AIDING AID:

A monitoring & evaluation framework to enhance international aid effectiveness

Doctoral Dissertation
by Paul Crawford
2004

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Paul Ward Crawford

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It is difficult to pinpoint the start of an intellectual journey. For me, the journey presented in this thesis may have begun on a day in 1994 while seated in a looted and bullet-pocked office in Kigali, Rwanda. With me were Peter Truscott, the person who first recruited me as an aid worker and Barry Chapman, my boss and mentor at the time. We were planning a project to rehabilitate war-damaged schools in northeastern Rwanda, and Peter introduced me to a tool called 'logical framework analysis' (or the 'logframe'). For an eager, but ill-equipped programmes officer, this tool shed a shaft of light onto an area within which I had been fumbling in the dark for some time.

While I have since come to appreciate much of the critique of the logframe and to recognise that its apparent simplicity belies a deeper complexity, this meeting marked an important intellectual milestone in my professional development. I recognised that the effectiveness of the projects for which I was responsible, could in part, be improved through more rigorous planning, and better use of information.

In numerous other field assignments since that day I have continued to grapple with how we can 'do aid better'. In this quest, I have appreciated the support and guidance of many people. I will attempt to acknowledge them, while recognising that any list will be inadequate.

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Paul, whose years of experience in the NGO sector, and whose appreciation of the complexity of the aid operating context, constantly challenged my thinking. As a highly regarded academic, his 'editor's eye' for detail was also much

[1] The editing of this document was in accordance with UTS Graduate School Policy.
[2] Omphaloskepsis \ahm-fuh-loh-SKEP-sis\ (noun): contemplation of one's navel as an aid to meditation.

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LIST OF RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS

Crawford, P., Perryman, J. & Petocz, P. (2004) Synthetic Indicators: a method for evaluating aid project effectiveness, *Evaluation*, 10 (2): 29 – 46

Crawford, P. & Bryce, P. (2003) Project monitoring and evaluation: a method for enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of aid project implementation, *International Journal of Project Management*, 21 (5): 363 – 373

Crawford, P. (2002) The aid project cycle: an effective vehicle towards ESD? *Conference of Australian and New Zealand Society for Ecological Economists*, Sydney, December 2002

Crawford, P. (2001). *M&E Handbook: Guidelines for the monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian projects implemented by Oxfam Angola*. Luanda, Angola, Oxfam GB. (unpublished)

ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to provide a coherent theoretical framework to guide the development of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) information systems within international aid agencies. The thesis applies soft systems methodologies (SSM) to explore the research question and to develop conceptual models.

The theoretical basis for the M&E framework proposed is drawn from a transdisciplinary review of three academic fields: information systems, organisational effectiveness and project management. It is argued that inadequacies in the operationalisation of M&E systems arise from divergent epistemological and ontological assumptions about the nature of information and its role within organisations that are concerned with effecting social change. The M&E framework proposed seeks to resolve the dilemma posed by these divergent assumptions. This involves a M&E information system (i.e. MEIS) that is novel in terms of its scope, purpose and application.

Firstly, the *scope* of the proposed MEIS takes in the entire aid organisation, going beyond the dominant, conventional approach, which is project-centric. This enables alignment of project strategies with organisational mission. Further, it aims to promote the institutionalisation of lessons learned within projects (conceived as 'social experiments') for organisational learning, thereby enabling informed debate about the effectiveness of the organisation in fostering sustainable development.

Secondly, the *purpose* of the proposed MEIS has been defined as being concerned with promoting organisational success. The critical success factors of learning and accountability are identified, and the role of M&E in encouraging responsive management decision-making and critical inquiry and reflection is described.

Thirdly, the *application* of the proposed MEIS involves a modified logframe. The '3D-Logframe' serves as a conceptual basis to address limitations found

with the conventional two-dimensional logframe matrix when employed for M&E purposes.

The proposed M&E framework was developed out of iterations of action in the field and reflection. Further research will involve applying the framework in its entirety.