Impact-oriented steering – the concept of NGO-IDEAs ‘Impact Toolbox’*

Summary  The NGO-IDEAs ‘Impact Toolbox’ has been developed with a group of NGOs all of which are active in the area of saving and credit in South India. This compilation of methods to apply in impact-oriented steering was devised by the executive staff of the Indian partner NGOs, also known as the Resource Persons, in 2006 and tested from late 2006 to early 2007. At first glance, the approach may appear to be highly specialised and difficult to transfer. However, in fact it follows principles that can be adapted for several NGOs in other countries and in other sectors. The following article presents the concept of the NGO-IDEAs ‘Impact Toolbox’.

Aims and Values

The NGO-IDEAs ‘Impact Toolbox’ serves the purpose of enabling the NGO and grassroots organisations or the population involved to steer projects in a manner that will enhance positive impacts and reduce negative ones.

The instruments of the NGO-IDEAs ‘Impact Toolbox’ are simple and participatory. Simple means: setting out from people’s knowledge and know-how, easy to learn and efficient in terms of the time and financial effort required. Application can easily be fitted into the ‘normal’ activities of the NGOs or grassroots organisations. The participatory character contains democratic elements promoting a ‘Culture of Learning’ that the people can assimilate.

Key features of the NGO-IDEA ‘Impact Toolbox’:

- The Toolbox offers a combination of a small number of instruments that are attuned to one another. They form a methodical whole but may also be applied individually to reduce complexity if required.
- The Toolbox is based on instruments that many NGOs are well familiar with. This enables them to be introduced without any major consultancy effort, and in several cases they can also be used independently by grassroots level organisations.
- The indicators may be represented quantitatively. While this facilitates the aggregation of data, the survey results can also easily be disaggregated if required; for example, not only is a differentiation of impacts possible according to sex, but also according to poverty groups or other social criteria, depending on what is required.
- These instruments encourage reflexion and demand steering decisions based on the continuous establishment of impacts. They can also be used in reporting, should this be needed.

*NGO-IDEAs (NGO-Impact on Development Empowerment and Actions) is a joint project of 14 German and 32 Indian NGOs, co-funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Instruments

The following instruments have been included in the Toolbox:

PWR – PARTICIPATORY WEALTH RANKING

PWR groups households according to affluence/poverty criteria:

This is a familiar instrument taken from the Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) context that is already being used by a large number of NGOs. It serves the purpose of poverty-oriented target group selection and assignment of impacts according to wealth or affluence/poverty criteria.

SAGE – SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS AND GOAL ESTABLISHMENT

SAGE establishes changes among individuals and households:

This instrument, which was developed in NGO-IDEAs, sets out from the assumption that the people in the target group create their own vision of their future living conditions. The aim is to establish to what extent each member or each household has developed towards these targets.

PAG – PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL OF THE GROUPS

PAG establishes changes in groups:

This instrument is used to assess the performance of a grassroots organisation. It was derived from a form used by Indian banks with the groups – albeit with other assessment criteria. In PAG, the NGO and the group agree on the criteria with which the group’s quality as a whole can be measured.

PANGO – PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF NGOS

PANgo serves an in-depth analysis of impacts:

PANgo is the impact-analysis instrument of the NGOs. It sets out from the methods of self-assessment of changes among individuals/households and in the group (SAGE and PAG), extending their results with a number of additional qualitative and quantitative data collected through special surveys. The NGOs are recommended to analyse what the same changes that they have observed among their partner groups result in among other groups that are not directly making use of their programme services.

Assessment

From the angle of the NGOs involved in testing it, the NGO-IDEAs ‘Impact Toolbox’ yielded some novel characteristics compared to their impact monitoring so far:

- The perception of impacts in the target group was sharpened overall. It became apparent that impacts occurred in a far greater number of areas than the programme’s target structure prescribed.
The perception of individuals and households was sharpened. Previously, the group had tended to be seen more as a whole, or some prominent individuals had been the centre of attention. With SAGE, those also came to the fore for whom the desired changes progressed more slowly.

Generally, with the different forms of disaggregation, the perception of different developments among the different social groups was sharpened, also with the aid of the control groups, enabling the NGO to formulate and implement its concepts and strategies more accurately.

Learning processes and, in particular, orientation for steering decisions were improved among the groups and NGOs. For example, in the PANgo reporting questionnaire, the following sequence of analytical questions was posed:
- What can the groups (and their federal structures) do to improve impacts in this area?
- What can the NGO do to improve impacts in this area?
- What does this mean for the project managers?
- What does this mean for the NGO strategy?

The instruments of the NGO-IDEAs ‘Impact Toolbox’ have generally been judged as simple and participatory by the partners, which coincides with the intentions of the resource persons. In practice, however, this frequently has to be qualified: the larger the NGO programme is, and the more indicators are supposed to be the object of the impact analysis, the more complex impact monitoring will be. Nevertheless, the steps proposed for analysis and decision-making have been a help for the NGO-IDEAs partners in steering their activities in an impact-oriented manner.

The Impact Toolbox and all documentation can be obtained on CD-ROM from:
Mr. Ernst Hisch, DAHW, Mariannhillsstr. 1c, 97074 Würzburg Germany,
e-mail: info@dahw.de

**Source:** Impact-oriented steering – the concept of the NGO IDEAs ‘Impact Toolbox’, Dr. Eberhard Gohl/23rd September 2007