Project logic, organisational practices and human autonomy

Four foreign-aided projects in Nicaragua and El Salvador

Mirtha R. Muñiz Castillo

December 2010

Working Paper

2010WP015

Maastricht Graduate School of Governance

The 'watch dog' role of the media, the impact of migration processes, health care access for children in developing countries, mitigation of the effects of Global Warming are typical examples of governance issues – issues to be tackled at the base; issues to be solved by creating and implementing effective policy.

The Maastricht Graduate School of Governance, Maastricht University, prepares students to pave the road for innovative policy developments in Europe and the world today.

Our master's and PhD programmes train you in analysing, monitoring and evaluating public policy in order to strengthen democratic governance in domestic and international organisations. The School carefully crafts its training activities to give national and international organisations, scholars and professionals the tools needed to harness the strengths of changing organisations and solve today's challenges, and more importantly, the ones of tomorrow.

Author:

Dr. Mirtha R. Muñiz Castillo
Maastricht Graduate School of Governance
Maastricht University
Email: mirtha.munizcastillo@maastrichtuniversity.nl
http://mirthamunizcastillo.blogspot.com/

Mailing address
Universiteit Maastricht
Maastricht Graduate School of Governance
P.O. Box 616
6200 MD Maastricht
The Netherlands

Visiting address
Keizer Karelplein 19, 6211 TC Maastricht
Phone: +31 43 3884650
Fax: +31 43 3884864
Email: info-gov@maastrichtuniversity.nl

Project logic, organisational practices and human autonomy

Four foreign-aided projects in Nicaragua and El Salvador

Mirtha R. Muñiz Castillo [*]

Abstract

This article aims to connect human development thinking to the operational realities of project design, management and evaluation. It explores how foreign-aided projects influence the local participants' autonomy, considering that enhanced autonomy promotes long-run development effectiveness. It examines their project logic and explores the stakeholders' various project theories, including assumptions and values. It looks not only at the expected changes but also at the actual felt changes in participants' lives and consciousness, based on organisational practices.

Evidence from four projects in Nicaragua and El Salvador indicates that managers need to understand project logic well beyond a 'logframe'. Project practices reveal the implicit real assumptions and affect the participants' autonomy and the projects' effectiveness and sustainability. When practices constrain the opportunities and felt competence of individuals to help themselves, the 'development' promoted is not sustainable. In contrast, project planners and managers should consciously select autonomy-supportive practices to further sustainable human development.

Keywords:

Autonomy, project logic, organisational practices, human development

---

Project logic, organisational practices and human autonomy

Four foreign-aided projects in Nicaragua and El Salvador

1. Introduction

Concerns around international aid effectiveness have grown as more flows are allocated to poor countries, including within the millennium development goals framework. At the project level, effectiveness has been usually assessed in terms of the achievement of immediate outputs (operational effectiveness), intended impacts, and objectives measured in monetary terms (economic effectiveness). Building on the insights of Ellerman (2006) this article argues that, for long-run development effectiveness, sustainability and also favourable impacts in unforeseen ways, projects need to expand the autonomy of participants. The 'human autonomy effectiveness' criterion is relevant to examine the effects of projects on the lives, opportunities and capacities of participants (Muñiz Castillo, 2009; Muñiz Castillo and Gasper, 2009).

The article aims to connect human development thinking to the operational realities of project design, management and evaluation. It reflects on how externally supported projects can influence the autonomy of local participants, by examining their project logic and exploring various project theories that stakeholders form, including their assumptions and values. For this, it looks not only at the expected changes in terms of a project's planned inputs, outputs and impacts, but also at the actual felt changes in participants' lives and consciousness, based on what was done during the project and how it was done (i.e., the organisational practices).

The article is based on evidence from four projects in rural communities of Nicaragua and El Salvador, two of water and sanitation and two of post-disaster reconstruction (Muñiz Castillo, 2009). Qualitative and quantitative data, including project documents, public reports, external statistics, stakeholders' interviews, focus group discussions, and a questionnaire survey, were analysed interpretively, aiming at understanding changes in the lives of project participants, drawing especially on their own perceptions.

The article is organised as follows. In the next section, I explain the role of human autonomy for effective and sustainable human development. Then, in section 3, I make the case for looking at organisational practices, beyond (formal) project logic. In section 4, I analyse evidence from the projects, centred on four types of practices. Finally, I explain how project practices can influence human autonomy and conclude.

2. Human autonomy and development effectiveness

In this article, I consider human autonomy as a person's ability to make reasoned choices in significant matters and achieve positive results in his or her life (Muñiz Castillo, forthcoming). All adult people have the ability to make choices but to different degrees, depending on their personal competence and their specific contexts. In addition, whether and to what extent we can reach our valued goals depends on several factors (many of them out of our control) and we typically act on our intentions in cooperation with others. Autonomy then does not imply independence (Deci and Ryan, 2000); we engage in interdependent relationships during all our life.

We can talk of degrees of autonomy. To develop or expand our autonomy, we require resources, relationships and certain conditions. More precisely, human autonomy has three determinants: an internal capacity to make reasoned choices and act accordingly; our access to resources or entitlements; and the structural contexts at different levels. These contexts comprise the social relations, institutions and organisations that promote or restrict opportunities for making those choices; contexts can be autonomy-supportive or controlling (Deci and Ryan, 1987). In these terms, autonomy can be seen as a 'combined capability' (Nussbaum, 2000) because it reflects both internal and external elements that configure our effective ability to lead our own lives, what we can do or be.

Moreover, autonomy refers not just to participation or 'process freedom', but also to 'opportunity freedom' (Sen, 1999) understood as the possibility to achieve valued outcomes, given personal and social circumstances. In this sense, we must pay attention to agency and to Nussbaum's sense of 'internal capabilities' and their use.

In the context of development projects, an expansion of autonomy may be seen both in relevant decision-making by participants during the project cycle (high-quality participation) and in positive changes in the determinants of autonomy that lead to greater ability to attain reasoned objectives.

Next, we can revisit the notion of effectiveness for project assessment. In general, effectiveness refers to the extent to which objectives are achieved, taking into account their relative importance (OECD, 2002). However, several development objectives are difficult to quantify, the causal assumptions used in the project design often do not hold, and several external factors affect outcomes.

I argue that 'human autonomy effectiveness' (HAE) is a more relevant interpretation of development effectiveness because human development is more sustainable when people become better able to improve their lives (Ellerman, 2006) and when the strategies devised with this aim are authentically motivated. Not only the goals but also the strategies to achieve them should respect local needs and values. This HAE criterion is relevant in project design, management and evaluation.

In design and evaluation, this criterion indicates that effectiveness should be assessed in relation to whether and how individual autonomy has been expanded – in addition to, and indeed as more important than (other) formal goals. HAE is different from:

- Operational effectiveness, which refers to the achievement of operational results that can be, relatively speaking, ensured by project staff;

- Intended impact, which refers to the achievement of higher-level project goals, outside the area of relatively greater control by project staff; and

- Economic effectiveness, focused on objectives expressible in monetary terms.

HAE refers to the promotion of autonomy that supports human development (wellbeing improvement and opportunities enlargement), but not the achievement of all personal goals, as some could be opposed to each other or normatively contestable.

In addition, the criterion requires that the expansion of autonomy does not contract other priority capabilities (Alkire, 2002). For instance, project participants may develop their competence by working in self-construction activities and attending workshops, but these actions should not prevent them from working in their own farms to sustain themselves. In practice, it is necessary to discuss and agree on a capability hierarchy so that

secondary goals that would constrain more valuable capabilities are not pursued (see Alkire, 2002; Robeyns, 2003).

Regarding design, it is crucial that the change aimed for with the project (i.e., the objectives) is not purely directed by outsiders. It should be shared and preferably initiated by local people so that the project supports ongoing self-motivated change; only such a change is sustainable (Ellerman, 2006).

In contrast, a pseudo-motivated change, visible during a project timeframe, is the result solely of an extrinsic motivation; aid recipients here behave as project staff expects and play as 'good beneficiaries' in order to secure what they perceive the project can offer (cf. Wood, 2003). Traditional ex-post evaluations could wrongly consider such a change as sustainable. Hence, project management should consciously promote autonomy, and impact should instead be assessed over a term that exceeds the usual timeframe of a project.

HAE refers to a long run perspective, including especially what comes after the end of a project. Whatever may be its direct contributions to human development during its duration (e.g., improved health, learned construction skills), a project that fails to build persons' autonomy during and through its processes will fail to lead on to sustained and continuing post-project contributions to human development.

It is worth stressing that HAE does not refer to autonomy *only* as an outcome variable. It aims at promoting autonomy (or at least not harming it) during a development process. Clearly, a water project promotes wellbeing and personal competence when participants enjoy better health. But, it is crucial also that they can make some relevant decisions in matters they know, and that these decisions and corresponding actions are to some extent effective.

The HAE criterion shifts the focus from projects to people, i.e. the social actors who experience the change that should be supported by a project (cf. Crawford et al., 2005). We must examine the effects of projects on the lives, opportunities and capacities of participants. It is necessary then to understand the relationships and strategies that participants develop during a project cycle.

3. From project logic and theories to impacts

In this article, impact has a comprehensive meaning. Impacts are 'lasting or significant changes – positive or negative, intended or not – in people's lives brought about by a given action or series of actions' (Roche, 1999/2004, 21). In terms of the HAE criterion, we should emphasise how autonomy changed as a result of the processes and the outcomes of the project. For this, a combination of analysis methods (qualitative and quantitative) is required as autonomy has both objective and subjective dimensions, and we must look at both conditions for autonomy and felt competence.

Logical frameworks make explicit a project's intended impacts, as aimed at in the design phase. A 'logframe' shows the *project logic*, i.e. the hierarchy of objectives and the posited causal links between the project elements (inputs, activities, and outputs) and between them and its expected near-term and long-term impacts. In addition to this logic, an *impact theory* includes the posited causal mechanisms (social, behavioural and institutional) that would lead to the expected changes (Leeuw, 2003; Rossi et al., 2004). This theory specifies how a project contributes to the intended outcomes. A theory-based evaluation requires an explicit description of conceptions, assumptions and expectations on which the design and implementation of a project is based. However,

those mechanisms are usually not explicit or even articulated by the involved people; instead 'it is understood' that they work – they are taken for granted.

Rather than 'mechanisms', we should speak of relationships and practices, since those terms better reflect the human content of what is referred to (cf. Eyben, 2010). Practices are forms of interaction and practical strategies carried out by social actors that evolve in specific contexts and are manifested in several ways (Long and van der Ploeg, 1994). Practices are not rigidly linked to particular events or project activities. An activity can be carried out in different ways, for instance, the monitoring of construction activities could be input-based (e.g., number of work hours) or output-based (e.g., number of houses built). Moreover, the same activity can have different meanings for individuals in the same locality and can stimulate different (and sometimes opposite) responses, depending on each person's capacities, cultural context and personality.

Project staff, not necessarily from only one organisation, may hold values and promote social practices different from the local ones, with different effects on local participants. Practices will reflect the power relations in specific communities and between local stakeholders and project staffs. For example, a practice of hierarchical project management may reflect assumptions – conscious or tacit – that project participants will do as they are told, and that they have no independent objectives or no 'exit' options. Such a practice is, however, especially dangerous when institutional contexts are uncertain and stakeholders have competing interests.

Clearly, there is considerable variation in the execution of any project and these details lead to noticeable differences in project success. Even similar-in-design projects might affect the access to resources, individual skills and power relations of participants in different ways. Using a 'realistic evaluation' approach (Pawson and Tilley, 2000), we can examine project theories (not a single one) that may differ among direct beneficiaries, evaluators and other stakeholders of a single project. I will show why it is essential to explore these different theories that stakeholders form, their assumptions and values.

4. Organisational practices in four foreign-aided projects

The projects studied were executed between 1999 and 2005 with assistance from Luxembourg's aid agency. They aimed at extending the access of households to infrastructure in water and sanitation (water projects) or housing and social services (reconstruction projects). The aid modality was bilateral grant, whose terms are agreed upon by the ministries of foreign affairs of the donor and the recipient countries. The formal counterparts were the public water companies (for the water projects) or the municipal governments (for the reconstruction projects).

The four localities are relatively small, each with between 350 and 500 households. In all four cases, before and after the projects, most households depend on agriculture activities despite the urban layout of some villages and the existence of seasonal migration. Households plan their activities in relation to agriculture. In order to support this activity, they invest resources such as communal solidarity work, children's work and remittances savings. They partially overcome shortage periods related to the agriculture seasonality through migration, housemaid work or petty trade activities. However, most households live in poverty.

The projects had two important design similarities: (i) they included a component of self-construction by residing households, and (ii) community organisations participated

during the implementation of the four projects, although to different degrees. In most cases, they worked together with social promoters to mobilise their neighbours and supervise activities. However, the evolving practices, and implicit assumptions of stakeholders, in these specific contexts had different influences on the projects' outcomes and the participants' autonomy. Below, I present four examples, from a wide range of experiences during the projects' cycle.

Example 1: A mistaken assumption about values in a reconstruction project

The selected reconstruction project in Nicaragua provides an example of a wrong assumption made during the design stage for a project that served a very special community. The assumption was: 'it is possible to create an agricultural community model', a community based on collective production. Led by this assumption, project staff took several decisions on behalf of participants, not respecting their autonomy, decisions which later did not secure the sustainability of the model.

The project aimed at the economic and social rehabilitation of households and had three main components: housing construction, water and agriculture, funded by three different donors but managed by a single NGO. People needed this help because they had suffered a terrible disaster: a mudslide fuelled by Hurricane Mitch in 1998 had wiped away their towns situated near the slopes of the Casitas volcano, killing almost three-quarters of the population. Survivors were relocated to a large farm bought by several donors, where the reconstruction was to take place.

The land assigned to survivors of the mudslide was divided in two areas, one for houses and social infrastructure (25 ha.) and the other for agriculture activities (41 ha.). The second area was a joint tenancy. Households had to construct the houses and plant in the communal land. The agricultural project started several months before the housing project and had positive short-term results. Residents planted vegetables and fruits. They were trained and received inputs and equipment.

The decision to implement this project as a communal landholding was made by donors during the formulation. From field interviews, it seems that donors or formulators wanted to (i) secure food for landless survivors who had to start planting as soon as possible, or (ii) promote union between people who needed to work together in order to advance. In addition, communal farming was considered feasible given the high levels of organisation shown by survivors during the emergency period. It was assumed that residents, drawn from diverse communities and from traditions of family-based agriculture, would possess or quickly develop a sense of shared community sufficient for them to henceforth cultivate together in a collective format, for the indefinite post-emergency future, not just co-operate during a short-term period of crisis response.

In reality, they did not trust each other. Each household would have preferred bigger individual lots to cultivate and to raise farm animals. One man expressed this:

> We have a roof but we do not have a space to work, to sow. Houses need to be enlarged [because] the family grows…. There is no space to go around the house so that children can play. We only can cultivate little things.

People were disenchanted with a cooperative model, after the failed experience of the Sandinista cooperatives. However, the project secured participation in the agricultural project by providing extrinsic motivation: people would receive food if they worked. A man recounted:

> We were sent to those lands to sow rice and to plant stumps…. Whoever worked had the right to receive food.

Other implicit assumptions also did not hold. A severe drought (2001/2002) and management problems troubled the project. The revolving fund only lasted one year and many people suspected bad handling of common resources by leaders. They were not willing to work together again because '[t]here, everything gets lost' (a woman). Residents parcelled out the communal land. Only a few people now work in groups, supported by a local church. Many people feel less competent because the attempt at collective cultivation failed. 'Those green fields should be watered, [but] no one does anything', remarked one man. Not taking into account the participants' values, socio-historical experiences and intra-community relationships made the agricultural project unsustainable.

Example 2: Household participation as an ongoing practice to build ownership

Each of the four projects included a self-construction component that involved manual work by part of beneficiaries to reach tangible outputs. The quality of participation varied between and within projects. Ownership was not related to the workload, but could have been affected by conditionality practices devised to promote 'participation'. Participation of this sort did not always promote individual autonomy.

Self-construction was implemented under two modalities. In the reconstruction projects, one member of each household worked in small teams (between five and six people) during two or three months as an assistant bricklayer to construct his or her house. In the water projects, each household built its home sanitation system to dispose of grey waters, assembled their latrines with the guidance of bricklayers, and performed other works. Participants attended training sessions in groups (between 25 and 40 people) and worked in teams for other activities.

The participation of households in project activities was expected to support the projects' operational efficacy because they would bring the interest that only an owner not a third-party has, to carry out and monitor on-site activities. Moreover, manual work was seen as a local contribution to the project budgets and a signal of commitment. Below, I develop four arguments why this assumption was too simple and unconditional.

First, *felt ownership depended on the importance of the need addressed by the project*. Residents accepted to work to get a house or a water connection because they valued physical security and health. They wanted 'to make [their] houses beautiful' (a man in Nicaragua) because they would live there and they worked very hard because 'otherwise, [they] could not afford a house like that one' (a woman in Nicaragua). Participants in the water projects valued having or regaining access to safe drinking water, but they have not valued other project outputs as much, such as home sanitation systems or reforestation activities. A man in El Salvador explained:

> They planned the reforestation project. In winter, they sowed trees and watered them. But, in summer, how were they going to water? They did not obtain any benefit but spent money.

He perceives that the lack of sustainability of the reforestation activities was a loss for outsiders ('they'), not for him or his neighbours.

Second, *participation has a broader meaning than manual work*. The levels of involvement reported by survey respondents were relatively low in all cases (mean value=1.2, for an index composed of five variables in a 0-3 scale). However, they quali-

fied their participation as 'fair' (in an ordinal scale: low, fair and high). It seems that they understood participation in terms of workload or to what extent they worked in project activities as agreed. Not surprisingly, the survey respondents in the reconstruction projects felt they had participated more than those in the water projects: 41% versus 27% of respondents, respectively, regarded their participation as high. However, reconstruction project participants did not feel more involved than water project participants. *Manual work was not translated into high felt involvement and commitment.*

On the contrary, high project workload restricted the time for many people to participate in other important activities related to community development and, most crucially for the poorest, time to secure their own subsistence (cf., Osti, 2004). A man in El Salvador recalled: 'Here, one felt that one was not going to earn for oneself… One worked here and down there [in the plot]… I felt that it was a lot [of work]'. A woman added: 'Here, no one can say "this house was given to me like that", rather, it cost quite some sacrifice to everyone'. Hence, when participants were called for voluntary work to construct the common social buildings, they were too tired to attend. This is not a good indicator of lack of ownership or commitment to their community. This leads us to the next point.

Third, when subsistence is threatened, people may give up the means (satisfiers) to fulfil other needs (e.g., physical security or health) if they cannot afford to hold those means. In such a case, *giving up resources provided by a project does not necessarily reflect a lack of felt ownership.* For instance, in the reconstruction project in Nicaragua, people worked hard and valued their houses, but many had to search for jobs outside the colony given that they had lost their lands after the mudslide and could not make a living from agriculture anymore. Near to the project completion, a commission decided that only those who were living in their houses would keep them. This was a credible threat because the project design did not consider the financing of deeds. For those who did not live in their assigned houses, the commission offered a monetary compensation, which was considered low by participants.

This practice forced many people to return, put at risk their survival and harmed their autonomy, already constrained by deprivation. Four years later, about one-third of the houses was uninhabited; people had (re-) migrated to sustain their families. Survival was a more pressing need than physical security. Once again, for farmers the 'loss of land generally has far more severe consequences than the loss of a house' (Cernea, 1997, 573).

Four, *felt ownership is rooted in personal conviction, influenced by external events.* People perceive different reasons for their behaviour. Those with 'autonomy causality orientation' (Deci and Ryan, 1985; 2000), who feel originators of events and not driven by external forces, want to be involved in decisions that affect their lives – not only to work hard to implement decisions. This interest is a signal of felt ownership, which is not created by projects but only supported or not supported by them (de Valk et al., 2005; Ellerman, 2006).

However, *felt ownership could be harmed* if project contexts are strongly controlling, that is, if managements exert much pressure on participants or induce behaviour toward specific outcomes. For instance, many home sanitation systems in both water projects have not worked well. Some participants stated that they knew these systems would not work, but they were not given any option to make design changes that would suit their reality. 'When a project is already defined, it has to be done' (an NGO coordinator in El Salvador). When people do not use and maintain the systems well, they tend to blame the quality of the infrastructure and not themselves.

Example 3: Local participation in project design with different features and influences

The participation of local stakeholders in the design of a project could vary from merely being informed to jointly defining the main aspects of the project (Arnstein, 1969). Moreover, similar expressions of participation can have different effects on project outcomes and participants' autonomy in different contexts. Let us compare the two Salvadorian project cases, both of which aimed at a participatory approach.

In the *reconstruction project*, there was participatory formulation. Formal community leaders defined the selection criteria, the model and materials of the houses; they selected the partner institutions and the social infrastructure to be built. In a first stage, meetings were held and representatives from each local association brought their designs and discussed them in assembly. In the second stage, the consultant met municipal committee leaders, local and government authorities, the priest, representatives of the vice-ministry of housing and other public institutions. To select the construction materials, leaders visited ten houses built with different construction materials. Finally, they chose the use of reinforced concrete, which they regarded as safer.

All this was possible because there was an active, broad-based municipal committee, integrated by former guerrilla fighters, former soldiers, and cooperative leaders. This committee brought together local committees and, with the support of an experienced NGO, it had elaborated a development action plan before the earthquakes struck, so that leaders were prepared to lead the efforts and propose alternatives. The committee coordinated the reconstruction actions in the municipality and decided the self-construction component for all projects. '[They] believe[d] that constructing with mutual help improves the organisation and the relationships among neighbours' (a community leader).

In contrast, in the *water project*, an intended participatory diagnosis was distorted by the local perception of likely project deliverables (cf., Mosse, 2004; 2005). A report said:

> The participation of the residents was limited in quantity and quality. The diagnosis [discussion] was steered toward the activities of the project, [and it was] perceived like a promotion of its activities. In other words, the residents did not have options on what to discuss (cited in Muñiz Castillo, 2009, 158).

The project was designed by outsiders; local leaders only remember to have been consulted. Participants could not introduce certain aspects that they valued, such as access to credit or to good education and health care services. However, leaders gained some influence on project decisions over time as they could promote a fish farming component, especially when the role of the water company weakened.

The water project was already complex, and it increasingly became overall a 'pseudo-comprehensive' project (Hirschman, 1967/1995). Its design was well intended but included very many elements. Project staff lost track of technical aspects affecting the project's operational effectiveness, in a climate of the reorganisation of the formal counterpart, and did not engage local stakeholders who could have supported the project outcomes. The residents now face continuous problems with the water system and cannot solve them, as a man expressed: 'There have been like seven [water] leakages... The last time, they had to break the paving stones of the road in order to fix the pipeline.'

Example 4: Coordination to support relationships and outcomes' sustainability

The four projects had different coordination practices, which were related to: (i) their organisational structure, entities involved, reporting chains, and responsibilities; (ii)

their goals, which differed in number, complexity, and coverage of population and territory; and (iii) the informal relations that actually sustained the projects.

Coordination was more challenging in the reconstruction cases. These projects were complex, required high negotiation skills from project staff and also creativity and flexibility to deal with many actors and multiple uncertainties. However, project staff also had more room to manoeuvre and engage actors. In contrast, the pre-defined role of the public water companies as local counterparts, executing and supervisory entities, constrained the range of possible coordination practices in the water projects.

The reconstruction project in El Salvador was the only case where the community organisation acted as a partner of project staff, sharing in relevant decision-making. A working group was the main decision-maker. Within it, the project chief had the leading role, assisted by the president of the municipal committee. They coordinated the actions of the NGOs in charge of the registration of property titles and the construction of houses and social buildings. These NGOs also belonged to the working group, but with a secondary role. The NGO that supported the elaboration of a municipal plan participated at times in the weekly meetings of the working group. The project chief institutionalised a consensus building style, by which each entity had the chance to contribute or complain.

Many entities were directly or indirectly related to this project. The number of contacts increased because the project chief decided (i) to support the community organisation much more than the terms of reference had indicated, and (ii) to provide houses to as many people as possible despite the complexity of their legal situation, for instance by looking for land donors or alternative housing solutions (e.g., prefabricated houses). Coordination was difficult because of the initial lack of support of political authorities, public bureaucracies and private companies and the lack of administrative staff in the project implementation unit. But as the project progressed, the departmental government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of El Salvador became facilitators of the project at the national level.

For such a complex project (with three different components), these arrangements made possible the achievement of valued goals with the involvement of the community organisation in relevant decisions during the design (i.e., participatory formulation) and the implementation of the project. In turn, local leaders gained connections with external actors (cf. Johnson, 2001) and become empowered through relationships – that had built during the project. They learned how to address people, to whom ask what and how to do it. These skills were important after the completion of the project, because they have the motivation 'to undertake other activities, to initiate contacts with other organisations and to engage in dialogue with anyone at any moment' (expressed by a project officer). However, the economic situation of households and municipality government is still poor.

5. Exploring influences of project practices on the participants' autonomy

The projects had varied effects on the determinants of autonomy: entitlements, internal capacity to make reasoned choices and act accordingly, and structural contexts. First, the most direct effect was on resources: provision of tangible project outputs such as houses, water services, home sanitation systems or wood stoves. However, people do not always use them in a way that supports their autonomy. For instance, those people who considered building the home sanitation systems as a duty (linked to conditionality

practices) do not use and maintain them well, so that the effects on health are not as expected.

Moreover, resources provided by projects are not always accessible. *Entitlements* are based not only on legal ownership or rights, but also on social legitimisation (Devereux, 2001). In a water project, some residents do not have their entitlement to safe drinking water secured, given their low payment capacity. In the Nicaraguan reconstruction project, communal land was available for the project, but residents had to use it in one specific way: planting together as a cooperative. Years later, they parcelled it out, although they hardly subsist with such small pieces of land and without credit.

Second, projects also supported personal competence as participants learned new skills, especially through their work as bricklayer assistants. Some men worked in reconstruction projects in nearby areas, were hired by project staff to construct the social buildings, or constructed small infrastructure in the water projects. However, the physical health and strength of some people in the reconstruction projects could have been harmed because they could not support themselves, thus delaying the works and also affecting interpersonal relations, in opposition to the intended positive effect of building relationships.

In fact, projects that include self-construction activities could have several effects on perceived competence and self-confidence. On the one hand, people could become aware of latent capacities or develop new ones. In the Salvadorian water project, men gained this awareness from construction activities and women from sharing their experiences (e.g., how to use the ecological wood stoves) with residents from other villages. They could also strengthen their interpersonal relations. In the Nicaraguan water project, a woman reflected: 'It is like the group gives strength, the union helps one to feel relieved'. They also felt more self-confident because they learned, enjoyed and worked together for the well-being of their families and community.

On the other hand, they could feel harmed by control-oriented project practices and lose their self-confidence. Power relations between participants and project staff are very important. If participants succeed to finish their commitments and reach the valued outputs, despite the adverse circumstances, they could feel proud. For instance, despite many cases of mistreatment, women in the Nicaraguan reconstruction project felt more respected by men. A woman recounts:

> When the men arrived with the material [for the home sanitation system], they said 'where are you going to make it?' I told them 'right here'. [They replied], 'Are you going to make it?' 'I am', I said, and I began to make it (laughs).

Personal competence is the foundation of individual autonomy, but it is necessary to analyse whether the structural contexts support the exercise of autonomy. A person could feel capable but powerless to promote his or her own development. If this feeling persists and people see their efforts constantly frustrated, they could steadily lower their aspirations (cf., Cleaver, 2005). In the Salvadorian water project, despite the long experience of leaders, the poor reliability of the water system and a failure to register a local NGO is causing disappointment in non-leaders because their efforts did not succeed. Only half of the survey respondents there said that the community would expand their opportunities.

Third, projects can influence the *structural contexts* in multiple ways, for instance, by supporting an ongoing positive change, starting a community organisation from scratch, unintentionally worsening local governance or choosing non-representative local part-

ners. A more substantive early engagement of project formulators with local communities could build the support of 'boundary partners' (Earl et al., 2002) such as communal leaders or local politicians. In that way, the chances for cooperation and mutual learning during the project would increase.

6. Conclusions

In this article, I have argued that a project is human-autonomy effective when it promotes an expansion of autonomy that allows people to support and sustain their own development in a way that does not constrain other priority capabilities. That expansion of autonomy may be reflected in both relevant decision-making by participants during the project cycle and positive changes in the determinants of autonomy. Applying this criterion, we need to systematically examine the effects of projects on the lives, opportunities and capacities of participants.

Project managers need to understand project logic well beyond the ideas of the 'logical framework' approach and to explore the various project theories that stakeholders form, including their assumptions and values. In contrast to the explicit causal links expected in project documents, the project practices reveal the implicit real assumptions that guide behaviour and that affect the participants' autonomy and the projects' effectiveness and sustainability. These are the aspects that require priority attention during project design, appraisal, execution, monitoring and evaluation. Muñiz Castillo and Gasper (2009) propose formats for helping to ensure this attention.

Power relations influence practices and the access to resources provided by projects. Practices such as top-down design or excessive conditionality typically harm participants' autonomy, despite being supportive to various short-term goals, and thus have negative longer-run significance. When project practices constrain the opportunities and felt competence of individuals to help themselves, the 'development' or change promoted by those projects is not sustainable. If project planners and managers consciously select autonomy-supportive practices and contexts, aid projects will have far greater chances of furthering sustainable poverty reduction and human development.

References

Alkire, S. (2002), *Valuing freedoms: Sen's capability approach and poverty reduction,* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Arnstein, S. R. (1969), 'A ladder of citizen participation', *Journal of American Planning Association*, 35, 216-224.

Cernea, M. (1997), 'The risks and reconstruction model for resettling displaced populations', *World Development*, 25, 1569-1587.

Cleaver, F. (2005), 'The inequality of social capital and the reproduction of chronic poverty', *World Development*, 33, 893-906.

Crawford, P., Swete Kelly, D., Mitchell, C. and Bryce, P. (2005), 'Aristotle and Plato at it again? Philosophical divergence within international aid project design and monitoring & evaluation' (electronic paper). Retrieved 10 June 2008, from http://www.aid-it. com.au/Portals/0/Documents/070105_Aristotle%20and%20Plato%20at%20it%20again.pdf

De Valk, P., Apthorpe, R. and Guimarães, J. (2005), Local ownership, co-ownership and capacity building in aid projects: the findings of a comparative study (ISS Working Paper Series 407), The Hague, Institute of Social Studies.

Deci, E.L. and Ryan, R.M. (1987), 'The support of autonomy and the control of behaviour', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 53, 1024-1037.

Deci, E.L. and Ryan, R.M. (2000), 'The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: human needs and the self-determination of behaviour', *Psychological Inquiry*, 11, 227–268.

Devereux, S. (2001), 'Sen's entitlement approach: critiques and counter-critiques', *Oxford Development Studies*, 29, 245-263.

Earl, S., Carden, F. and Smutylo, T. (2002), *Outcome Mapping: building learning and reflection into development programs,* Ottawa: International Development Research Centre (IDRC), (http://www.idrc.ca/openebooks/959-3/).

Ellerman, D. (2006), *Helping people help themselves: from the World Bank to an alternative philosophy of development assistance,* Ann Arbor, The University of Michigan Press (Paperback edition).

Eyben, R (2010), 'Hiding relations: "the irony of effective aid"', *European Journal of Development Research*, 22, 382-397.

Hirschman, A.O. (1967), *Development projects observed,* Washington, D.C., The Brookings Institution (reissued 1995).

Johnson, C. (2001), 'Local democracy, democratic decentralisation and rural development: theories, challenges and options for policy', *Development Policy Review*, 19, 521-532.

Leeuw, F. (2003), 'Reconstructing program theories: methods available and problems to be solved', *American Journal of Evaluation*, 24, 5-20.

Long, N. and van der Ploeg, J.D. (1994), 'Heterogeneity, actor and structure: towards a reconstitution of the concept of structure', in D. Booth (ed), *Rethinking social development: theory, research and practice*, Essex, Longman Scientific and Technical, 62-89.

Mosse, D. (2004), 'Power relations and poverty reduction', in R. Alsop (ed), *Power, rights, and poverty: concepts and connections*, Washington, DC and London, World Bank and DFID, 51-67.

Mosse, D. (2005), *Cultivating development: an ethnography of aid policy and practice,* London and Ann Arbor, Pluto Press.

Muñiz Castillo, M.R. (2009), *Human development and autonomy in project aid: Experiences from four bilateral projects in Nicaragua and El Salvador* (MGSoG Dissertation Series 4), Maastricht, Boekenplan.

Muñiz Castillo, M.R. (forthcoming), 'Human autonomy and development effectiveness: Introducing a people-centred framework for project assessment', in Lessmann, O., Otto, H. and

Ziegler, H. (eds), *Closing the capabilities gap: renegotiating social justice for the young*, Barbara Budrich Publishers.

Muñiz Castillo, M.R. and Gasper, D. (2009), Looking for long-run development effectiveness: An autonomy-centred framework for project evaluation' (MGSoG Working Paper 2009/005), Maastricht, Maastricht University.

Nussbaum, M. (2000), *Women and human development,* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2002), *Glossary of key terms in evaluation and results based management,* Paris, OECD, DAC.

Osti, R. (2004), 'Forms of community participation and agencies' role for the implementation of water-induced disaster management: protecting and enhancing the poor', *Disaster Prevention and Management*, 13, 6-12.

Pawson, R and Tilley, N. (2000), *Realistic Evaluation*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications, Inc. (first printed in 1997).

Robeyns, I. (2003), 'Sen's capability approach and gender inequality: selecting relevant capabilities', *Feminist Economics,* 9, 61-92.

Roche, C. (2004), *Impact assessment for developing agencies: learning to value change,* Oxfam Development Guidelines, Oxford, Oxfam Publishing (Original work published 1999).

Rossi, P.H., Lipsey, M.W. and Freeman H.E. (2004), *Evaluation: a systematic approach*, Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage Publications, Inc. (7th edition).

Sen, A. (1999), *Development as freedom,* New York, Anchor books.

Wood, G. (2003), 'Staying secure, staying poor: the ''Faustian bargain''', *World Development*, 31, 455–471.

Maastricht Graduate School of Governance
Working Paper Series

List of publications

2010

No.	Author(s)	Title
001	Hercog, M. and A. Wiesbrock	The Legal Framework for Highly-Skilled Migration to the EU: EU and US Labour Migration Policies Compared
002	Salanauskaite, L. and G. Verbist	The 2004 Law on Allowances to Children in Lithuania: What do Microsimulations tell us about its Distributional Impacts?
003	Salanauskaite, L.	Microsimulation Modelling in Transition Countries: Review of Needs, Obstacles and Achievements
004	Ahmed, M. and F. Gassmann	Measuring Multidimensional Vulnerability in Afghanistan
005	Atamanov, A. and M. van den Berg	Rural non-farm activities in Central Asia: a regional analysis of magnitude, structure, evolution and drivers in the Kyrgyz Republic
006	Tirivayi, N., J. Koethe and W. Groot	Food Assistance and its effect on the Weight and Antiretroviral Therapy Adherence of HIV Infected Adults: Evidence from Zambia
007	Atamanov, A. and M. van den Bergs	Determinants of remittances in Central Asia: evidence based on the household budget survey in the Kyrgyz Republic
008	Tomini, F. and L. Borghans	Between Children and Friends
009	Tirivayi, N. and W. Groot	In Kind Transfers, Household Spending Behaviour and Consumption Responses in HIV-affected Households: Evidence from Zambia
010	Tomini, F. and L. Borghans	Interdependent transfers and individual needs: Parental support to children in the Netherlands
011	Kwanpadh Suddhi-Dhamakit	You, Me, or Us? Conjugal Separation and Parent-Child Separation in Family Migration: a Case of Rural Thailand
012	Tomini, F.	Transferring to family and friends: A review of the Motives, Evidence, and the role of Economics
013	Roelen, K.	Girls in Transition – How to build evidence and gain insight?
014	Schüring, E.	Conditions, conditionality, conditionalities, responsibilities – finding common ground
015	Muñiz Castillo, M.R. and D. Gasper	Project logic, organisational practices and human autonomy: four foreign-aided projects in Nicaragua and El Salvador

2009

No.	Author(s)	Title
001	Roelen, K., Gassmann, F. and C. de Neubourg	Child Poverty in Vietnam - providing insights using a country-specific and multidimensional model
002	Siegel, M. and M. Lücke	What Determines the Choice of Transfer Channel for Migrant Remittances? The Case of Moldova
003	Sologon, D. and C. O'Donoghue	Earnings Dynamics and Inequality in EU 1994 – 2001
004	Sologon, D. and C. O'Donoghue	Policy, Institutional Factors and Earnings Mobility
005	Muñiz Castillo, M.R. and D. Gasper	Looking for long-run development effectiveness: An autonomy-centred framework for project evaluation
006	Muñiz Castillo, M.R. and D. Gasper	Exploring human autonomy effectiveness: Project logic and its effects on individual autonomy
007	Tirivayi, N. and W. Groot	The Welfare Effects of Integrating HIV/AIDS Treatment with Cash or In Kind Transfers
008	Tomini, S., Groot, W. and M. Pavlova	Paying Informally in the Albanian Health Care Sector: A Two-Tiered Stochastic Frontier Bargaining Model
009	Wu, T. and L. Borghans	Children Working and Attending School Simultaneously: Tradeoffs in a Financial Crisis
010	Wu, T., Borghans, L. and A. Dupuy	No School Left Behind: Do Schools in Underdeveloped Areas Have Adequate Electricity for Learning?
011	Muñiz Castillo, M.R.	Autonomy as Foundation for Human Development: A Conceptual Model to Study Individual Autonomy
012	Petrovic, M.	Social Assistance, activation policy, and social exclusion: Addressing Causal Complexity
013	Tomini, F. and J. Hagen-Zanker	How has internal migration in Albania affected the receipt of transfers from kinship members?
014	Tomini, S. and H. Maarse	How do patient characteristics influence informal payments for inpatient and outpatient health care in Albania
015	Sologon, D. M. and C. O'Donoghue	Equalizing or disequalizing lifetime earnings differentials? Earnings mobility in the EU:1994-2001
016	Henning, F. and Dr. Gar Yein Ng	Steering collaborative e-justice. An exploratory case study of legitimisation processes in judicial videoconferencing in the Netherlands

017	Sologon, D. M. and C. O'Donoghue	Increased Opportunity to Move up the Economic Ladder? Earnings Mobility in EU: 1994-2001
018	Sologon, D. M. and C. O'Donoghue	Lifetime Earnings Differentials? Earnings Mobility in the EU: 1994-2001
019	Sologon, D.M.	Earnings Dynamics and Inequality among men in Luxembourg, 1988-2004: Evidence from Administrative Data
020	Sologon, D. M. and C. O'Donoghue	Earnings Dynamics and Inequality in EU, 1994-2001
021	Sologon, D. M. and C. O'Donoghue	Policy, Institutional Factors and Earnings Mobility
022	Ahmed, M. and F. Gassmann	Defining Vulnerability in Post Conflict Environments

2008

No.	Author(s)	Title
001	Roelen, K. and F. Gassmann	Measuring Child Poverty and Well-Being: a literature review
002	Hagen-Zanker, J.	Why do people migrate? A review of the theoretical literature
003	Arndt, C. and C. Omar	The Politics of Governance Ratings
004	Roelen, K., Gassmann, F. and C. de Neubourg	A global measurement approach versus a country-specific measurement approach. Do they draw the same picture of child poverty? The case of Vietnam
005	Hagen-Zanker, J., M. Siegel and C. de Neubourg	Strings Attached: The impediments to Migration
006	Bauchmüller, R.	Evaluating causal effects of Early Childhood Care and Education Investments: A discussion of the researcher's toolkit
007	Wu, T., Borghans, L. and A. Dupuy	Aggregate Shocks and How Parents Protect the Human Capital Accumulation Process: An Empirical Study of Indonesia
008	Hagen-Zanker, J. and C. Azzarri	Are internal migrants in Albania leaving for the better?
009	Muñiz Castillo, M.R.	Una propuesta para analizar proyectos con ayuda internacional: De la autonomía individual al desarrollo humano
010	Wu, T.	Circular Migration and Social Protection in Indonesia

2007

No.	Author(s)	Title
001	Notten, G. and C. de Neubourg	Relative or absolute poverty in the US and EU? The battle of the rates
002	Hodges, A. A. Dufay, K. Dash-dorj, K.Y. Jong, T. Mungun and U. Budragchaa	Child benefits and poverty reduction: Evidence from Mongolia's Child Money Programme
003	Hagen-Zanker, J. and M. Siegel	The determinants of remittances: A review of the literature
004	Notten, G.	Managing risks: What Russian households do to smooth consumption
005	Notten, G. and C. de Neubourg	Poverty in Europe and the USA: Exchanging official measurement methods
006	Notten, G and C. de Neubourg	The policy relevance of absolute and relative poverty headcounts: What's in a number?
007	Hagen-Zanker, J. and M. Siegel	A critical discussion of the motivation to remit in Albania and Moldova
008	Wu, Treena	Types of Households most vulnerable to physical and economic threats: Case studies in Aceh after the Tsunami
009	Siegel, M.	Immigrant Integration and Remittance Channel Choice
010	Muñiz Castillo, M.R.	Autonomy and aid projects: Why do we care?

2006

No.	Author(s)	Title
001	Gassmann, F. and G. Notten	Size matters: Poverty reduction effects of means-tested and universal child benefits in Russia
002	Hagen-Zanker, J. and M.R. Muñiz Castillo	Exploring multi-dimensional wellbeing and remittances in El Salvador
003	Augsburg, B.	Econometric evaluation of the SEWA Bank in India: Applying matching techniques based on the propensity score
004	Notten, G. and D. de Crom-brugghe	Poverty and consumption smoothing in Russia

2005

No.	Author(s)	Title
001	Gassmann, F.	An Evaluation of the Welfare Impacts of Electricity Tariff Reforms And Alternative Compensating Mechanisms In Tajikistan
002	Gassmann, F.	How to Improve Access to Social Protection for the Poor? Lessons from the Social Assistance Reform in Latvia