. Even if the evaluation itself does not contribute much in a "studies" sense, that is, the exchange around it may produce some more useful and powerful findings. This requires capturing and putting together findings on paper; and since this is a burdensome task for the FR, it is perhaps best delegated to ORE, or to a consultant with the analytical skills and comparative experience to set these findings in an interesting light.

The three favorable aspects of FR evaluation described above are more represenative of the best of what is being done at the Foundation, rather than the typical case. They represent a direction in which things are evolving for some FRs, rather than the norm. I devote so much time to these indirect benefits here, and to the way some FRs try to augment them, because the stories of how these arrangements were made by the FR sounded so interesting to me--in many cases, moreso than the projects themselves. What also struck me was the fact that the evaluations I saw that resulted from these efforts seemed so weighty and dull, for a general reader like myself, in comparison to the FR's description of the process that produced them. I thought that it might be worth the effort to produce a written result as interesting as the verbal description of the process, so that the value of the evaluation effort can be made to extend beyond the FR himself. I also thought that the Foundation ought to commend itself in its public statements not just for its projects, but also for these exercises, when indeed they are carried out in a way that provides the benefits described above.

One final point about the FR evaluation exercises. In a sense, the innovating that is being done in this area by FRs represents the making of a virtue out of necessity. The contracting out of evaluation and monitoring work by the FRs can be seen as a result, in part, of increasing workloads, a non-expanding staff, and the importance of keeping overhead below the 15% figure--together with more discriminating standards of project monitoring and approval resulting from the cumulative experience of a wiser Foundation. Since contracted-out evaluations and monitoring tasks do not count as overhead, they allow the FRs to increase their efficiency without increasing staff or overhead.

The IAF is in no way unusual in contracting out staff work to third parties. The practice is a common reaction to budget limitations on organizations. AID responded to personnel cuts in this way, and the World Bank has always contracted out considerable evaluation and monitoring work. The IAF response to these constraints--though not at all explicit and not necessarily conscious--can be understood as similar to that of the other organizations; at the same time, it is also quite different. The contracting-out process itself produces results that, as described above, are very much in keeping with the objectives pursued in the projects themselves. And they are very much in keeping with the FRs' sense of commitment to the values the Foundation is meant to hold. The same could not be said of the contracting-out response of the other organizations--since they often use expatriate evaluators and monitors. The Foundation's way of contracting out evaluation and monitoring work, then, can be seen as a

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3. I have just read a paper by Richard Ryan, an ex field-staffer of Catholic Relief Services, who refers to a similar case of virtue-out-of-necessity. That PVOs use local employees in the field much more than large donors, he says, evolved less out of a commitment to "participation" than out of highly constrained budget pressures to keep salary items down. PVOs were forced to contract out more work to local persons, in other words, than their preferences might have

virtuous and innovative response to necessity. 3

The Journal

The Journal seems to have caused considerable resentment among the FRs, for two reasons. Most important, people feel that their articles have been so edited that they are no longer their own; secondarily, people feel that the Journal has been held out to them as their chance to tell their stories, and yet it seems to be going in the direction of being dominated by "star" outsiders.

I do not want to treat this problem more than summarily, since it falls somewhat outside the topic of evaluation and studies. But feelings about "the editing problem" are so intense, and affect FR attitudes toward ORE so adversely (the only source of strong adverse feelings), that it may be necessary to do something about the problem in order to create a better climate for improved evaluation.

It seems to me an inefficient use of ORE's and the FRs' time to spend so much time at editing articles for the Journal, aside from undermining the purpose of using the Journal as a channel for allowing FRs to tell their stories. (People feel the edited version is neither their own prose or points, and is like a "ghost-written" product.) I

originally led them to. Once done, this practice had significant benefits, not only in terms of project implementation, but in terms of the creation of a cadre of local persons committed to, and having experience with, such projects.

also feel that a lot of the FR writing I see in trip reports and memos is highly interesting, and would not need editing--except perhaps for a stylistic reading by an outside editor. I think it makes more sense to find a way of publishing what FRs do well, pretty much in the form they write it--rather than to try to get "journal quality" articles from them. Also, some quality should be traded off for giving people an opportunity to do what they want to, and get some recognition for it.

Two suggestions come to my mind. One is to establish a "staff working paper series," which would undergo minimal editing by an <u>outside</u> editor (unless people wanted more, of course); a second is to devote part of the Journal to interesting memos, trip reports, or passages from them. They should not be put together by ORE into a homogeneous piece--which would again defeat the purpose of people being able to see their own writing published under their own name. I think that opening this possibility in itself would be a significant incentive for people to write, and to improve the quality of their writing--let alone their feelings about ORE.

Conclusion

It is important to recognize the difference between studies and evaluations, that evaluations serve quite different purposes than studies, and that it may be difficult to combine the two. Evaluations serve immediate monitoring and decisionmaking needs of FRs, and also have important indirect benefits--bringing together grantees with persons and institutions with whom they can have a beneficial relationship, and supporting an "intermediary" sector of social scientists and technicians who are developing skills and commitments to grassroots development projects.

Though FR-sponsored evaluations amount to about 30 a year, and though FRs feel these exercises are adequate to meet their needs, they are not suited to providing the kind of information the Foundation needs about its projects. They make no contribution to helping the Foundation learn what its project experience has to offer across countries and projects, and they are of little use to other FRs. Though I have made some suggestions about how the existing evaluation system might yield more generalizable information, I think the bulk of this effort must be placed in cross-project, cross-country exercises with the distinct objective of providing some general learning. Since the current evaluation-monitoring activities seem to be working reasonably well in helping FR's to meet the Foundation's principal objective--to fund projects--then the system is probably best not tampered with too much.

In order for studies to be of use to the Foundation, it is essential that users--i.e., FRs--play an important part in their design. It is also important that one person have sole responsibility for the study exercise, and that that person not have other responsibilities of greater priority--i.e., that that person not be an FR. 4 The importance I attribute to having one person responsible--beyond the obvious reasons--relates to the collaborative nature that the exercise must take within the Foundation. FRs and others relevant to the study will have to be called to meet, to contribute their ideas about issues to be raised and questions to be asked, and to brief the evaluator; seminars will have to be organized, at the start of the exercise and after preliminary findings are in, so as to help the evaluator think out her findings, and to allow her to hear the relevant experience of FRs with respect to her findings. These meetings will be important to the success of the study, and the transmission of the learning experience, and time will be required to plan them--writing up brief agendas or issue papers to be distributed beforehand, and providing a brief report of a few interesting findings and other impressions that emerged in the meeting--to be distributed to people afterward. It is important to capture the findings of this verbal interaction on paper, as noted above, because it is often at least as significant as the written work, and needs to stand on its

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4. Unless, of course, an FR is detailed to that task--and relieved of project tasks for the period of time necessary; though I would not propose this approach as a general rule, I think that any FR who wants to propose such a "detail," and has a topic in mind, should be encouraged.

own. All this will require a person with sole responsibility.

Responsibility for studies, in sum, should lie with ORE, in conjunction with an outside consultant. At the same time, it is essential that FRs participate to the fullest extent possible in the planning and execution of a study, in order that the results be informed by their experience and of relevance and use to their future decisionmaking.

Other subjects

Large vs. small projects

Many FRs commented on the fact that average grant size had been said to be decreasing. This was usually noted in the context of reporting that FR workloads were higher as a result of a larger number of smaller projects. When pressed for details about new projects funded per-year per-FR, now versus some years ago, some FRs figured out that the number of new projects they funded this past year was about the same as before. The difference in workload, they said, was a result of the increased monitoring work load resulting from an increasingly larger buildup of projects funded in previous years and still current. (One would expect, as well, that as past projects built up, the number of terminated projects would, correspondingly, also build up. Perhaps project lives are much longer than everyone

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5. Some FRrs reported that it was a "drag" to do the paperwork necessary to close a project, so that those tasks tended to fall to the bottom of the pile. It is a pity that the moment of closing a project cannot be taken as an opportunity for interesting reflection. One might want to take advantage of those moments to ask FRs to reflect back on what they would have done differently (or what they already do differently, what they think worked and didn't, and what they think the group's future will be). Again, this assessment could be made through an interview conducted by ORE, or perhaps a seminar. Currently, the major obstacle to closing out projects, let alone thinking reflectively about them, is the task of writing the project history. Perhaps that task could be lessened and the "reflective" part given more prominence; or some of the work of writing down the reflections might be taken over by ORE.

anticipated, or FRs are being somewhat sluggish about closing out old projects. 5

Most people seemed not to have actually sensed the decrease in project size themselves before they heard the statistic being quoted by others. They also felt that the decrease was not across the board, but represented a decline in the very small category of large projects (say, above $500,000). For reasons discussed below, people seemed to be staying away from these large projects. With respect to small and medium projects, they did not feel that average size was also decreasing. The statistic on lower average grant size, then, may be somewhat of a statistical artifact, caught hold of by staff as a seemingly valid explanation for their general feelings of dissatisfaction with an increased workload. They may have more work, that is, but for reasons other than increases in the number of projects funded per year.

It is important to dwell a little on this subject because the reasons people report for staying away from large projects can be seen as reflecting the emergence of a significant consensus among FRs (with an important minority dissent) about certain "lessons learned" about grassroots projects. The consensus, if it indeed exists, is not only an important example of Foundation learning and should be chronicled as such, but it also has significant disturbing implications for policy, which I will spell out below. This is an area, therefore, where future studies might be profitably focused.

People gave the following reasons for staying away from large projects:

(1) Large projects are complex and very demanding of FR time--both during the pre-proposal and the monitoring phase. The feeling I got from some FRs was that the work required to fund and monitor a number of smaller projects adding up to the same amount of money spent for one large project, might actually be no greater than for that large project--and perhaps even less. This is an interesting observation, since it belies the conventional wisdom about "economies of scale" in project lending--i.e., that projects take a fixed amount of work, no matter what their size, so that the staff cost per dollar "moved" is smaller for large projects than for small ones. If the Foundation's smaller projects do not carry these higher per unit costs, then this is a significant discovery.

(2) People felt it was more difficult to keep a monitoring eye on the larger project than on the smaller one (or on a base-group project versus a capital-city-based facilitator). When money gets ripped off, they said, it is easier with a small project to know that it has happened, take a strong stand, and cause the offender to be exposed to community pressure. With a larger project, it is difficult to figure out what is happening and where the money went, and denunciations of misspending do not surface as easily and quickly. (Also, it is difficult for the FR to discreetly ask around about the

large-project/ large-organization, because it gets back quickly to the organization and is taken by the grantee as a kind of public display of distrust on the part of the IAF.)

(3) Small projects are more "fun," some said, than large projects. Large projects require a lot of administrative work, and often require management or technical expertise placing them somewhat beyond the reach of the FR's skills and making it more difficult for the FR to relate to the project, participate in it, and make judgments about it on his own. Small projects are more suited to the generalist, country-specific, and process expertise of the FR.

(4) People feel that the lessons to be learned from the problem projects in Peru and Chile is that they were too large and too ambitious in terms of creating large organizations and, in some cases, too sophisticated technically. Small projects are considered more desirable, then, in that they are a synonym for smaller, more modest organization-building efforts; they are less vulnerable to the temptation to load project costs up with equipment beyond the capabilities of the grantee.

(5) Many said that large projects are less frequent because of the "exhaustion of NDF opportunities." Once you created a national development foundation in a country, that is, there is no space in the non-government sector for another one. Why should this be the case--or is it that the NDF "fad" has passed in the Foundation, or that IAF

support for another NDF would make relations difficult with the first one?

(6) Large projects are said to be less frequent to the extent that they are associated with large, capital-city-based facilitator organizations. With increasing experience, FRs are becoming more familiar with the nooks and crannies of their countries, both organizationally and geographically, and are better able to find base groups and small organizations themselves--rather than relating them through a capital-city based facilitator. In this sense, the large projects of the past are seen as a result of Foundation newness at getting to the grassroots.

(7) Many small and medium projects represent base groups spun off from the larger facilitator programs. These projects are more plentiful now than before because of the number of intervening years during which facilitator organizations were stimulating base-group formation in the countryside. 6

To paraphrase with a certain amount of liberty, I see the reaction against large projects by FRs as a finding that large projects

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6. Let me repeat again that a small minority of FRs either had no preferences, or thought that large projects were also "fun." I sometimes felt that the difference between the large-project lovers and haters was that the former were risk-loving, while the latter were risk-averse. If this is the case, and risk-loving does not lead to bad projects, then one might want to encourage the risk-lovers to take on the challenge, in order the keep average project size from falling.

are not in the Foundation style--that they force (or lure) the Foundation into doing things that it should know better not to do, things that have all the ugly mistakes of large-donor projects. Small projects, to continue the paraphrase, are the direction in which the Foundation can refine further its unique style and develop its own comparative advantage. Small projects, moreover, are more in character with Foundation constraints on staff size and on technical expertise; small projects are compatible with a generalist, country-knowledgeable staff, whereas large projects are less so. The projects that people were excited about were usually small ones (the CUNA Indian project is an exception), not large ones. Large projects make FRs feel "soft" and inadequate; small projects are where they can shine. The logical conclusion of this contrast is that small projects do more good for the poor than large ones because the Foundation is better at choosing and monitoring them.

Though I overdraw the contrast in this paraphrase, I tend to sympathize with this characterization of small and large projects as related to the Foundation. The Foundation should be able to take advantage of its "luxury" of being able to do small projects, and resist tendencies to do the larger ones--if, indeed, this is the conclusion of learning cumulated so far. This kind of decision, unfortunately, has negative implications for the project-pushing problem. If the large projects are allowed to be ignored, or are rejected, it means that each FR will have to propose even more projects per year, again leading to staff discontentment and a probable decline in the quality of project choice and monitoring.

The dilemma is a difficult one. On the one hand, let us say that the trend toward smaller projects is a real sign of learning in the Foundation, and refinement of its comparative advantage--an example of learning that it ought to be proud of and public about. On the other hand, if the Foundation acts on this learning without increasing staff size or significantly decreasing the level of its annual grant commitments, then working conditions will become more difficult and the project approval and monitoring process may decline in quality.

I have no solution in mind to the dilemma, aside from the obvious suggestion that the Foundation might want to resign oneself to a few large "sacrificial cows" per year, in order to get the money spent. 7 I sense that the dilemma is posing very large problems to FRs now, and that their complaints and resentments about "project-pushing" are a reflection of it. They see the pressure to push projects as "ruining" the quality of Foundation work, as well as

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7. The "sacrifice" would not be that one expected the project to be bad, but that the project would be an obvious "winner" that some other donor would already be involved in. The other donor would take care of most of the burden of technical assessment and monitoring, the Foundation would simply ride its coattails; the project itself might not be that exciting to the Foundation. This would be the sacrifice.

of life at the Foundation.

The question of large projects and project-pushing pressures, of course, is one of management, and does not fall within the purview of a report on evaluation. But it is hard to talk about the subject of Foundation learning without running up against the subject of pushing projects; and since the problem is a significant one, evaluation can perhaps be directed toward coming up with some findings that would point toward ways of alleviating the problem. It is a pity, after all, to find that the "project-pushing" phenomenon, and the complaints about it by the most dedicated and productive staff members, are as conspicuous a phenomenon at the Foundation as at AID and the World Bank--given that the Foundation seemed to have been set up with the freedom not to be ruled by such pressures. If, indeed, the Foundation cannot escape these pressures and what they do to projects and to staff, then that is somewhat of an indictment of the feasibility of this "alternative" model of development assistance.

I would suggest a few initial approaches to the question:

(1) ORE might analyze the data on grants to find out exactly what the source is of the "decline" in average project size--and whether it actually exists. This analysis might also include a longitudinal analysis of the project load per-year per-country (per-FR may be an unfair and too-threatening approach); this should be broken down by new projects, amendments, and subsequent grants--and should

include the number of projects per-year, per-country in the monitoring portfolio.

(2) The data might be analyzed to see if, through the years, projects are getting smaller and having a greater number of amendments--and hence are being strung out longer through time. If this is the case, ORE may want to sponsor some investigation directed toward producing guidelines about phasing--i.e., making a longer-term grant that has various small disbursements phased through time, which are contingent upon reviews that are more like those required for an amendment but requiring less staff input. The guidelines would include a list of "vital signs" for how to react to each successive disbursement decision. (It may be that there is not much room for saving on FR work this way, in which case the choice of amendments versus phased disbursements is not that significant.)

A decision to choose a long period over which small disbursements are phased would also represent a distinct change in thinking about the life of grantee organizations, and the best pace at which they should be supported. If such a decision were taken (or formalized, if longer, strung-out funding has actually been increasing), it would represent a distinct instance of learning and change. ORE could help to illuminate the question by sponsoring work that would not only verify whether or not this trend was occurring and represented an improvement, but would produce some guidelines as to how to structure the phases, and how to make decisions on disbursements. (A few FRs have actually expressed a need for this kind of guidance, in the context of explaining that they feel more comfortable with smaller first disbursements, but are not clear about how to make decisions about the subsequent ones. How do you know, that is, whether refusal to disburse will help the organization to swim by itself, or simply cause it to drown.)

(3) Another contribution to the phasing question could be made by ORE if it were to draw up a few sentences of instruction for evaluators so as to make them aware of this question (since it is difficult to make the question itself the topic of a cross-project evaluation). Evaluators could give some opinions about disbursement size (whether too little or too much), pacing (whether too rapid or too slow), and various funded items (whether some are harder to absorb than others, whether some are more vulnerable to misuse than others). (I discuss some of the comparative characteristics of different grant items below.) ORE might also conduct a series of interviews of FRs to learn their experience and ideas on this question.

<u>Goods vs. money</u>

Related to the subject of large-vs.-small projects and the phasing of disbursements is the question of items that are funded by a grant. Some FRs said, or implied, that they felt more comfortable about funding expenditures for equipment, installations and other concrete goods, than for salaries and other "invisible purchases." They felt that the "goods" expenditures had self-monitoring features that salaries and other operational expenditures did not: not only could the FR see with his own eyes whether the good had been acquired and was in place, but the intended beneficiaries and other outside parties could stand as witnesses. Those for whose benefit the goods were intended, moreover, would be likely to notice if they did not materialize, and make their discontent public. The FRs presence to hear the complaint would not even be necessary for this mechanism to work, since disgruntled beneficiaries would complain to management itself, which would feel at least uncomfortable about having nothing to show for the money spent.

Salaries and other operational expenditures, of course, share none of these redeeming qualities of visiblity and built-in beneficiary pressures for accountability. In addition, a few FRs said, salaries were often too extravagant for local people, and hooked them to the fortunes of the organization rather than the community (in the case of facilitator organizations not based in the community but hiring local people there to help implement projects). The project-funded salaries, it was felt, introduced them to hopes for mobility through the facilitator organization outside the community, and opened up channels for them. One FR made an argument for appropriate technology on these same grounds: if you trained somebody to run a bulldozer or other types of equipment used in the modern sector, it was a sure ticket to his soon leaving the community; whereas if your projects used a more rustic technology, they required less skills, and the simpler skills acquired would represent less of a lure to leave--being less in demand outside.

I have overdrawn, of course, the opposition between goods and "invisible" expenditures, for one needs invisible expenditures in order to put the goods into place, run them, or distribute them. Nevertheless, I was intrigued with the expression of this thought by more than one FR, because it is very close to the rationale that large donors used for years for financing large capital projects and not operating expenditures--road construction but not maintenance, school construction but not teachers' salaries, dams for irrigation but not farm-level channels, etc. This staying away of the large donors from the "morass" of operating expenditures ultimately came under criticism, for reasons now known to us all, and the large donors are currently struggling with the question of how to successfully finance ongoing costs; and of how to behave in the sectors where capital costs are a low percentage of total costs, mainly, the "social" sectors as opposed to the "infrastructure" sectors. The original assumption, that is, did not work: you could not finance the more easily monitored capital costs, and assume that that would be enough to cause the grantee to come up with the operating costs on his own. (Interestingly enough, the failure to come up with operating costs, in the case of infrastructure, was partly a result of the fact that grantees <u>did</u> have the funds but used them instead for more construction!)

Have the FRs found--as revealed in their comments about "goods" costs versus salary costs--that the original preferences of the large donors for financing capital expenditures were not so wrong after all? Is the IAF completing a circle that started out with the large capital projects of the 1950s and 1960s? The questions, of course, are a little unfair--partly because the Foundation projects and the large-donor projects are not strictly comparable. But the issue is an important one, just as the issue of large versus small projects is. Can the Foundation get away with financing more goods and less "invisibles"? How does the grantee make do for the "invisibles"? Are goods really easier to keep an eye on than "invisibles"? Or only certain ones? 8

ORE might want to poll the FRs on this subject, and find out what it has learned about one budget item versus another. If indeed there is successful experience with financing mainly "goods" costs, then there are important lessons to be learned from this--and

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8. Another variation of the "goods-vs.-money" agreement discussed here has also been used in support of making welfare transfers through food-aid programs rather than in cash.

communicated to other donors. One might conduct such an inquiry with the goal of producing a set of guidelines about items financed, or at least a list of lessons learned.

Cycles, spirals, and negative lessons

A number of FRs spoke of swings of the pendulum between one kind of approach to projects, or internal management style, and another. Some of the swings identified were from base groups to facilitator organizations and back, from an evaluation department to no evaluation department and back, from cross-regional meetings to no cross-regional meetings and back, from certain kinds of project-review meetings and other kinds, with a different frequency, and back. People also felt that certain types of projects suddenly came into style, and seemed to go out of style as mysteriously as they came in: credit projects, some said, seemed to have "peaked," a rash of women's projects was appearing in some places. With respect to these project "fads," it was not clear whether it was the Foundation or the grantees who were causing the fad. Many people felt that discussions of these issues were stale and like beating a dead horse--since the only result could be another swing of the pendulum back to a place where everybody had already been.

In some ways, it was sad to hear people describe their discussions as swings of a pendulum or fads--as if these changes were caused by an almost exogenous cyclical dynamic, rather than representing any underlying learning process leading to increasing control over the results of one's actions. The pendulum seemed an image of people desperately and ingenuously rushing into one thing, quickly discovering its failings, and rushing hopefully into a new thing, abandoning completely the first; then one would find the faults of that new thing, and dejectedly go back to the first thing, forgetting enough of its problems as was convenient. (This phenomenon is somewhat reminiscent of Hirschman's discussions about "fracassomania" among Latin American intellectuals and technocrats, in his article entitled "Obstacles to the perception of change.")

I am not sure that the swings really represent such back-and-forth, non-learning cycles. I would expect that they are more akin to spirals, and that partly because of the lack of a chronicling of collective learning, people feel as if they are going back to the same old thing. ORE might find it helpful to try to discover the learning process that underlies (hopefully) these swings, showing that they are not simple random and whimsical events. It may be that the learning from the failure of the first swing is stored during the second swing, to be reapplied after the swing back to the first. How, for example, is the Foundation doing base groups differently than it did before the swing back to facilitator groups? How is evaluation different now than it was the first time around?

A related subject, in that it is also a little sad, is that the lessons that people say they have learned tend to be negative: we learn that big projects are a mess, that money for salaries gets lost, that people can't handle too much money, that projects with several components usually don't work, etc. Of course one can state these findings positively: small projects do better than big ones, "goods" expenditures are better managed than salary expenditures, people do better at handling small amounts of money, single-task projects usually do better than multi-task. No matter how the lessons are stated, however, they were learned as a result of problems.

Listing lessons in the negative form makes it appear that the Foundation's possibilities of choice become more and more limited through time, as one approach after another is struck down. Successful approaches may indeed be discovered mainly in the course of facing up to the problems caused by unsuccessful approaches--in which case all one needs to do is to make the statements positive, as I have done above, to show that "positive learning" has taken place. But I suspect that there are some lessons that have been learned--or are yet to be learned--that result from success, or uneventful successes, and that are not based on the rejection of a wrong approach. They are harder to observe, because one notices projects with problems more than those that are going smoothly; one feels one has to offer an explanation for a failure (where did we go wrong?), but not a success (what was it that we were supposed to be doing that we did?).

More Foundation learning seems to have taken place with respect to the problem projects than the successes--as reflected in the disproportionate number of evaluations on problems, and of discussion of them at meetings. Everyone talks about the failures of large projects in Peru and Chile, for example, but nobody mentions the relatively smooth going of the large national-development-foundation projects in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Mexico. Added to this is the relatively small amount of attention paid to projects in unexciting or politically unimportant countries (Panama, Paraguay, etc.) and to unobtrusively small projects versus the large ones. It may well be, in fact, that the FR perception of large projects as more problematic than small projects is an artifact of evaluations having been concentrated on problem projects and large ones (though I doubt it).

Now that the Foundation knows so much about its problem projects, and what to avoid, it might make sense to choose a set of successful projects and try to discover how they differ from the general characteristics of the problem ones. Again, ORE and/or a consultant could make a start at this by interviewing FRs about the characteristics of their favorite projects.

Credit, the beginning

A number of FRs said that, with my papers on rural credit and Bolivia, the task of looking at credit at the Foundation had really "only just begun." I think this is true, at least to the extent that it is not possible to leave the subject of so many projects in such a negative light 9 without making it official (e.g., with guidelines about the "only" circumstances under which credit will be supported)--or without describing the conditions under which credit has not been a problem in Foundation projects. In addition, my and Hirschman's paper can be seen as offering two mutually exclusive hypotheses about credit. According to Hirschman, the type of activity, or whether the group has success with it, does not really matter, as long as it serves to get an organization going (a view similar to that held by many in the Foundation). My view, in contrast, is that credit is a "bad" activity, reducing an organization's chances for going anywhere. The two opposing views can be easily converted into an empirical question: how have the groups with credit funds fared, and how have the credit funds themselves fared, whether the group was successful or not?

Information gathered from IAF files on grants with

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9. More negative reports on credit are coming in the Hartford and de Janvry reports on Chile.

rotating-credit funds suggests that these have not fared too well. For half the groups, no information could be found on how much money was now in the credit fund; for the other half, the funds reported to be outstanding were almost always the same as the initial grant--a near impossibility, suggesting that the figures were simply taken from the grant document, rather than representing current outstanding values. ORE could do further work in Washington on the data already collected, by polling the FRs on the status of each group--whether the credit fund still exists, whether the organization still exists, whether other activities have become more central--and, if the credit fund failed, what the transition was, if successful, to another activity.

A second, and perhaps more important task is to try to find common features of the credit projects that were successful--with the ultimate purpose of drawing up a set of guidelines. I have not done such cross-project questioning at the Foundation, but FRs have already made some comments--in response to my questions of why they thought a particular credit project worked well--that exemplify what such a list might look like. Three features that seemed plausible candidates for such a list were (1) repayment was denominated in kind rather than cash, thus providing automatic indexing to repayment capital, and allowing a reasonable real interest rate to be charged. (2) Some kind of important peer-group mechanism was in place; for example, small groups of five to eight borrowers shared joint responsibility for the debt, or farmer-peer "supervisors" were hired to check that each farmer had planted what he had borrowed money for (the supervisors, provided their own transportation to the plots--usually walking, or riding an animal). (3) The grant agreement stipulated that a grantee repay grant funds to an independently administered-in-country fund, and that the grantee have sole borrowing rights to that repaid principal and interest; incentives were also built in for early repayment. (4) A grant to a coop association was channeled to it through its own affiliated coops as a loan to the association from them; this set up a dynamic (hopefully) of strong internal pressure on the association by its members, if the association does not repay. (These latter two arrangements have just started, so they cannot be reported as successes; I list them here because they reflect cautious thinking about the credit mechanism, an awareness of the disincentives to repayment, and an attempt to correct for it.) These points come from single examples, and are not cross-project findings. A cross-project survey would yield a more powerful list, contribute to a good "lessons learned" piece, and serve as the basis for a set of guidelines. Compared to the investment made by the Foundation in exploring this issue so far, the task yet to be done seems relatively small, and of considerable value.

Ending a study

My suggestions about the little that is left to be done on credit, and the relative ease of it, 10 are illustrative of how future studies and comparative project evaluations might be planned by ORE. The major input of the consultant and the field phase (Bolivia, in the credit case) can be seen as looking at a limited number of projects in order to clarify the issues (unless the issues are already quite clear), rather than as providing comprehensive cross-project, cross-country evidence from the start. (The consumer-store study might be seen as being opposite to the approach of Bolivia, with the field exercise being seen as leading to comprehensive cross-project findings.)

After the major field and intellectual undertakings of a study are over, it will be much easier for the consultant (along with ORE) to specify a limited set of cross-project questions, or types of evidence to be looked for--as I have above with respect to rotating credit funds. Done this way, the cross-project evidence-gathering exercise becomes a less overwhelming task--and less demanding of the consultant's and the Foundation's ongoing input. This subsequent stage can be carried out within or closer to ORE and the FRs, which insures

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10. Much of it could be done by ORE in Washington, and any cross-project fieldwork could be done by a junior person under my or ORE's direction, or an FR on sabbatical.

greater feed-in of lessons to the Foundation, since the final "verification" stage goes hand-in-hand with the formation of guidelines. This allows the Foundation, as it prefers, to avoid large multi-year, cross-country evaluation exercises like the one proposed by the LTC for credit, while at the same time obtaining much of what these exercises are meant to yield. All this means that one of the most important aspects of a study is what ORE does with it afterward. It also means that the consultant's scope of work should include a list of suggestions about the questions that should be asked in such a subsequent stage of cross-project work.

Technical vital signs

Many FRs express a need to have more technical guidance on certain kinds of projects. Women's, crafts, handicapped, environmental, appropriate technology--are some of the areas that have come up. In many cases, the FR's networks do not put him into contact with persons with this particular expertise, he does not have enough familiarity with such persons to be able to invite them to a brainstorming session or ask their opinions on the phone. In addition, many FRs express a desire for a set of guidelines with respect to some of these constantly recurring technical issues. They refer to the "vital signs" as a model--as a set of guidelines on process issues that they have gone back to time and again--and wish that some analogous guidelines might be drawn up for these more technical questions. Since some FRs spoke as highly of the internal process of generating the "vital signs" as of their value as guidelines, ORE might consider repeating that same process, or a modification of it, for the technical guidelines. FRs also feel that to call somebody in for a brainstorming session is somewhat cumbersome bureaucratically, and some wish that the procedures could be simplified, or that some of the "mechanical work" of that process might be done by ORE.

With respect to the guidelines issue ORE might do the following. First, it could hold a meeting with FRs at which two or three high-priority guidelines areas would be identified, and FRs would express their opinions as to what questions they would like answered, and what kind of "expert" they would like called in (including suggested names). ORE might then canvas the Washington development community, and invite someone in with expertise in the area, to talk about her experience, and to respond to FR questions. Out of this exercise, a set of guidelines might be drawn up--either by the invitee or by ORE after the meeting, in consultation with the FRs.

Inviting outsiders in for this purpose would be valuable not only for the guidelines produced, but also because it would introduce FRs to people they can turn to when they have questions on a specific project (which may be more valuable than referring to general guidelines). This kind of exercise would also expose others in the development community to the expertise and personality of the Foundation, and help to mitigate somewhat the isolation of FRs from professionals working on subjects of related interest--especially at places like the World Bank and other organizations with considerable investments in research and evaluation on development questions. Though FRs do not make these contacts themselves partly out of the press of work, I think they are also somewhat shy about exposing themselves to economists and other professionals who might view them as "soft." Inviting a professional to the Foundation reduces that problem by arranging the meeting on Foundation turf (a more comfortable place), focuses the discussion on a specific issue on which FRs, as well as the invitee, can bring experience to bear, and gives the invitee a chance to see that he has something to learn from FRs, as well as vice versa.

Sabbaticals, details, and other diversifications

Many people expressed a desire, not just for sabbaticals, but to spend periods of time (one to three months) doing something else for the Foundation. Some wanted to travel with another FR in another region, some wanted to work on a particular topic in ORE for a time, some wanted to be detailed to another PVO, some wanted to do their own evaluation work in collaboration with an outsider. If management is indeed willing to consider such proposals (as it has already shown by approving some), it might make sense to be explicit about it--i.e., to say that certain types of proposals for certain lengths of time would be seriously considered. Despite the fact that a few such proposals have been accepted and carried out, FRs seem to think that management would not be receptive--and classify this perception as part of the general picture of "caring only about money-moving."

Local-vs.-gringo evaluators

The question of local-vs.-gringo evaluators should not be an important one with respect to studies. FRs have good reasons to prefer local evaluators for their evaluation and monitoring work, which do not really apply to studies. Studies require persons with analytical training in the social sciences, and experience in doing comparative empirical work. In many Latin American countries, these sets of skills and experiences do not exist. Much of the evaluation work contracted out in Latin America tends to be abstract with little empirical content or, at the other extreme, to engage in endless collection and reporting of data, with no analysis to inform that data. These shortcomings do not necessarily affect the evaluation and monitoring contracted out by the FRs, because of the informational needs of the FR and the appropriateness, in many cases, of a person with expertise in a specific area. All this is not to say that Latin American evaluators should not be used but, rather, that there need be no problem in using a gringo.

Sensitivities of grantees about being evaluated should not be a problem either. The comparative nature of the evaluation--and its separateness from the FR monitoring and evaluation activity--will make the study seem much less threatening. With a few exceptions, moreover, hypersensitivity by grantees about outside evaluators seems to be limited to large grantees. With careful explanations by FRs to the grantees, along with the choosing of sensitive evaluators, apprehensions can usually be taken care of. (ORE might want to draft a short standard paragraph, in Spanish, which FRs and evaluators could use to explain a study to a grantee. It could run something like: The Foundation wants to improve the way it funds projects and relates to its grantees and, to this end, is looking at a series of projects in various countries in this area. We have already looked at X and Y project in A and B countries, and after we leave you we are going to look at P and Q projects in C and D countries. We want to understand better what projects and activities work best, and which ones have problems and why. We're not interested now in making any decisions about future funding of your particular project, but we want to put your project together with others and see what the general picture looks like, so we can make better decisions in the future.)

Miscellanea on ORE

In addition to the comments by FRs on ORE reported so far, I wanted to sum up FR impressions of ORE. They fell into seven categories.

(1) People did not seem to feel threatened by ORE, in the sense of ORE taking away their control over evaluations, or invading their country turf with ORE-sponsored studies. (This was a surprise to me.)

(2) Most people did not have ready suggestions in their mind as to what contributions ORE might make, or about topics for studies (except for the sector studies listed in the Topics section).

(3) When people did suggest topics for studies, they usually involved "sector" studies--like women's, crafts, appropriate technology, etc.--rather than "issue" studies.

(4) Most people seemed to want more interaction with other FRs, particularly outside their region, and outsiders (PVOs, for example); yet they seemed too overwhelmed by work, and not enough encouraged by management, to bring such interactions about; it seemed that they would welcome ORE taking an organizing hand in such interactions, or at least help them out.

(5) Negative feelings about ORE related to only two specific activities. The strongest feelings related to editing, for the Journal and in general, as discussed above; and the second strongest to the cluster evaluations. Most FRs seemed to see the cluster evaluations as characterizing the kind of work ORE does and will do in the future. They did not see those exercises as an attempt by ORE to get an overview based on file materials but, rather, that the cluster studies represented ORE's concept of "evaluation" or "studies." They disliked the cluster evaluations for the following reasons: (a) the topics weren't important or significant to their concerns; (b) the way of going about the work resulted in products that did not tell them anything they didn't already know; (c) the consultants hired were "junior" people, from whom one could not learn anything; and (d) FRs were not involved in the planning of these exercises.

(6) On the positive side, a number of people felt that ORE participation in discussions and decisions had "toned up" the quality of thinking about problems; as noted above, the area of research came

in for specific praise, with the caveat that ORE should not initiate research projects.

(7) Some people hoped that ORE could take some of the administrative work of bringing in consultants and doing evaluations off their hands. (FR suggestions about diminishing the administrative burdens of their work, however, concentrated on an expressed need for "junior-FR" positions or additional support staff to whom FRs could delegate some of the paper- and file-work involved in project monitoring).

I have a few minor suggestions for Sheldon's Evaluation Book, one my own, and one Sally Yudelman's: (1) the brief writeup of the evaluation should describe the findings of the evaluation rather than what it set out to do (JT); and (2) the book or printout should have a section organized by type of project, rather than just by country.

Topics for studies

Most people were not brimming with topics to suggest. I will list first the topics that were suggested by more than a few persons, and then those topics that were suggested by only one person.

The repeated topics were (1) the impact of training, promocion, cursillos, technical assistance--components that enter into

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almost all the projects; 11 (2) large projects--are they always failures? what makes them work when they do?, etc.; (3) "sector" studies in uncharted territory (the human-rights evaluation exercise is often cited as a favorable model)--e.g., women's projects, crafts, handicapped, environmental, appropriate technology, ethnic minorities.

Topics suggested by only one person were:

(1) Trucks (what is the appropriate size, when are they economic, what are their trouble spots and how should they be dealt with?).

(2) Country assessments a la the de Janvry exercise in Chile, that help FRs to know what kinds of projects make the best sense.

(3) Credit: in addition to the question posed in the section on credit above, what is the effect on people of having had credit once or twice, for the first time, regardless of whether the rotating fund still exists?

(4) What has been the relationship between people's participation in an IAF-supported project and their participation in broader social movements, particularly in areas where broader social movements have existed or developed during the time of the IAF funding? Does the involvement of people in the IAF-supported organization cause them to identify with the broader movement, or to

11. I think that a very interesting first crack at this subject would be for a consultant, or FR, or graduate student, to do a sleuthing job trying to track down people some years after they'd taken courses in IAF-supported projects, and interview them about what they thought.

withdraw from it?

(5) What has been the effect of IAF actions, particularly in the case of problem projects? When have the actions had good results, and when bad?

(6) This topic was suggested in the context of expressing a desire for more interaction among FRs, as well as for getting more Foundation-wide learning about projects: FRs could be interviewed about their project experience, with the following kinds of questions--what is the most exciting and innovative project you have ever seen, and why? What are the favorable surprises you have experienced with your projects, the best unanticipated results? This FR suggested that an FR be detailed to do the interviewing on this topic.

I suspect that my list is meager, especially on topics of interest to more than one person, partly because I did not ask the question as much as I might have--i.e., what are possible topics of evaluation? I was more interested in finding out how people handled their current evaluation work, and what they had thought of past evaluations. If there is interest in the question, it should be pursued with the FRs, since I may not have given it fair coverage here.

I would like to add a topic suggestion of my own. I think it is important to look at groups that have done well in regions or countries undergoing particularly adverse economic conditions. (De

Janvry, for example, tells me that some of the IAF-funded Chilean coops he saw are doing well--a surprising finding, given the extreme adversity of the economic environment.) I think the topic is a neglected one because we are so committed to the idea that the poor sectors of the population suffer more than most, and that they are undergoing particular stress these days. It is contrary to the nature of our political commitment to dwell on success--because it may be looked at as saying that things are not that bad after all. I think it is extremely important to overcome our ignorance about how the successful groups have survived, because it will help us to make better decisions about what kinds of projects to support under adverse economic conditions. The topic is not necessarily suited to a study in itself, but the questions should be included in the work of all evaluators. De Janvry's work in Chile and my work with Hatch and Grindle in Nicaragua are current cases in point.

Closing

I would like to close this report with a note of caution. My concern about the need for interaction between FRs, and my suggestions about building this interaction into study exercises, should be taken with a grain of salt. I think that, up to this point, the Foundation has done considerably better on interaction among its staff than it has on learning about its projects, and their impact on people's lives. Foundation staff is so articulate, reflective, informed, and interesting to talk to, that there is a considerable temptation to an outsider like myself to be satisfied after talking with them, that one knows what the projects look like and understands what impact they have. It is not that the staff view is wrong. It is, rather, that their limited exposure to the project environment, in terms of time, and their necessary preoccupation with operational work, provides a certain kind of knowledge about a project and not another--that which allows one to make systematic comparisons between projects.

Before working with the IAF, I had never experienced this danger of feeling that I knew so much about the projects--and being so favorably inclined toward them--just by talking to the staff. Usually, the persons I interview reveal enough traces of arrogance, ethnocentricism, inadequate understanding, contempt for poor people, or lack of sympathy for appropriate technical choices, that I automatically maintain a healthy degree of skepticism about what they are saying--or, at least, a feeling that I really couldn't believe it, even though it sounded plausible and interesting, unless I checked it out myself. With Foundation staff, it is hard to maintain this skepticism, and the feeling that one cannot "really" know what the projects are about unless one visits them. This is a "danger" that future evaluators, perhaps, should be warned about!

The sophistication of FRs in knowing their project world is a result of many things, of which interaction must play an important role. For that reason, I am not as concerned about interaction as a studies issue (as opposed to a management issue, in terms of which I think it is central). The need for comparative learning about projects, I think, is of much greater importance.