Indigenizing Evaluation for Development

Civil society and evaluation capacity building in Zambia

Jennie Andersson
Abstract

This thesis explores the interlinking of evaluation and development through an anthropological lens by considering the indigenization process of an evaluation culture, and how evaluation travels across boundaries as an assemblage, similar to many other global phenomena. Central to the thesis is the national evaluation capacity building trend viewed as a two-sided project; first as internal capacity building of institutions and organizations while facilitating a professionalization of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) through national evaluation associations. Second, as promoting civil society-led evaluation of government-implemented development policy. In this second part, a community monitoring and evaluation project organized by Zambia’s civil society network CSPR is examined as a strategy for social accountability and pro-poor development. The conclusions demonstrate that the current evaluation capacity building trend cannot be differentiated from the existing evaluation culture in Western societies and the current values of the new aid regime. The methodology relies on interview data from a field study conducted in Lusaka and Choma in Zambia, as well as documents and reports that were collected in the field. The data analysis was conducted using a qualitative data analysis software which is also discussed in brief.

Keywords: M&E, evaluation, social anthropology, civil society, development, capacity building, Zambia, social accountability
Acknowledgements

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## Abbreviations

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AfrEA</td>
<td>African Evaluation Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLEAR-AA</td>
<td>Center for Learning on Evaluation and Results in Anglophone Africa</td>
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<td>CSPR</td>
<td>Civil Society for Poverty Reduction</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organization</td>
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<td>DANIDA</td>
<td>Danish International Development Agency</td>
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<td>DFID</td>
<td>UK Department for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECB</td>
<td>Evaluation Capacity Building</td>
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<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>GIZ</td>
<td>German Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDEAS</td>
<td>International Development Evaluation Association</td>
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<td>IEG</td>
<td>Independent Evaluation Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>IOCE</td>
<td>International Organization for Cooperation in Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
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<tr>
<td>MESSY</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation Support Systems</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>NGOCC</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organizations Coordinating Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRSP</td>
<td>Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>RBA</td>
<td>Rights-Based Approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>SACCORD</td>
<td>Southern African Centre for the Constructive Resolution of Disputes</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIDA</td>
<td>Swedish International Development cooperation Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWAAZ</td>
<td>Society for Women Against AIDS in Zambia</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Program</td>
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<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>WfC</td>
<td>Women for Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZaMEA</td>
<td>Zambia Monitoring and Evaluation Association</td>
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<td>ZEA</td>
<td>Zambia Evaluation Association</td>
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<td>ZGF</td>
<td>Zambia Governance Foundation</td>
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1. Introduction

One of the most recent exports to many developing countries is neither a fast food chain nor a trade liberalization policy, but it is being marketed as essential to progress.

In the public sector there is the “New Public Management” trend of how things are supposed to run in public administration. In our private lives, there is the “Quantified Self” movement where we as individuals are encouraged to measure our sleep, steps and food intake to create statistics on our own lives. The general mantra of Western society seems to be that everything can be measured, and everything should be measured. This is especially the case when it comes to any kind of policy, which should now be “evidence-based”. It makes it difficult to be against evaluation; it is something that can perhaps be delayed, but ultimately not avoided. In a way, the necessity to do evaluation has progressively become a “protected discourse”; something that holds a near sacred status and that society’s dominant forces do not question. (Dahler-Larsen 2012:3, quoting James March)

This thesis is about an on-going trend within the development industry to build national evaluation capacity in developing countries. Coming up on the International Year of Evaluation in 2015, we’ve seen a shift in thinking when it comes to aid modalities, with new principles such as ownership, harmonization, participation, and results-based management. There has also been a shift in the way aid money flows – from projects to budget and sector support – which has had a huge impact on the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems of both donors and developing countries. National M&E systems have been the subject of an ambitious reform agenda, since donors have moved away from an ex-ante type of aid conditionality, to an ex-post type of conditionality in which further aid is depending on a proven record of results and progress. Further, the participation of civil society in national M&E systems has been widely encouraged. (Gildemyn 2013:146) In the world of policy and international development, the intense focus on M&E and building capacity for this have been crystalized in the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008, after which the international coalition known as EvalPartners was formed. The purpose of this self-defined global movement is to strengthen national evaluation capacities and introduce monitoring and evaluation as a strategy for producing evidence of the world “we” want and improve peoples’ lives through better policy making. (My M&E 2013) The growing social accountability agenda in Africa has put substantial emphasis on the monitoring, evaluation, development, and tracking of public resources (see McNeil and Malena 2010). Zambian civil society organizations are among the pioneers in engaging citizens in monitoring and evaluation activities to hold government accountable.
1.1 Research purpose and questions

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the interlocking of evaluation and development in the Zambian context to see what forces and underlying assumptions are at play in what is now called “building national evaluation capacity”. I take an anthropological approach to examine actors, means, and challenges in this evaluation capacity building project, while focusing in particular on civil society organizations as central actors in the new aid modality. The first question of this thesis examines this on-going trend by asking the following:

How can we understand the current drive to build national evaluation capacity in a developing country like Zambia?

I argue that there are two sides to the “evaluation capacity coin” and they are both subject to the external influence of donors and trends in the current aid architecture. First, the evaluation capacity building project is about building internal evaluation capacity in institutions and organizations, while supporting a professionalization through national evaluation associations and other local actors. Parallels can be drawn from the study of evaluation capacity building from an anthropological perspective to other “capacity building” efforts or “exports” to developing countries, and more broadly to how certain phenomena or “assemblages” move from one place to another.

Second, the other side of the evaluation capacity coin is about strengthening civil society organizations to have the capacity to externally monitor and evaluate pro-poor development policy, government service delivery and national expenditure. This is where Zambia is a particularly interesting case, with an organized civil society who carries out an annual community M&E project that seeks to empower citizens and hold government accountable. Therefore, the second question of the thesis is:

How is evaluation used as a strategy for social accountability and pro-poor development by Zambia’s civil society organizations?

The primary interest here is in the means and ways of performing community monitoring and evaluation, and the surrounding challenges in producing and utilizing this knowledge with the intention to bring about social accountability and pro-poor development. External influences and trends in the aid regime play a significant role in these kinds of M&E projects, especially as most civil society organizations are dependent on external funding.
1.2 Delimitations

Naturally, the M&E capacity building efforts are also directed towards the government sectors, but an in-depth analysis of these are beyond the limits of this thesis, although some references will be made to these efforts in brief.

As for my second research question, I focused my Zambian field study on a civil society umbrella network called Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR) which is the one network that together with member organizations run an externally funded, continuous project called the Budget Execution and Service Delivery Barometer, which is about civil society-led monitoring and evaluation of government-implemented development policies (described further in section 4.3). This is a multi-faceted project and while I attempt to include many of its aspects, a comprehensive analysis is beyond the scope of this thesis. Methodologically, I rely on interviews with various informants involved in the project, unfortunately it was poor timing for any field observations or participation as data collection for the project is only carried out once a year.

1.3 Thesis outline

The following chapter (2) will take its departure in anthropology, and provide background and a review of previous research in relevant fields, as well as a discussion of theoretical perspectives. Chapter 3 is dedicated to the methodology surrounding the field study that I undertook in Zambia as well as a note on how I analyzed my data using ATLAS.ti, a qualitative data analysis software. Chapter 4 provides background on the Zambian context in terms of political and civil society climate, relevant development policies, and an introduction to the civil society network CSPR. The following two chapters are dedicated to the analysis; chapter 5 focus on an indigenization of M&E in Zambia by examining capacity building actors or mediators and the professional evaluation association(s), while chapter 6 contains an examination of CSPR’s Budget Execution and Service Delivery Barometer and analyses different aspects of using evaluation as a strategy for social accountability and pro-poor development.
2. Background, theoretical foundations and concepts

This chapter will give a broader introduction to the thesis topic by providing some background and theoretical foundations, as well as defining central concepts used in the thesis.

2.1 An anthropological inquiry into evaluation in development

How can we use an anthropological perspective to understand the mobility of “M&E” across boundaries, and how it does, or does not, become “indigenized” in developing countries through capacity building efforts? What is the usefulness of an “evaluation culture” as a concept? The following sections will discuss these issues while simultaneously providing the foundations for my analysis of evaluation capacity building efforts and civil society-led evaluation in Zambia.

The academic field of an anthropology of evaluation is still in its cradle, and has been described by Copeland-Carson (2005:7) as the comparative study of how people evaluate, in terms of “the ways of knowing, being, and valuing”. The anthropology of evaluation is further depicted as the ultimate transdiscipline, drawing from a number of other disciplines and subfields. Indeed, this thesis makes use of both anthropological and sociological subfields on development and knowledge, as well as the perspectives of evaluators and political scientists. Among the anthropologists studying development, Mosse (2005:3) has examined “the new architecture of aid”, which refers to the shift from project aid to policy reform and budget support, the emphasis on poverty reduction and empowerment, and the new “aid packages” for public sector management and support to civil society under the “governance” rubric. It is believed by aid practitioners that this new aid management regime will solve past problems of aid efficiency and to really benefit all stakeholders, with its policy being embedded in “populist norms of poverty reduction and grassroots empowerment” (Gould 2005:62). In the new architecture of aid, we have seen a focus on governance and a reframing of aid relationships in terms of local ownership and partnership (donors are now referred to as “cooperating partners”). Simultaneously, however, any failings or corruption scandals in the governments of developing countries are now of central concern to the donors, as the reorganization of state and society in the name of good governance has become part of the means of international development. (Mosse 2005:4-5) The ethnographies of aid presented in Mosse and Lewis book (2005) show the complexity, diversity and the often contradictory set of policy goals and practices that this new aid regime encompasses. Anthropological inquiries into the policy rhetoric of ownership has revealed its complexity and multiple meanings in different situations; in one case a shift to national budgetary support, in another the promotion of civil society as a countervailing power. (Mosse 2005: 11, 22) Local ownership in this thesis is also about
the more general trend towards indigenizing the management of development (see Marsden 1994), which also includes the indigenization of M&E, as will be discussed in section 2.4. In further understanding the process of “exporting” evaluation across boundaries, we may look to Collier and Ong who has dubbed certain phenomena (ranging from technoscience and regimes of ethics to systems of administration or governance) as “global assemblages”. As global forms are territorialized in assemblages, “they define new material, collective, and discursive relationships” and constitute sites for the “formation and reformation of anthropological problems”. (2005:4)

The argument I wish to make throughout this thesis is that this evaluation capacity building process that is underway in a developing country like Zambia (and many others) cannot be separated from our own “evaluation culture” in Western societies, and must be understood in relation to the new aid architecture which has its own values, methods, policies, and agendas that all influence CSO-led evaluation. The concept of an evaluation culture will be examined below, but first it is necessary to unpack the M&E concept and discuss some appropriate definitions.

2.2 The mysterious acronym that is M&E

Although the title of this thesis leaves out the first part of the acronym that is Monitoring, it remains in this case inseparable from Evaluation in the realm of capacity building in development countries, as will be evident in later chapters. M&E is a well-established acronym, especially within international development, and yet its meaning remains ambiguous and the difference between monitoring and evaluation is often questioned.

Starting with evaluation, the available literature offers a plethora of definitions. One that is frequently occurring, with slight modifications, is given by Weiss (1998: 4); “Evaluation is the systematic assessment of the operation and/or the outcomes of a program or policy, compared to a set of explicit or implicit standards, as a means of contributing to the improvement of the program or policy.” This definition is certainly pragmatic and would be very helpful if we were to undertake an actual evaluation in the next chapters. However, for my research purpose, I am more concerned about the concept’s relation to ever-present social and political values. A more appropriate definition would therefore be to say that systematic evaluation “is conceptualized as a social and politicized practice that nonetheless aspires to some position of impartiality and fairness, so that evaluation can contribute meaningfully to the well-being of people in that specific context and beyond” (Shaw, Greene, and Mark 2006: 6, quoted in Dahler-Larsen 2012: 9). The contribution to peoples’ well-
being is central as proponents of evaluation (very similar to proponents of development), view it with an inherent optimism that evaluation will lead to betterment, learning, and greater efficiency; making it a universal good (Dahler-Larsen 2012:4).

With regards to monitoring, it is sometimes subsumed in definitions of evaluation, such as that of Rossi and Freeman (1985: 19); “evaluation research involves the use of social research methodologies to judge and to improve the planning, monitoring, effectiveness, and efficiency of health, education, welfare, and other human service programs”. But the act of monitoring a program, project, or any other social intervention, and how it differs from an evaluation is perhaps best shown in a direct comparison between the activities included in both practices. Nolan (2002: 204) has provided us with a clear table over the key differences between monitoring and evaluation:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monitoring</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tracks daily events</td>
<td>Takes a long-range view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts policies and rules</td>
<td>Questions policies and rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accepts plans and targets</td>
<td>Asks if plans and targets are accurate and appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checks work against targets</td>
<td>Checks targets against reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stresses input/output relationships</td>
<td>Stresses project purpose and goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks mainly at how project delivery occurs</td>
<td>Looks also at unplanned things, causes, and assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reports in terms of progress</td>
<td>Reports in terms of lessons learned</td>
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We can sum this up by stating that evaluation becomes a much bigger challenge when monitoring doesn’t take place, which is why capacity building efforts in evaluation often include training in how to monitor projects as well as evaluating them. Naturally, things can look somewhat different in the reality of projects and programs, especially concerning what model of evaluation that is being used in each case. Now that we have our initial definitions and understandings of M&E, it is only prudent to give a brief history of evaluation and the developments and reasons for speaking about an “evaluation culture” on export.

### 2.3 Toward an evaluation culture

People evaluate all the time, they make judgments on movies they have seen, books they have read, the quality of recently purchased gadgets or perhaps whether everything actually was better in the
old days. In other words, it is probable that people have always been evaluating in the simplest sense of the word. But scholars seem to agree that large-scale evaluation in its professional, scientific, and institutionalized form began in the United States in the 1960’s, during the time when many social programs were launched, and the cost of social welfare increased exponentially whereby it was required to systematically evaluate the results (Weiss 1998: 12; Pawson & Tilley 1997: 2; Toulemonde 2000: 351). The use of quantitative methods long dominated evaluation research, as it did in most other forms of research in the 1950’s and 1960’s (May 2011:222). In what came to be known as the “paradigm wars”, qualitative methods gained momentum in the late 1970’s and 1980’s and challenged the frequent and exclusive use of quantitative approaches such as the randomized experimental designs. This was also a time when the utilization of evaluations gained increased attention. Qualitative techniques became increasingly used in evaluations, advancing its legitimacy and showing the benefits of relying not just on numbers but also on words (through informal interviewing and observations). (Weiss 1998: 14) Especially during what has been referred to as Fourth Generation Evaluation, it became more common to use participation and dialogue in guiding evaluation methodology. The point was to go beyond “just getting the facts”, to also take into account the social, political, cultural, and human elements involved (Guba & Lincoln 1989:8). Evaluation as a field has since the mid-90’s again seen an increased focus on experimental, quantitative methods along with the attention to “evidence-based” policy, and the central goal of finding evidence for “what works” (Sandberg & Faugert 2012:14).

As Pawson and Tilley has remarked, we live in the age of the specialist, with an increasing number of the particular specialists that go by the name of evaluators. The fact that there are now so many of them is attributed to the society we live in; knowledge-centered, management-fixated, information-processing, and value-adding (1997: xi-xii). Dahler-Larsen has studied evaluation as a social phenomenon, and argues that the unprecedented amount of resources, societal influence, and attention that “our type of society” have allotted to evaluation was – during a reflexive modernity – produced by a general doubt in progress, which has “run out of steam”. The current social imaginary celebrates a “neorigorism” built on fear and risk management, while seeing a revival of the rational, management-oriented and bureaucratic organization that is hoped to secure order, predictability, and non-subjectivism. (2012: 142, 176).

The concept of an “evaluation culture” has been circulating for some time, mainly among evaluators and evaluation capacity builders themselves. Toulemonde (2000) has discussed evaluation culture(s) in Europe and identified both endogenous and exogenous factors for the
development of an evaluation practice. The external driving forces were made up of the Planning-Programming-Budgeting-System (PPBS) in the United States, international professional evaluation networks, the European Structural Funds, and development aid institutions (such as the OECD and the World Bank). In the policy sphere, the American Planning-Programming-Budgeting-System helped export evaluation to Northern Europe, and commissions, units, or agencies were created to engage in policy analysis. An evaluation culture started to spread further in Europe through policy networks, in particular those open to international trends, such as research and – the main focus here – development aid. Thus, one of the more decisive forces for the diffusion of an evaluation culture in Europe has been the European Union, especially OECD. The mandatory evaluations of all socioeconomic programs financed via the Structural Funds was instrumental in getting evaluation off the ground in many European countries. The internal factors for fostering an evaluation culture included in varying degrees national audit offices, parliaments, and ministries of finance. Toulemonde further discusses degrees and forms of “maturity” for an evaluation culture. In his view, most countries in the European Union are in the process of reaching a relatively mature evaluation culture in the sense of its politico-administrative integration and multiplicity of evaluators, but not in a way that there is a democratic evaluation culture where citizens participate in public sector evaluation. (Toulemonde, 2000) Following this line of thought, in a volume to which Toulemonde also contributed, Furubo and others (2002) have described the different aspects of a “mature” evaluation culture as involving a degree of evaluative praxis integrated within the political and administrative system, and a plurality and openness towards new perspectives in evaluation. Furubo and his group has set up nine criteria upon which the existence of such a “mature” evaluation culture can be judged on a score from 0 to 2, and I will do my best in trying to briefly summarize them here;

(1) Evaluation is practiced in several policy domains and is not an isolated activity.
(2) There is a plurality of evaluators specialized in different methods and disciplines.
(3) A national discourse exists on evaluation that is resulting from the particular national environment and not on “imported goods”.
(4) Evaluation exists as a profession with its own national association, or there’s frequent attendance at international associations’ meetings, and a discussion on professional ethics.
(5) The government has institutional measures to conduct evaluation and disseminate the results to decision makers; i.e. utilization of evaluation results is not neglected.
(6) The parliament, much like the government, also has institutional measures for carrying out evaluations and disseminating the results.
Pluralism with regards to different policy domains; different people or agencies perform evaluations and there is no single organizational body dominating a policy domain.

There are evaluation activities in the Supreme Audit Institution, and finally;

The evaluations performed shouldn’t focus solely on input/output relationships or technical production, some should instead measure the impact of public interventions and focus on public sector program/project outcomes. (Furubo et al. 2002:7-9)

Although practically no attention has been focused on explaining why the “culture” concept is used in this case, I would interpret it as an aspiration to try and capture the widespread existence of a systematic practice, that encompasses a set of knowledges, values, methods, and also attitudes pertaining to the usefulness and value (one might even say sacredness) of the practice that is evaluation itself. Beyond this, it is something that is not bounded or isolated, but travels across boundaries, and is at the same time influencing and open to other influences. This definition goes beyond other descriptions such as that of Dahler-Larsen (2012:164) who states that evaluation culture is “the norms, values, and habits related to evaluation”. The working definition of an evaluation culture in this thesis is reminiscent of Collier and Ong’s (2005: 4) concept of global assemblages; that are “abstractable, mobile, and dynamic, moving across and reconstituting ‘society’, ‘culture’, and ‘economy’”, making an evaluation culture comparable to other assemblages or phenomena with a “global” quality.

While I could not subscribe to a linear way of thinking about a “maturing” evaluation culture, there are some aspects of the framework described above that is of particular interest for my own topic. It is not my intention here to assess the evaluation culture in Zambia on some scale of “maturity”. Rather, I am interested in certain aspects of Furubo and others reasoning that can aid the understanding of the current drive to build evaluation capacity in developing countries, such as the differentiating between internal and external factors. It is obvious that an evaluation culture is rarely something that arises solely from within a society; external influences play a pivotal role. This has been, and continues to be the case, not just for various Western countries, but also for developing countries. Evaluation in new democracies was imported by international donor agencies and foundations who commissioned evaluations of their own programs as well as the projects by their grantees that were often civil society organizations (Kosheleva & Segone 2013:569). This trend has now developed further, and in the next section we will take a closer look at the interlinking of international development and an evaluation culture.

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1 A Supreme Audit Institution is an independent, national body at highest level that provides external audits of government bodies.
2.4 The relationship between evaluation and development

As soon as an academic field blossoms into being, it won’t take long before subfields begin to mushroom. “Development evaluation” surfaced as what I would characterize as a subfield within evaluation research and practice, but in the particular setting of international aid and development interventions. Its existence has been subject to critique, recently by Carden (2013:577), who has argued that development evaluation is not a permanent field, it emerged in the context of international development aid and will become increasingly marginalized as development evolves and is less driven by donor agencies and more by national governments, civil society, and other actors. Therefore, it doesn’t represent a long-term approach to evaluation, and according to Carden, it does not serve the donor agencies very well either, as development evaluation has focused on single projects and not taking the whole system into account. On the other side of the spectrum, Ofir (2013) has contended that the distinction still matters as long as we still live in a world where some countries have greater vulnerabilities and larger power asymmetries. This poses a bigger challenge for evaluators, as the evaluation of development initiatives becomes a “high stakes” endeavor, due to the potential serious consequences of ill-performed evaluations on local communities.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, “M&E” is now a well-entrenched concept in development discourse and practice, in the sense that it represents an activity that should be carried out whenever a project, program, or policy has been implemented. It has joined other buzzwords such as capacity building, participation, ownership, accountability, and governance, to name a few. These concepts are often closely linked, and “M&E” has fit in nicely; capacity building now also comprises “ECB” - Evaluation Capacity Building, so that governments and civil society organizations can learn how to do monitoring and evaluation, ideally improving governance and leading to greater accountability, while encouraging participation through civil society-led evaluations that support local ownership of the development process. Pro-poor development is another concept that is frequently mentioned in the new aid regime, and in the following chapters its meaning is quite simply defined as the intention to “put the last first” (to borrow a line from Chambers) in development policy formulation and implementation.

In this thesis, I make use of Olivier de Sardan’s concept of “the developmentalist configuration”, which defines development in terms of being “a complex set of institutions, flows and actors, for whom development constitutes a resource, a profession, a market, a stake, or a strategy” (Olivier de Sardan, 2005:2). Evaluation has been given a prominent role in the developmentalist
configuration. As Zenda Ofir (2013:584) has stated; “Development and evaluation are, or should be, in a tango with each other – the one sometimes leading, and sometimes the other, learning from each other and working together synergistically to create something meaningful.” The Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) at the World Bank has linked together evaluation and development by simply arguing that “evaluation is essential to progress” (IEG World Bank/Heider 2013:7). Whereas others, like Menon at International Development Evaluation Association (IDEAS) have posited a link between development and evaluation by defining the ultimate goal of evaluation as to “improve public action to contribute to people’s well-being”, in which public action represents people’s agency along with the actions of the state and its partners (2013:26). M&E is now part of virtually every development strategy, program, and project, and is also considered a resource for determining the value, effectiveness, and efficiency of development aid. Naturally, actors in the development configuration have not wasted time in coming up with even more fashionable acronyms, like “PM&E” – Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation; “PMER” – Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting; or “MELC” – Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Communications, and the list goes on.

When it comes to evaluation capacity building, there is a slight overlap with the concept of evaluation culture, as Dahler-Larsen (2012:164-165) has observed. We can understand evaluation capacity building as the infusion of a set of knowledges, methods, and resources pertaining to evaluation. In his ethnographic examination of capacity building, Gould (2005: 78) interprets capacity as a will to modernize and argues that while capacity building might be undertaken with the purpose of empowering, the most tangible result is often regulation and control through self-discipline. There are many forms of capacity building, and the justification for many “assemblages of practices” is through the need to improve the performance of “local” actors. Capacity building doesn’t just give expression to the will to civilize, but the way it is done “reaffirms sacred values of the aid domain: modernity, rationality, and political neutrality” (ibid.:69-70). However, this does not mean that we should succumb to the popular moralism of the subaltern which suggests that the powerful aid agencies are inherently evil and constantly “mistaken in their policy prescriptions simply by virtue of their commanding position in the hegemonic regime of partnership”. What needs to be remembered is what Foucault has called the productive side of power, the sites where “capacities” in terms of means of mobilization and organization, and modes of awareness that are generated from mechanisms of “partnership”, which actually do serve the purpose of empowerment. (Gould 2005: 81)
Within the developmentalist configuration, the trend for the past decades has gone towards increasing the indigenous management of the development process, generally by building institutional capacity and transferring ownership from external actors to the country in question. General and sector budget support to national governments have replaced much of the former aid structure that focused on specific projects and programs. This indigenization trend is also evident in the case of performing monitoring and evaluation of government-implemented development policies. Marsden (1994) has discussed this indigenization process in international development, and provides a critical lens through which to view actors involved in this process, and what lies behind the idea of “indigenous management”. Questioning the concept of “indigenous” becomes key in the reality of Western knowledge systems and management tools in the development regime that travels as “assemblages”, which also includes evaluation.

As we shall see below, CSO-led evaluation means that civil society actors, often on community-level, work together to produce knowledge on government-implemented development policies and budget spending. Depending on the political climate, this knowledge can either supplement or compete with other knowledge such as that produced by government agencies themselves. When this takes place in a so-called developing country like Zambia, there are often international donor agencies involved in the mix, supporting both government sectors and civil society organizations. In understanding knowledge and power relations in this complex setting, we are aided by Long (1992) who has described development as “battlefields of knowledge”. Seeing as evaluation is always about producing knowledge, we can consider CSO-led evaluation as both a resource and a strategy, or “weapon”, on the battlefield that is development. On another level, it is possible to view different sets of knowledge as competing discourses.

2.5 Civil society organizations leading evaluation

The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the monitoring and evaluation of national development policies has received more attention in the past few years as is evident from (for example) the global development policies signed in Accra and Busan (section 4.2). The primary interest here is not in the internal M&E that civil society organizations conduct on their own projects, but rather what Gildemyn (2013) has termed “CSO-led evaluation” of public service delivery and national expenditure. CSOs are seen as a driving force for pro-poor development, and a crucial part of, and resource in tackling a myriad of development and policy challenges. (Segone et al. 2013: 55). I use the term “civil society organizations” as encompassing not just NGOs, but
other local affiliations and groups such as religious organizations and community-based organizations, in short what Copeland-Carson (2005:13) calls “the social loci falling between the state and the private sphere while overlapping with both”. Nevertheless, parts of the large body of literature on NGOs and development do apply in this case even if the chosen term here is CSOs. Lewis (2001:71) has examined the different roles that development NGOs may take on, and the role of ‘catalyst’ is particularly relevant when discussing CSO-led evaluation. What Lewis has referred to as the development catalyst role of NGOs is centered on the idea of empowerment, as many organizations view it as their mission to empower their beneficiaries.

Civil society is also regarded as a form of social capital, defined as “the procedures, practices and connections that help a society or an organization to work effectively and fairly”, and evaluation is thought to contribute to this form of social capital (Segone et al. 2013: 53). Whereas evaluation capacity building during its inception might have been solely for the purpose of ensuring sustainability of development interventions in local communities (Dahler-Larsen 2012: 163), this no longer suffices as an explanation for the current evaluation capacity building trend. A lot of attention is focused on building capacity within civil society, which according to Catsambas and others (2013: 44), is intended to influence public policy by giving a voice to marginalized people in society and promote equity-focused and gender-responsive action and policy. Gildemyn (2013: 146) has listed three assumptions for the participation of CSOs in national M&E systems: (1) that the involvement of civil society would mean greater accountability between government and its citizens, (2) in comparison with external evaluators, CSOs would have an advantage due to the fact that they are closer to the local community and have the ability to do continuous monitoring over a longer time period, and (3) that CSOs would be more experienced in participatory and other qualitative M&E methods, and employ these to complement the often quantitative approach of official M&E systems. These assumptions help explain the differences, or at least intended differences, between CSO-led evaluation and any private evaluation usually done by foreign M&E specialists. As opposed to government-executed evaluations, CSO-led evaluation of public policy is carried out independently with the help of local communities.

Gildemyn (2013) has argued that CSO-led evaluation primarily has two functions – social accountability and/or feedback and learning. In cases of CSO-led evaluations of public policy or service delivery, increased accountability between governments and citizens is often the goal, but there is little research on whether or not it’s effective. What this type of evaluation always does, however, is to produce knowledge – and how this knowledge is used (assuming that it actually is),
becomes a different challenge and “project” in and of itself. It is this knowledge production, coupled with external influence on how it should be produced and how it is intended to lead to greater accountability that is of interest in my analysis. Previous research on the involvement of civil society in policy have mostly revolved around the PRSPs and civil society participation in the monitoring and evaluation of these initiatives (see for example Lucas et al. 2004, Eberlei & Siebold 2006, Eberlei 2007). In a broader and more general sense, McGee and Gaventa has discussed what they call transparency and accountability initiatives, led by civil society actors as a way of empowering people and bring about a more effective response to the needs of the people that is represented by the CSOs. The authors further dissect the development logic behind the recent attention paid to accountability, noting that: “the argument is that through accountability, the leaky pipes of corruption and inefficiency will be repaired, aid and public spending will be channeled more effectively, and development initiatives will produce greater and more visible results.” (McGee and Gaventa 2011:6-7) Holding those elected into power accountable is inherent in the idea of democracy, and from this follows the idea of accountability – but just as there are efforts to reshape democracy, there are efforts to reinvent accountability. According to Goetz and Jenkins (2005: 1-2), we are witnessing a global upsurge of such efforts – a new accountability agenda especially in the developing world where democracy is still young and fragile and where people will turn away from it swiftly when accountable governance is constantly out of reach. Social accountability refers to the myriad of ways that civil society actors can hold the state accountable, as well as the actions of media, government, and other actors that facilitate or promote these efforts. As observed by McNeil and Malena (2010: 1-2), social accountability efforts like participatory monitoring of public expenditure and citizen evaluation of service delivery have been developed over the past decade in countries like India, Brazil, and the Philippines, whereas similar efforts in less-developed countries in Sub-Saharan Africa have received less attention. This thesis will contribute to this under-studied area by focusing on Zambia and civil society’s M&E project, while drawing parallels where possible to the other African cases presented in McNeil and Malena.
3. Methodology

This thesis is the result of a minor field study that was carried out in Zambia for ten weeks in 2014. In this chapter I will discuss methodological choices, mainly semi-structured interviews and the case study approach, and other reflections on my field study in Zambia, starting with the creation of the “field” itself. I will conclude this chapter with comments on how I analyzed my data using qualitative data analysis software.

3.1 The field study taking shape

The conventional methodological assumption within anthropology of the field as a well-defined physical site has been challenged by rapid globalization (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). A researcher never enters a field; the field is always created to some extent by the researcher on the one hand, and the research subjects on the other, and this will determine what and whom will be included in that particular field (see Sjöberg 2011, Long 1992). When I finally got through Zambian customs three hours after landing, I knew I had to start creating my own “field”, and this was not going to be without its challenges.

I took an actor-oriented approach to creating my field, and a lot of time went into the actor analysis; i.e. trying to figure out who the actors are, who does what, the power relations between the different actors, and, not least, how to gain access to them. The actor analysis can easily become a research project all on its own, which I was doing my best in trying to avoid. I started out with a list of organizations, many of which I had emailed well before I arrived in Zambia, but hadn’t yet heard from. The list was the result partly of my own internet research on local civil society organizations, and partly of suggestions from my Zambian contact with a promising name; Wisdom. At times I found myself a tad envious of the earlier anthropologists, the ones who would travel to a remote island to do research while having had minimal previous contact with its inhabitants, and this wasn’t expected of them, because there wasn’t really any reliable way of initiating such contact, except face to face. Today, however, in our globalized world with the long arms of modern technology reaching as far as into the deepest jungles or the most remote mud house villages, I sensed the expectations had changed. Wasn’t I supposed to have set up contact with an array of potential informants, and have at least a hand-full of interviews already scheduled, before I even sat foot outside Lusaka airport? In truth, I wasn’t even able to pre-arrange a meeting with my local supervisor at University of Zambia, who kept telling me – perhaps skeptical of modern technology – that first I should arrive in Lusaka, and then we’ll make an appointment!
There was also the fact that I ended up spending a lot of my time in Lusaka, the capital city in which my initial activities did not really feel like fieldwork. This made the process of shaping my field a bit more anxious. As remarked by anthropologist Kurotani who doubted the “appropriateness” of her doing fieldwork in middle-class American suburbs; “In a distant, exotic place, though, we have the assurance that everything we do – from asking for a direction to the village chief’s house, to negotiating prices at a local market – is a legitimate part of fieldwork.” (Kurotani 2004: 204) In this case, my first few weeks in Lusaka largely consisted of what Kurotani calls the “telephone and shop” phase; trying to get situated and making calls to all the people who had not responded to my emails. Most of it did not exactly feel like proper fieldwork activities, even if I did make an effort to learn some polite phrases in “Town Nyanja” – the most commonly spoken local language in Lusaka. Fortunately, my supervisor at University of Zambia stuck to his words and I was able to get a meeting with him in my first week. The rest of my field study, however, turned out to be an exercise in patience, perseverance, and flexibility on almost all matters.

3.2 Finding a case to study

Although I had sought to avoid the “urban bias” that is often present in research in “developing” countries, I soon realized that in Zambia, this bias extended to the civil society organizations who were all clustered in the capital city, Lusaka. The reasons for this are first and foremost that the donor agencies are also clustered in Lusaka, and so are the decision making bodies of the government which is still highly centralized in Zambia (Elemu 2010: 25). My initial approach was to try and gain access to a couple of organizations to find out more about the integration of evaluation and the M&E capacity from a local perspective. However, I found it difficult to get a response when emailing to an organization’s official email address found at their website. It proved to be much more successful, albeit more complicated, to track down an individual within the organization and contact him/her directly. This was also the slightly more risky approach, in terms of potentially by-passing hierarchies that could make it difficult for me to find more informants higher up in the organization later on. Luckily in my case, my Zambian friend Wisdom gave me the contacts of a friend of his, the head of Research and Policy Analysis at Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR). This is when I learned about the Budget Expenditure and Service Delivery monitoring that this civil society network was leading, and that I found particularly interesting in all its complexity. This continuous project will be discussed in detail in chapter six, but in brief, it concerns community monitoring and evaluation of government service delivery and budget expenditure through participatory methods across the country, carried out once or twice a year depending on available funds. CSPR and their aforementioned project became my main case study.
for this thesis. After gaining access through my contact, I interviewed three of their employees; two at the headquarters in Lusaka, and their Provincial Coordinator in Choma, Southern Province. I was happy to get out of the capital for a few days, and I got to learn more about the actual work and field methodology. Unfortunately, I couldn’t have timed my field study to actually observe the data collections in the communities (which had already been done in January for the 2013 report), but I did get detailed information through my interview on the methodology, for which I also received a lot of documents such as score cards and questionnaires. The case study is approached from an interpretivist perspective where the purpose is to understand the complexity of a particular case and its activity within a specific setting, not ruling out the possibility for generalization, but this is not the main goal of the research. It requires the researcher to be “ever-reflective in their search for the sequence and course of events which are interrelated and contextually bound”. (May 2011: 224-225)

As I was also interested in the process that I interpreted as “indigenizing” M&E and building local evaluation capacity, and while trying to be holistic about my case study, I continued to search for other informants who could give me more insight into M&E in Zambia. An unexpectedly good tool in this process turned out to be the online professional network, LinkedIn, where I would connect with one informant, and then have his/her professional network open up to me – which made it a lot easier to find more informants in the same field (M&E). Modern technology does have its benefits. It also had the added advantage that, as I reached out to a new potential informant, I could refer to someone we had in common; we were already interconnected in that online, pseudo-real but comforting way; I was not a complete stranger. In the end, aside from informants at CSPR and my local supervisor at University of Zambia, I managed to find informants from the two national evaluation associations (that have now merged into one), the Zambia Governance Foundation (grant givers that focus a lot on evaluation capacity building), and an NGO called Society for Women Against AIDS in Zambia, that recently carried out a similar service delivery and budget tracking project as CSPR, albeit in much smaller scale.

In the words of Norman Long, it’s important to treat the researcher (i.e. the author) as: “an active social agent who struggles to understand social processes through entering the life-worlds of local actors who, in turn, actively shape the researcher’s own fieldwork strategies, thus moulding the contours and outcomes of the research process itself.” (1992: ix) I had been warned that I might encounter some “research fatigue” among civil society; that is, many organizations are tired of being approached by researchers unless they see any potential gain for the organization. There can
also be some suspicion when it comes to outsiders, especially when the subjects touch on anything donor-related, or other sensitive information that organizations fear could lead to negative implications for their future financial survival. This is why it was important to try and have someone “introduce” me to the next informant. I always introduced myself as a Swedish graduate student working on my master’s thesis (thus not something that was going to be published), and that I was in Zambia thanks to a minor field study grant from the Swedish International Development cooperation Agency (SIDA), but that they had not commissioned my research. I didn't encounter much research fatigue, nor suspicion, but I became very aware of my informants’ often crowded schedules and tight deadlines, and was humbled that they nevertheless gave me their time and offered elaborate answers to my interview questions.

### 3.3 On using semi-structured interviews

During my field study in Zambia, I conducted a total of nine interviews with eight informants. The decision to use semi-structured interviews was not a difficult one as I wanted my informants to be able to elaborate freely and give detailed and in-depth answers. I also wanted to elicit their views on current events and their experiences. Taking a cue from Rubin (2005), I regarded the people I interviewed more as conversational partners, trying to balance my probes, checks, and prompts. The topics or questions that I used during my interviews depended on who I was interviewing at the time and what organization they were involved in. Some recurring themes, however, were the political and economic climate for civil society in Zambia, and also the informants’ perceptions and interpretations of the local capacity to conduct M&E and engage with government on M&E and policy matters.

I recorded some of my interviews, from which I am able to give exact quotes, while for some of them I decided to take notes by hand. My decision to either record or take notes during an interview was often not made until I had met the informant face to face and introduced myself. This was to let my instincts and previous experience in interviewing interpret the appropriateness of using a recording device, as some informants can find this intimidating and it might affect what sort of, and the amount of data that the researcher may get. For my research interest, which to some degree included asking questions about donor relations and CSO funding and capacities, it was pivotal to establish a certain comfort level and trust whereby the interviewee could speak freely without being overly concerned about potential consequences. From an ethical perspective, they were all given the opportunity to be anonymous before answering any questions. As English is the official
language in Zambia, all of my informants spoke it fluently which meant that there was no need for a translator, thus contributing to making the interviews more of a conversation.

3.4 A note on qualitative data analysis using software technology

Picking up from the discussion on far reaching modern technology above; have the expectations on data analysis also changed with the advent of new technology? My answer would be yes. Quantitative researchers have been using software technology for some time now, coding and analyzing their data, producing neat graphics and tables. Now there are a limited number of programs out there that can be used by qualitative researchers who may also code their data in order to facilitate the analysis. I would argue that whether you’re dealing with a set of case studies, a larger body of articles for discourse analysis, or as in my case, around 30 000 words worth of semi-structured interviews, not counting the reports and other documents I received from my informants, it helps to make use of 21st century technology when sorting through and trying to analyze all this information. I made use of what is probably one of, if not the most common “QDA” software, ATLAS.ti, and the only book I managed to find about the program, written by Friese (2012). Instead of immediately making use of the program’s every bell and whistle, I focused on “coding” – essentially categorizing – my material, using the “comment field” to write down interesting things I noticed while coding. As Friese puts it, the coding function corresponds to “the time-honored manual practice of marking (underlining or highlighting) and annotating text passages in a book or other documents” (ibid: 10).

The analytic framework presented in Friese’s book is called NCT – noticing, collecting, and thinking, and is not intended to follow in a direct sequential process but rather suggests a recursive process of moving back and forth between the three. Rather self-explanatory, it involves noticing interesting things in the data, collecting these by coding them, and thinking about them – as the researcher still has to be the brain in qualitative data analysis. (ibid.: 92, 101-102)

With regards to my case study on CSO-led evaluation, I found the RAPID framework (Research and Policy in Development group at the Overseas Development Institute, presented in Court & Young 2004: 2), helpful in thinking about ways of coding and organizing my data with the following four elements: External influence, political context, evidence, links. The interrelatedness of these areas in understanding the link between research and policy, and where M&E is situated in this is demonstrated by the figure below.
Some of the codes that I used in analyzing my data were directly drawn from the figure above while others emerged from the data, such as “M&E perception” which referred to quotes from informants on the local perceptions of what “M&E” is about. There was a certain overlap and linkages between codes named “rights-based approach”, “empowerment”, and “knowledge”, but instead of merging the codes into a singular one, I formed a “network” (another neat function) of the three codes that I simply named “REK”, while another network, “Links” included codes such as “CSPR media relations”, “information dissemination”, and “policy advocacy”. These are merely some examples to illustrate the ways in which QDA software aids the process of thinking about and analyzing qualitative data.
4. The Zambian setting: Politics, development, and civil society

In this chapter, the purpose of the first section is to acquaint the reader with the political and economic context in Zambia, and the role of civil society in a brief historical perspective. Next, the impact of international development policies and aid modalities on Zambian civil society will be discussed, before introducing the Zambian civil society network, Civil Society for Poverty Reduction, whose community M&E project was the subject of my case study.

4.1 Political economy and CSO climate

Zambia has seen a recent economic growth following a rise in global copper prices, and in 2011 it “graduated” from a position as a low income country to a lower middle-income country. However, the country has not been able to decrease the percentage of the population that are living in poverty, which is at 42% and has slowed down in its declining pace. The proportion of Zambians living in extreme poverty has decreased in the past decade, but the number of Zambians in rural areas living in extreme poverty has, paradoxically, increased. The development has been concentrated in urban areas such as Lusaka and the Copperbelt, where most of the foreign direct investment is being made. (UNDP 2013: 16-17)

Zambian civil society, understood in its broadest sense as the social loci between the state and the private sphere, began emerging just before independence, but was mostly based on regional politics that created platforms for citizens to engage in national affairs. In the Second Republic (1973-1991), during the Kaunda regime with the slogan “kumulu Lesa, panshi Kaunda” – meaning “in the heavens, God, down here, Kaunda” – (cited in Elemu 2010: 21), all civil society organizations were outlawed. During this time, Zambia was a one-party state under Kaunda, who promoted an ideology of state control over all spheres of society. Under his regime, civil society organizations were created in different sectors, usually in the form of cooperatives and unions, to make sure that the Party state controlled all social forces. This resulted in what has been termed “state-led civil society”. Kaunda’s regime was finally challenged in 1990 by the church and trade unions, among other dissenting voices who transformed themselves into the political party of Movement for Multi-Party Democracy (MMD) which ultimately ended the one-party Kaunda rule. From that point, there was an explosion of civil society actors in areas such as governance and human rights. (ibid.: 21-22) A typology over different civil society organizations have been provided by Elemu (2010:25), who distinguishes between small CSOs revolving around a charismatic leader and larger CSOs with formalized structures; membership-based and non-membership based CSOs; other civil
society components such as trade unions, professional associations; and finally “national” CSOs with regards to geographical coverage. The common feature of these different CSOs, however, is that they are highly dependent on external donor support, and it follows that CSOs tend to mushroom in areas that correspond to donor interests. (ibid.: 26)

**Civil society and the current government**

The current government of the Patriotic Front, led by Michael Sata who was elected in 2011, is in the process of enforcing a new constitution. This is referred to as the “people-driven” constitution that is supposed to reflect broad collective interests. During the time of my field study in Zambia, the government had produced a draft of the new, “people-driven” constitution, but ironically enough they refused to release the draft to the people, causing much stir and media attention. Civil society organizations had a prominent role in the public urgings to the government about informing the people of the contents of the draft, as well as a time frame for the adoption of the new constitution. As one of my CSPR informants commented; “This type of government that is in now, when in opposition they would even support us, and all our messages for tax justice, for pro-poor allocation of resources to all those sectors we talked about. Today, they are turning back on the promises that they made”.

Another debate raging in the media (although at the time of research rather overshadowed by the relentless constitution debate) regarded the so-called NGO Act. This act was launched in 2009 and required NGOs to register their organization with the government as well as start paying taxes. It also required all civil society organizations to declare assets and reveal their sources of funding (Mumba 2014: 4). The Sata government established the Non-Governmental Organization Registration Board with the task of monitoring the operations of the NGOs. This regulatory body is also supposed to register and approve the area of work for those NGOs operating in Zambia, as well as make recommendations of audit rules and procedures for NGO accounts.² Opposition to the Act was led by a coalition of civil society actors; NGOCC, CSPR, WFC, among others. They were arguing that the NGO Act and its implication of obligatory registration was undercutting the country’s democracy and was simply a government tool to impose their control over civil society (Mumba 2014). The debate had dragged on into 2014, and the government only recently announced that they would go back to the drawing board, invite some representatives from various organizations, and revisit the contents of the Act. It thus seemed like the pressure from civil society

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had had some effect. However, the government was urging NGOs to register their organizations first, in compliance with the current NGO Act, and then later on the discussions and steps back to the drawing board would be taken. The relatively recent trend of introducing various legal means of registering NGOs has also been observed in other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (such as Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia). This might suggest that government openness to civil society participation in the policy arena has not yet been fully institutionalized. (Jones & Tembo 2008: 7) As remarked by Habasonda (2010: 51); “Mistrust and lack of confidence has been the hallmark of the government-CSO relationship”, a subject that will be explored further in section 6.3.

Zambia is now into its Sixth National Development Plan (SNDP), but since the current government took office in 2011, a lot of insecurity has surrounded the implementation of this plan. The government has stated that because the SNDP was developed under the former government when the opposition party was in power, it represents their political agenda. Therefore, the government first needs to “marry their manifesto with the SNDP”, as an informant at a CSO put it, before arguing that the SNDP should be a national document, and not an object for party politics which only serves to prolong the plan’s implementation. Now that the political context has been introduced, we can move on to exploring the impact of some of the more recent international development policies on Zambia.

4.2 The influence of global development policies

The challenges in coordinating and managing development aid have been well-documented, and international policies in the last decade have endeavored to improve aid effectiveness and refocus the efforts. An important step in this was the Paris Declaration that was adopted in 2005. It is centered on reforming the delivery and management of aid, based on the five principles of ownership, alignment, harmonization, managing for results, and mutual accountability (OECD 2005). While this declaration formalized a new framework for the relationship between cooperating partners (donors) and partner (recipient) countries, it was surprisingly mute on the role of civil society. Not including civil society in the Paris Declaration meant that CSOs in Zambia had little leverage in trying to promote their priorities in relation to the declaration. One critical voice went as far as to argue that the implementation of the Paris Declaration in Zambia officially “legalized the displacement of civil society by CPs [Cooperating Partners] from the dialogue table”, and made the Zambian government more accountable to the donors than to its own citizenry. Ultimately, the
Paris Declaration failed to recognize the resources of civil society organizations to strengthen good governance and contribute to economic, social, and political development. (Mali 2010: 124-127)

Since then, the tide has turned and civil society seems to now have an indisputable role for actors in the developmentalist configuration. The policy that followed the Paris Declaration was the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA) in 2008, which not only reaffirmed the overall message on aid effectiveness and coordination in the Paris Declaration, but also identified ownership, inclusive partnerships, delivering results, and capacity development as areas for improvement. At the Accra meeting, it was recognized that civil society also need to participate along with the national government and donor agencies. (OECD 2008) An important consequence of the meeting was also the formation of the EvalPartners Initiative as mentioned in the introduction; a joint initiative launched by Unicef and IOCE with support from international donors to promote national evaluation capacity building in the following ways; facilitation of peer-to-peer cooperation among VOPEs (Voluntary Organizations for Professional Evaluation), developing a toolkit for institutional capacity within VOPEs, generate new knowledge on VOPE operation, promoting an “enabling environment” for evaluation, and supporting equity-focused and gender-responsive evaluation. (Kosheleva and Segone 2013: 569) The Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation in 2011 placed further emphasis on the role of CSOs in ensuring accountability for public policy implementation and advocating for transparency in budget expenditure while increasing demand for evaluation to inform evidence-based policy making. (Catsambas et al. 2013: 46)

Aside from the international development policies discussed above, another one of the building blocks that signified a change in the approach to development by actors in the developmentalist configuration, and which had significant impact on the growth and organization of civil society in Zambia, was the IMF Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP). Civil society involvement in the formulation, monitoring, and evaluation of the PRSPs in Zambia is largely concentrated to the subject of my case study; the civil society network called Civil Society for Poverty Reduction, which will be explored in the following section.

4.3 Civil Society for Poverty Reduction

This section will describe the Zambian civil society network called Civil Society for Poverty Reduction (CSPR), and situate the network’s creation in the context of the new architecture of aid,
starting with the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper process and civil society’s role in this. The purpose is to provide the context for the case study of the CSPR “Budget Execution and Service Delivery Monitoring Project” that will be analyzed in chapter 6.

The Civil Society for Poverty Reduction is a membership-based, umbrella network for civil society organizations in Zambia founded in 2000. The initial purpose was to ensure the meaningful participation of civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of the national Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). The head office is a labyrinthine, single-storey house neatly tucked away behind gates in Lusaka’s North-East outskirts, a place where more and more organizations and businesses are relocating from the chaotic downtown center. CSPR’s mission is articulated as to “actively and effectively contribute to poverty reduction and pro-poor development in Zambia through generating and sourcing evidence based data, advocacy for responsive policy formulation and implementation; promotion of community participation and civic engagement in development processes, mobilization and coordination of CSOs for the provision of a platform and knowledge sharing at all levels.” The work is organized into five different programmatic areas: Advocacy and Policy Dialogue (APD), Civic Participation and Engagement (CPE), Institutional Governance and Development (IGD), Information Management and Communication (IMC), and finally Research and Policy Advocacy (RPA) under which the Budget Tracking and Service Delivery Monitoring project takes place (also known as the Barometer project hereinafter).

The organization has field offices in five provinces (Eastern, Western, Southern, North Western, and Luapula) out of Zambia’s total ten provinces, and its headquarters in Lusaka in the Central Province. In each of the five provinces, CSPR works in two districts, with a provincial coordinator that organizes the activities along with member organizations in that particular area. The overall concern is pro-poor development, and CSPR has given themselves six sectors to focus on, which are all related to development and poverty reduction; Health, education, agriculture, social protection, water and sanitation, and infrastructure development.

CSPR’s activities also include simplifying important national documents, such as the national budget (here I was let in on a private joke about the 5000 page budget being like a woman; very complicated and impossible to understand fully). This kind of activity has been referred to as “budget literacy” by some authors (See Gildemyn 2013; McNeil and Malena 2010). Depending on how much funding is available, the simplifications of the documents will then be translated into
local languages. CSPR is also involved in disseminating and exchanging information with both local and international partners on issues of poverty reduction and national development plans. External donors fund various activities and parts of the organizations work, among the donors are the Zambian Governance Foundation (ZGF) – a Zambian grant-making organization who in turn receives funding from a number of European countries, with Sweden (Sida) being the largest donor. Support for various CSPR activities has also been received from UNICEF and the Embassy of Finland, while ActionAid Zambia has been funding the setting up of an internal monitoring and evaluation system.

The network has experienced a member drop from 140 member organizations in 2009 to somewhere around 70 at this time (2014), my source speculated that this might have something to do with the five-time increase of the yearly membership fee from a modest 100 kwacha in the early years to 500 kwacha in 2011. Another possible reason for the decrease is the general economic climate for CSOs in Zambia, where many struggle to obtain funding and work under financially insecure conditions. However, some of the influential members that are still part of the network are the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR), Caritas Zambia, and SACCORD.

**Participation in the formulation and M&E of development policies**

It has been argued that the founding of CSPR represented a crystallization of doubts from civil society organizations about the PRSP process launched in 2002 and completed in 2005, and civil society participation and inclusion in its formulation and monitoring. (Matenga 2010: 67-68) Whether or not the creation of CSPR was an entirely “indigenous” effort, without any “facilitating” by external donors, remains unclear, but safe to say that the network has gained a prominent – and in some ways privileged – position in relation to government, and sometimes the donor community.

The idea of CSPR was nevertheless that there would be an organizational body that would represent the voice of civil society in lobbying government, but also to strengthen learning and build financial and technical capacity among civil society organizations. CSPR spearheaded civil society policy input into the PRSP, the Fifth National Development Plan (FNDP), and participated in the formulation of the long-term Vision 2030. In both the PRSP and FNDP processes of formulation, CSPR carried out an independent, parallel process in addition to participating in the official government consultative processes. CSPR formed working groups on different development areas, such as food security, HIV/AIDS, governance, and gender. Provincial consultations were carried
out in four of Zambia’s poorest provinces; Eastern, Luapula, Western, and North-Western, and data from these consultations along with the working groups culminated in a report entitled “A PRSP for Zambia – A Civil Society Perspective” that was delivered to the government. A similar procedure was conducted for the FNDP, parallel to the official consultation process. CSPR also conducted its own evaluation of the PRSP and introduced its own monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in five provinces, apart from participating in the government’s monitoring and evaluation frameworks. The policy influence of CSPR was reflected in the fact that most of its inputs and suggestions for the PRSP and the FNDP were accepted by government and incorporated into the final policies. (Matenga 2010: 68-70)

Most recently, CSPR participated in the formulation and monitoring of the SNDP, while also publishing a simplified version of the development plan, an activity that was sponsored by UNICEF, and the Embassy of Finland. In this document, it states that the Ministry of Finance and National Planning is the government body who is responsible for the coordination of the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the SNDP. It further states that “non-state actors” will play an important role in M&E of government programs, in terms of undertaking their own independent monitoring and evaluation and discuss findings through institutions like the Ministry of Finance and the Sector Advisory Groups (SAGs). The SAGs have been an important arena for the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the development policy processes of the PRSP, the FNDP, and now the SNDP. They were established in 2003 as part of a more inclusive institutional structure for monitoring the implementation of the PRSP. Originally eight in number, they have been increased to twenty-two working groups that have a wide representation of members of civil society organizations, government, academia, private sector, and cooperating partners. (Matenga 2010:70-72) The criticism that has been levied at the SAGs from civil society and academia suggest that the SAG’s are merely “window-dressing” with the civil society representatives; they are present, but they are not heard.

Now that the stage is set, the next chapter analyzes the first side of what I have called the evaluation capacity coin; building internal M&E capacity in civil society organizations and supporting a professionalization through national evaluation associations.
5. M&E in Zambia: External influences and internal challenges

This chapter examines the diffusion of evaluation to Zambia; the traveling M&E assemblage, and some of the actors involved in building evaluation capacity in civil society. The concern is more about understanding the process of M&E indigenization rather than determining whether some end goal of a mature evaluation culture has been reached. This chapter is divided into two sections; the first is concerned about evaluation capacity building in Zambian civil society organizations, while the second discusses the professionalization of M&E mainly through national evaluation associations, and perceptions on the current evaluation capacity among civil society actors.

5.1 “De-mystifying M&E” – building evaluation capacity

In the new aid regime, the actors in the developmentalist configuration have been greatly concerned with what is termed capacity building, which Gould (2005: 69-70) has argued is not undertaken for its own sake, but is embedded in the particular policy agendas of development actors; “The ‘pro-poor poverty partnership’ has ushered in a new generation of demands for which capacity must be created”. M&E capacity has become part of this aid policy rhetoric as a lack that needs to be corrected, and the dissemination of such capacity is considered necessary for the process of poverty reduction to continue. It also has a way of reaffirming the aid regime’s sacred values of modernity and rationality. However, there are several problems inherent in this, one of which Gould has identified as the “infinite improvability” of subjects that turns capacity building into an endless project in itself. (ibid: 71) Another key challenge in capacity building that became evident in my research, was what my informants identified as a need to “de-mystify” M&E. The specialists known as “Evaluators” or “M&E Officers”, and the particular set of techniques known as evaluation methods that have become so commonplace in the Western societies aren’t necessarily recognized, and certainly not taken for granted, in other societies.

According to my informants, the perception of M&E that many local CSOs have in Zambia is that it involves people driving around in fancy range rovers doing “monitoring”, and the CSOs don’t have the resources to engage in that type of activity, and perhaps also don’t see the point. M&E is locally perceived as going to a project site and “inspecting” or “checking up on” the work that is going on, and this is not a task for just anybody; it has to be a specialist entitled “M&E Officer”. One of my Zambian informants was working as an M&E specialist at one of the largest grant making foundations in the country, Zambian Governance Foundation (ZGF), who also focus on capacity building support for CSOs. The role of ZGF can be described as mediators or brokers –
an intermediary actor who functions as a translator of the abstract global policy tasked with enforcing new normative, “rational”, and administrative orders (see Mosse 2005: 20). Capacity, as Gould has remarked, has an ordering power in which hierarchies of authority and expertise are created, even if the skills that are passed on may also be used subversively (2005:71). As my informant observed when discussing the inception of the foundation in 2009; “we realized that you can give grants to projects – but projects don’t run themselves. So you do need to provide capacity development support in addition to grants.” Upon further inquiry into how this work got started, I was informed that;

You need organizations to have the ability to track the results of the work they do. You need them to understand how to measure progress and to report on it, things like that. So we started to develop toolkits and other kinds of support mechanisms. And in that process it was necessary that we ourselves needed to have a strong monitoring and evaluation system that helped us follow up, not only on what we were doing to support them, but also on what they were doing in their various interventions; trying to influence policy, trying to bring about change, trying to…build peoples’ confidence and a sense of rights.

Capacity development can have the dual function of both disciplining and empowering (ibid.: 71), and the quote above also illustrates the role of an actor like ZGF as both an object and an agent of the global development regime. As they work to build M&E capacity in Zambian civil society organizations, they are simultaneously subject to external pressure and the “ordering power” within capacity; “We get grants ourselves, to be able to give grants to others, and we are constantly under pressure to show; ‘what are these people even achieving? What change are they making? Why should we continue to give you money so that you can give them money?’”. The above-mentioned difficulty of making local CSOs understand how to use M&E and why, was an apparent challenge in ZGF’s work, a challenge that can be framed in terms of creating an administrative order and a single discourse on what “M&E” is about. It represents a core problem of indigenizing an evaluation culture. Definitions of central concepts in the aid regime often diverge from the way these concepts are understood and used in society at large or even in parallel expert domains (Gould 2005: 70). My ZGF informant explained the difficulties in the following manner;

I think for many of them [the CSO’s] it’s just a question of not thinking, not valuing it enough. Just not appreciating what it does for me as an organization, as a person in my job. They say ‘no but we don’t have an M&E officer here, so we don’t see why, or how we can do monitoring and evaluation’. I tell them, look, it’s not a question of someone being called that in the organization, but everybody’s job could include elements of
monitoring, because you have to be able to understand whether what you’re doing makes any sense for anybody. Does it make a difference? Is there any use in doing more of the same? How do you evaluate that what you’re doing really is the right thing to be doing, if you don’t bother to monitor? And just, to look back and see, ‘has this really worked?’ I think it’s just the appreciation which still is not there.

Any resistance towards evaluation as such is often viewed as irrational, coupled with egotistical interests, or simply as the result of a lack of an evaluation culture (Dahler-Larsen 2012:164). So how do the mediators of the global aid agenda handle this? One of the methods was mentioned briefly in a quote above; the creation and distribution of an “M&E toolkit” for civil society organizations engaged in governance and policy engagement work. This toolkit informs organizations on the ins-and-outs of the M&E practice and emphasizes ZGF’s commitment to a “culture of learning”, that is to be achieved through the implementation of an M&E system that conforms to ZGF’s values of fairness, integrity, respect, quality and learning (ZGF 2011). It also contains information on how to do M&E reports, tailored to suit the foundation’s needs (and no doubt the foundation’s donors’ needs). Aside from this toolkit, a number of training workshops for “grant partners” (the CSOs who go through the process of applying for grants and support successfully), are organized on M&E as well as other administrative and fashionable areas.

ZGF also applied a strategy called “accompaniment”, which started out as “M&E accompaniment” based on the identified difficulties in this capacity building area. This entails giving the CSOs who are grant partners an M&E expert who walks with them in what my informant described as “the process of developing really good systems of monitoring, really good indicators of measuring change, and just developing the culture.” Because the foundation has been understaffed for a long time, this is outsourced to consultants, “mostly” local experts on M&E who have been with the foundation for a number of years and “are very aware of the kinds of things we’d like the partners to develop, the kinds of support, the style in which we support, and all those kinds of things that are important for us [ZGF].” It’s not unlikely that this accompaniment of an M&E expert works to reinforce already formed perceptions of monitoring and evaluation as something carried out by an external “expert” only. Although the foundation, according to my informant, does manage to locate a few Zambian M&E experts even though the supply is described as “pretty thin” and the list contains only two names (but can be extended to four people who can provide the basics). Another one of my informants with no direct connection to capacity building efforts, postulated that this capacity building seems to be more about matching an organization’s operation with the donor’s criteria, sort of “swaying” the CSOs in the donor’s direction to report how the donor’s
money is spent, rather than being about strengthening the projects and work that the CSOs are doing. This is perhaps straying a bit far towards the “populist moralism” of the subaltern, if we consider the productive side of power where most capacity builders and donors do seem to believe in the universal good of evaluation. At ZGF, the M&E Specialist expressed her disappointment over the poor results of evaluation capacity building in CSOs;

Sometimes when...lots of times...for some organizations when their grants run out, when the grant duration period ends they have the opportunity to access another grant depending on how well they’ve done with the first one. And so you expect that, at this point they are going to design…the design of their project will be pretty easy, they will have understood what we look for in M&E and they will have understood how to measure and monitor projects and so on...and they’ve not.

An internalization of a meticulously formalized way of producing documents such as project proposals or monitoring and evaluation reports is often considered a key indicator of improved capacity (Gould 2005: 79). The lack of an indigenization of an evaluation culture results in a lot of stress for the capacity builders – the mediators of the global aid agenda – who has to report back to their donors higher up in the capacity building order. ZGF has taken a more direct approach to this dilemma, and has started to collect the information they need from the grant partners (the CSOs) by themselves.

A second challenge in evaluation capacity building is the sustainability issue. Building evaluation capacity has been framed as a way of ensuring sustainability of local development interventions (see Dahler-Larsen 2012) – although I argue that this is merely one side of the coin – but what about the sustainability of the capacity building that is taking place? From my research, it became apparent that it was difficult to institutionalize M&E within the organizations, and the capacity builders ended up working mostly with individuals, which had obvious constraints, as my ZGF informant explained:

There is a pretty high turnover in some of the civil society organizations [...] and in most cases you are working with individuals, because no matter how hard you try, some of the skills never really get institutionalized. So you get one or two people that become really good in the organization, and then they can easily be approached by somebody else because they are good at that, and that’s the skill that many are looking for. This tends to happen pretty often.
Another one of my informants, the former chairman of an M&E association who has written about M&E and development in Zambia, commented on the notion that it's often the younger population who are trained, but since they don’t yet have any families of their own, or any strong bonds to the community, they tend not to return after they’ve been trained. By building capacity among those who are already well-established in the community, my informant speculated, the shortfall in M&E capacity in rural areas could possibly be remedied.

What has become obvious is that international policy regimes “do not simply arrive, but are produced by intermediary actors” such as ZGF above, and frontline workers such as CSO staff (Mosse 2005: 20). On the African continent, another mediator of the evaluation capacity building and for creating and institutionalizing an “evaluation culture” is the African Evaluation Association (AfREa). This is the continental body for national evaluation associations in African countries, and it has been spearheading the M&E capacity building in the region along with donors and international coalitions such as EvalPartners. The AfREa’s role as a mediator for capacity building was however questioned by a former chairman of an evaluation association in Zambia; “All it did was to concentrate on conferences, and within that two years, between conferences, the activities were basically nowhere. They would have a conference, donors would pump in a lot of money, everybody would talk about ‘capacity building, capacity building’, and once you leave the conferences, the workshops, there’s no follow-up.” In the next section I will discuss some evaluation capacity building efforts that has been carried out by one of Zambia’s evaluation associations, along with the growth of a professionalization of M&E in Zambia.

5.2 The professionalization of M&E

“You literally knew all the M&E people in the country. You could count them.”

The history of M&E in Zambia is a relatively short one, but attention to the subject has rapidly increased in recent years, as the diffusion of an evaluation culture has reached the so-called developing countries. Professionalization is closely linked to the indigenization of a practice that we might call an assemblage, and an indigenization of M&E in developing countries requires a supply of “local” professional M&E experts.

Crewe and Harrison has discussed the tendency to fetishize technology in development interventions, and the role of experts in this. They contend that technical expertise in development
is often associated with expatriate advisers (of the male kind), and that divisions between Western knowledge and indigenous knowledge is to a large degree entrenched in ideas about people rather than “objective differences” in knowledge or expertise. The argument is that the “definition of certain forms of knowledge as ‘expertise’ according to who has the knowledge, rather than because of the nature of what is known, effectively excludes a wide range of people from the central discourse”. (1998: 92) In some cases it would be part of the aid conditionalities that donors get to bring in their own people, their own experts into the development projects. But since the new aid regime, with a focus on ownership and partnership, along with the drive to build “national evaluation capacity”, it would seem that there’s been a shift in the aid discourse on who is an expert.

As one of my informants from a local M&E association remarked; “The difference between the expats from outside and the locals were that the expats from outside, though they knew the theoretical parts and all that, they were very good theoretically, they didn’t understand the local contexts. They didn’t have the local knowledge.” At the time when there was a recognized need for local M&E experts, there weren’t any capacity to train them locally, which meant that Zambians were being sent off to the UK, Germany, the United States, India or possibly South Africa to receive training in M&E, and then return to work for donor agencies or the Zambian government.

In the beginning of the new century, money for M&E trainings in Zambia started to come in via donors. The Centre for Disease Control was one such institution, where one of my informants had found work as a Program Specialist but was also responsible for “strategic information” (which is what CDC calls M&E), which meant that he also had some funding to set up local M&E trainings for Zambians. Courses were set up at the University of Zambia, and M&E trainings were also held for government officials. In the government agencies, however, trying to build capacity for M&E is a lot more challenging than organizing a training course for students at a university;

One of the main challenges that we found is that, at the government level, you can have so many systems running, and there’s so many ideas and new things coming up, that it’s kind of destructive at the national level. You have so many donors on the playing field, each one of them has ideas about what they want to fund and not fund, they talk to the same Ministry, et cetera, so that’s where the challenges are.

My informant then shared a story on one such M&E training program, organized by himself and a team, illuminating challenges in coordination and communication on government level;

So this program was designed because we have so many people who are practicing M&E, and most of them, like we said, the skills are not there, there’s very few people who can actually get a data set and analyze it [...] So we started out the program, uhm...we wrote out this nice curriculum and whatever, we trained people in the areas et cetera...;
Somebody got the curriculum, and started off another program, another [donor] funded program, and started training the same people on the same things! It was somebody in the Ministry [of Finance]… ‘Oh, this is a nice curriculum, with all these shiny powerpoint slides already made and all, this will be a good training’, and they started training and calling the same people back for the same training.

When asked about their perceptions of the general M&E capacity in Zambia, my informants had different opinions. The chairman of one evaluation association (same informant as quoted above) said that there has been a huge improvement in the capacity compared to where they started and a lot more local M&E practitioners, although the quality and skill level varies a lot. The ZGF informant contended that; “if I give you our annual reports you will see that from 2012, we’ve been saying that there’s a lot we can’t report on because the M&E capacity still is very low, the M&E capacity is very low….until we had to stop saying that because we were sounding like a broken record.” That there seems to be a growing number of Zambian M&E practitioners is likely symptomatic of the recent drive within the development regime to build evaluation capacity, whereas the reported low level capacity reflects the challenges in indigenizing an evaluation culture.

Recently, a study financed by DFID and carried out by the Centre for Learning on Evaluation and Results in Angophone Africa (CLEAR-AA, 2013: 32) assessed the demand and supply of evaluation in Zambia. The study showed that “the supply of evaluation expertise in Zambia is diverse in its quality and needs further development”. There is a demand for local M&E experts in Zambia, but this demand is almost exclusively put forward by external development agencies and to some degree civil society. The CLEAR-AA report showed that even the evaluations conducted in the Ministry of Finance is contingent on external support from donors. In many cases when local M&E experts are sought after for development evaluations, there’s often a foreign expert leading the evaluation while the local M&E expert merely supplements, as described by my informant; “what we have to know is that when an assignment is coming from outside, usually they might just need one local person, because already they have identified who is supposed to be who, outside.” Another informant confirmed this by stating that “You have a lot of foreign expats, you can combine, you know, you have like one person who is leading the evaluation who’s an international expat, with a local supporting.” In building evaluation capacity and supplying the local M&E experts, evaluation associations, as we shall see, requires a closer examination.
Local M&E Association(s)

"Why do we always have to deal with both of you, why don’t you think about merging?"

In any project of indigenizing a traveling assemblage or “package” such as M&E, professional associations have a significant role to play. As shown in chapter two, the existence of M&E as a profession with its own national association and a discussion on professional ethics is one indicator of an evaluation culture (Furubo et al. 2002). Kosheleva & Segone (2013: 569) has remarked that local M&E associations in Africa have the dual challenge of not just promoting quality evaluation, but also the national demand for evaluations.

For quite a number of years, Zambia had two parallel M&E associations; Zambia Evaluation Association (ZEA), and Monitoring and Evaluation Support Systems (MESSY), until they merged in 2014, and at the time of writing this thesis they are in the process of registering the one and only Zambia Monitoring and Evaluation Association (ZaMEA). The process and history up until this point reflect the changes in national evaluation demand and supply, as well as the effects of changes in international development policies and donor interests.

ZEA was donor-driven from the start, according to the former chairman, and has been running for around ten years, while MESSY started out as a small group of M&E practitioners in the mid 90’s. People would get together at someone’s house, present their work, get feedback on an M&E system they were setting up, or some advice on evaluation methodology. After some time, the group began meeting more frequently and started to identify training needs or training areas, such as in Participatory Rural Appraisal, or quantitative data analysis using STATA. Former MESSY chairman and now the interim chairman for ZaMEA explains, ”[that] evolved into actual trainings, we’d have very short trainings, we would have one week, two week trainings….and you know how it is, over time people start saying ‘I’m a member of this group’, so then we had to give it a name. So we called it support systems, like M&E Support Systems. A simple group of people who meet, talk about M&E.” When MESSY got registered, ZEA was already established as an M&E association, but with a different angle; to offer M&E consultancies. The main purpose was to put forward the agenda of Zambian M&E professionals, which worked for some time. ZEA would receive a quarter of the consultancy money coming in, and the rest would go to the individual consultant performing the assignment. However, according to the former chairman, this soon resulted in a fight over consultancies where a small network of people inside the organization formed a link with those who gave out consultancy assignments. Some of the organizations’
members would benefit, while others would be left out. The offering of M&E consultancies, intended to employ and nurture the local evaluation capacity, became a major challenge for the association itself; “within the executive there was that split, with people feeling they were not benefitting, and those who were benefitting.” Despite the struggles within the organization, there was a recognized need at least among some practitioners to build up the internal M&E capacity. The former chairman laid out his views in the following manner;

Instead of focusing on what we can get out of ZEA, let’s think of what we can give to ZEA so that at least M&E can develop in Zambia, because the demand is so much, but without a strong national association we will not be able to meet it. And we will not be able to help government be able to move away from depending on donors and foreign experts. We are here, at least if we developed the profession in Zambia, we can be offering checks and balances, we can be the watchdogs of governance issues, national development.

For Zambia, changes in the development landscape was brought about by the US launching of PEPFAR (the President’s Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief) in 2003 and had an unquestionable impact on M&E in the country, and also on the evaluation associations. It brought in a lot of funding, around $65 million in the first year, and thus was able to fund a lot of organizations that needed M&E support. According to MESSY’s former chairman, this resulted in that: “[In] the first MESSY meetings, most of the discussions were HIV/AIDS related, and almost all the trainings that we did were on implementations of HIV/AIDS evaluations, data systems; almost everyone who attended came from an HIV/AIDS program.” This is but one illustration of external circumstances driving M&E in Zambia. In this case, it also meant that MESSY was able to get funding from the National AIDS Council, who recognized MESSY’s role as an evaluation capacity builder.

ZEA’s former chairman explained the difficulties of running a donor dependent organization by referring to the changing priorities and interests of the donor agencies and its staff; “The person who might have been keen on M&E might move away, the next person who comes in might not be so keen. So that has been a major challenge, because of this in-and-out kind of thing of donor agencies.” This made it difficult to build relationships and make connections with the cooperating partners. In addition, the strategic plans of donor agencies would change from one time period to the next, contributing to the financial insecurity. This was a time when donors would still engage with organizations directly, and at that time, ZEA received support from UNICEF and the German Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). The former chairman brought up a
different aspect of the lack of capacity; “When people were thinking of capacity building for associations, they were just thinking of the skills to do M&E, but not how to run the organization.” However, my informant, in pondering what ZEA’s capacity problems were about at the core, finally conceded that “so we had those capacity challenges, administrative, financial, managerial… basically it was mainly on the issue of money. Money to run ZEA.”

The two associations finally realized that they were moving in the same direction and had roughly the same goals – even if the focus was slightly different – and after the Ministry of Finance grew increasingly impatient about having to turn to both of them on M&E related matters, they have now merged and formed Zambia Monitoring and Evaluation Association (ZamEA). The interim chairman explained that this platform is crucial as it provides a coordinated research community on M&E, and also works to build the M&E skills of existing practitioners and beginners. Marking a difference in relation to the African Evaluation Association, he also stated that ZaMEA wants to focus on both monitoring and evaluation, instead of just on evaluation which tends to be the main agenda of AfrEA.

In concluding this chapter, having examined evaluation capacity building efforts and the professionalization of M&E in Zambia to increase the supply of local M&E experts, it has become apparent that the different capacity building mediators are taking different approaches and adjusting to the social context in which they are working. The M&E association is concerned with enhancing the skills level and bringing together a supply of local M&E experts – while ZGF tries to convince CSOs that practicing M&E in their projects does not have to involve a person with expertise knowledge entitled “M&E Officer”. Multiple sources have argued that development agencies, both international and national bodies, have been the driving force in exporting an evaluation culture to other countries, now in particular to developing countries (see Kosheleva & Segone 2013, Toulemonde 2000, and Furubo et al 2002 above). What may have started out as evaluation capacity building solely for the purpose of ensuring sustainability of development interventions in local settings, has evolved into something much more complex and multifaceted. Next, the other side of the evaluation capacity coin focusing on CSO-led monitoring and evaluation will be analyzed.
6. Accountability between state and citizens: CSO-led evaluation in Zambia

This chapter focuses on the other side of the evaluation capacity coin in development; local civil society organizations leading monitoring and evaluation of government service delivery in the current aid architecture. In Zambia, this is performed by the civil society network, CSPR, which will be at the center of analysis in exploring the means and challenges in realizing social accountability. In the following sections, I will describe the evaluation methods used in the CSPR project and relate it to the context in which it operates. The purpose is not to engage the reader in a discussion on whether the methods or the knowledge that is produced are to be considered “valid”, but rather how different forms of knowledge are produced and perceived by different actors in this multifaceted project.

6.1 “Listening on the ground”: CSPR’s Barometer project

“It was important that it came from the community, therefore we now have their support, otherwise they would have just said ‘no, you chose these people, you only work with them, not us.’”

The community monitoring and evaluation called the Barometer project, organized through the CSPR, represents what Gildemyn (2013:147) would call “CSO-led M&E”, where civil society is not involved in an official M&E system, but rather carries out M&E independently (beyond internal evaluations of its own projects) and engages with government officials through other channels. The project was set up in 2009, with the initial purpose of filling out a gap in feedback from government spending, in particular in the Ministry of Finance as this is the lead agency in policy implementation. According to my informant, they didn’t have a functioning M&E department at the time, but whatever monitoring that was carried out by the government was focused on resource disbursement in quantitative terms, and so funding was disbursed without any feedback on how projects turned out, whereas the Barometer “brings out the qualitative aspect”. While numerous tool exist for civil society, CSPR focus their efforts on four objectives; (1) Diagnostic – identifying problems and their scope, (2) Monitoring – regular assessments to continuously check initiatives, policies, or programs, (3) Evaluation – assessing whether an initiative, policy, or program has achieved its intended results and outcomes, and (4) Dialogue – engaging citizens and communities in informed discussions on shared priorities and goals. The Barometer project has two different elements; budget tracking which involves following the allocation of funds to particular
development areas and tracking evidence of the utilization of such funds in addressing development needs, and service delivery monitoring that involves perceptions of government services on provincial, district and community level and feedback from both service providers and service recipients. (CSPR 2012: 34)

The budget tracking aspect is done in six sectors; health, education, water and sanitation, agriculture, infrastructure development, and social protection. On community level, the budget tracking is only performed in four sectors; agriculture, health, education, and water and sanitation, as there is no social protection or infrastructure sector on that level; that is administered at national level by the central government. The data collection for the Barometer report is usually carried out twice a year, reporting results every six months, however, due to lack of funding it has only been carried out once for 2013, and will only be executed once for 2014.

The methodology for the Barometer project involves questionnaires and budget tracking forms on budget allocations and disbursements that are delivered to public service workers (key informants) in the districts where CSPR are present. The methods also include community members who are given scorecards, which are used in focus group discussions. A challenge in arranging the focus groups is to keep the number down to around 15-20 participants per group. Even though more participants would correspond with the inclusive and empowering approach to community M&E, it does make the scoring a lot more difficult as more people has to come to an agreement on how to rate government performance. The organization never turns anyone away, but encourages a time limit for each issue that needs to be discussed. Scorecards are a common methodology used for participatory monitoring and evaluation, and in this case, focus groups are organized in the communities where the locals gather to discuss a certain number of issues per service delivery area (the six sectors listed above) and grade it on a scale from 0 to 5 on a “Service Delivery Scorecard”. Aside from giving each issue a score, the groups are also required to sum up the reasons for that particular score. The focus groups in each community are divided into a male group, a female group, and a youth group (if you’re under 35, you are considered youth). The focus group discussion are usually conducted in the local language in the community in question. I interviewed the Provincial coordinator for the Southern Province, who explained that the community members themselves carry out the data collection, but the Research and Policy task force – consisting of members from the Provincial program management team within CSPR – are responsible for the coordination. In ten districts, community members are chosen to become “community facilitators” and are trained from a rights-based approach to be able to hold government officials accountable.
for the kind of service delivery the community members are given. As my informant explained, in identifying the community facilitators, CSPR went about it in the following manner;

The community knew about CSPR because we had been coming there to sensitize them on various issues, so what we did was we organized a community meeting, open for everyone, and said we are looking for people who want to be a part of this service delivery and budget tracking. We explained we needed people who were going to be available when we call, people who could do this monitoring even in their day-to-day activities, we said ‘who do you think can help us?’, and the community members would discuss and then give us a list of names. It was important that it came from the community, therefore we now have their support, otherwise they would have just said “no, you chose these people, you only work with them, not us”.

In finding the community facilitators, the requirement was also that they needed to be able to read and write, and “it was crucial to have equal participation, we didn’t end up with exactly equal but at least there is representation, in one of the communities there are actually more women than men, and in the other there are more men than women.” When asked about how the community facilitators were motivated to participate in the project, my informant said that “they were told that they are volunteers, that this is for their own benefit and we wanted to see them empowered, because even if CSPR is the one providing the monitoring logistics, they are doing it for themselves and to improve their own community. We do give them t-shirts, books and files that they need for the work, and identity cards, so that wherever they go, they are identified.”

In the Barometer report of July to December 2012, (this was the newest report finished at the time of research since data collection for the entire year of 2013 was completed in February 2014), the methodology also contained a panel of experts to whom the analyzed data from district and provincial level would be presented. This panel, consisting of eight people from academia, the private sector, civil society, retired government officials, and expats, would follow three steps in their assessment; exchange information and create a common understanding, discuss evaluation of the facts, trends observed, and primary data collected, and finally do their own scoring through secret ballot from a scale of 0-100 % on how well the government has met each indicator.

Over the years, the methodology has been revised a number of times, which also relates to the fact that the project has had different donors supporting different elements of the project. According to my informant, one donor rarely funds the entire project, but rather a particular segment; the research aspect, elements of training, elements of publication, and distribution of the findings –
one donor usually supports only one process. The Zambian Governance Foundation has been supporting CSPR since around 2009 when the Barometer project started, and the initial methodology was developed with staff from CSPR and a consultant from DANIDA (DANIDA has since phased out its support to governance in 2013), while DFID also supports elements of the community monitoring project. In developing the initial methodology, I was told, the staff and consultant would travel to the communities to find out what questions that were meaningful and relevant to ask on a provincial and district level and what key issues was at stake for the community members.

6.2 Creating a civil society watchdog?

CSO-led evaluation in the form described above has become increasingly popular as a demand-side approach to accountability. (Gildemyn 2013:147) Demand-side accountability refers to the abilities of citizens and civil society organizations to hold government accountable, whereas the supply-side are the conditions that support governments’ ability to be accountable. Accountability exists when those in power must justify and explain their actions, or are subjected to sanctions in the event of power abuse. (McNeil and Malena 2010:4) In order to hold the government accountable, knowledge must be produced. A sociological understanding of knowledge would claim that “knowledge is whatever counts as taken-for-granted reality within a given social context” A knowledge regime might carry with it a variety of unforeseen consequences, where new knowledge can lead to social change, but hardly in a linear manner. This can be explained by differences in power relations, value conflicts, and unintended consequences of earlier applications of knowledge. (Dahler-Larsen 2012: 22-24) The emphasis in the Barometer project has increasingly moved towards community participation and local knowledge, likely through the influence of existing values in the new aid architecture.

The Barometer project started out from a rights-based approach (RBA), in which the focus is on empowering people at the grassroots level by promoting basic human rights, a useful approach in illuminating linkages between poverty reduction and issues of accountability and the recognition of power relations (Lewis 2009: 59). As my CSPR informant put it, the rights-based approach is used to inform community member that; “they have rights to clean water, proper education, and if there are no meds at the health clinic, they have a right to know, why are there no meds.” McNeil and Malena (2010: 192) have speculated that the “cultural characteristic” of respecting authority and not questioning those in power poses a challenge to social accountability efforts such as the CSO-led evaluation project described above, as seeking accountability from a public official can be
seen as an act of disrespect. However, this was not supported in the data underpinning this thesis, where informants instead pointed to a lack of information on where to demand accountability;

Sometimes it’s because of lack of knowledge, that’s why people may leave things as they are, they don’t know where to report or they don’t know what action to take. So when we are actually seeing the community beginning to speak and demand for these rights, I think it’s a desirable situation that we want to see for the rest of the other parts of the country [...] If the community is empowered they are able to know, this is meant for them, and when I do this it’s not just for me, it’s for my children, it’s for the generation to come.

There is also the question of whether or not the CSOs are dealing with an “institutionalized” state and a stable democracy. In discussing the challenges of NGO advocacy in relation to the government, Lewis (2001:129-130) notes that the most difficult aspect is that of making the state accept its responsibility for service delivery and welfare of its citizens; “the prevailing conditions of debt, political, and bureaucratic corruption and inefficiency all combine to make even this basic acceptance of responsibility a rather remote possibility”. For this reason, decentralization of power and a strong democracy are considered important enabling factors for social accountability (McNeil and Malena 2010:186).

One of my informants involved in evaluation capacity building contended that M&E methods used by civil society needs to be very basic and straightforward – exemplified by the “food basket” which is a comparison between basic goods and the take-home pay of Zambians, conducted by the Jesuit Centre for Theoretical Reflection (CLEAR-AA 2013: 19). The methodology of the Barometer project, as described above, is rather straightforward which makes a wide participation a lot easier since not a lot of technical assistance is needed for the part of collecting the data. A CSPR staff member described the procedure in the communities as follows; “So when we go in a district we show them [the community members]; this is how much the government has allocated for you in the education sector, in health sector, in social protection, and so on, but is it so? Did this money arrive? And we’ve seen a lot of gaps, sectors that are really, really failing. Especially in the rural areas.” As an example, we may take the health sector, where the community monitoring has revealed situations where – due to lack of trained health personnel – drugs have been administered and prescribed by security guards.

The participatory evaluation tradition emerged from the wider trend of participatory development strategies in particular associated with Chambers (1994). Within this tradition, evaluation is viewed in less objective terms and more as a “combined judgment” of different stakeholders. The
criticisms levied at participatory approaches largely revolve around how easily they can be abused or coopted into the top-down paradigm, and the risk that they may hide differences in power, and the “conceptual contradictions” that can occur when distinctions are made amongst different types of knowledge. (Lewis 2001: 135) With this in mind, the term “community monitoring and evaluation” needs to be problematized. The role of civil society organizations, in this case CSPR, cannot be underestimated in these efforts, as it is frequently civil society that initiates, organizes, and mobilizes for social accountability (as exemplified in several case studies in McNeil and Malena 2010). However, as CSPR is funded by external donors, these also play a substantial role in how M&E is used as a strategy and the design of “appropriate” methods.

The current methodology for the data collection on 2013 (for which the data was being “cooked” during my field visit) had seen a significant change since the year before. My informant explained that a DFID evaluation of the Barometer project’s methodology had led to two major changes in the project. One is the way that data is presented in the Barometer report. The data would be collected for the six different sectors mentioned, and then presented in six thematic areas; citizens’ participation and civic engagement in development processes, transparency and accountability, pro-poor resources management and execution, basic service delivery and management, equity, and human development. The DFID evaluation concluded that information should now be presented according to sectors, the way the data was collected in the field. The second change was the removal of the “panel of experts” that was described above. The informant at CSPR expressed disappointment in this action, as the panel of experts would triangulate the data that was coming in from the field and make use of documents such as the budget and the development plans, and other sources in judging the governments’ performance; “I think the panel of experts had a significant role to play in the barometer. However, it was felt that they kind of lost what the communities had to say, because the communities give data according to sectors, but we presented it according to thematic areas … But it was very important to include the panel of experts, although we’ve done away with them.” The donor focus on community participation and ownership is consistent with current trends in the new aid architecture, while only certain forms of “expertise” are deemed appropriate. My CSPR informant, sighing over the non-involvement of the expert panel, contended that “we are still trying to maintain a place for them, in terms of maybe, as trying to validate the barometer, or present their own data, they can have a look at their own data and look at the barometer”. The disagreement on the role of the expert panel might be construed in terms of Long’s (2001) “battlefield of knowledge” in development, however, considering the dependent role of CSPR on funding from DFID, there is an obvious imbalance on the field.
Social accountability and knowledge utilization

As argued in chapter two, evaluations of any kind always produce knowledge, and the primary purposes for community M&E are social accountability and feedback to those in power. This section takes a look at the ways of disseminating knowledge and potential impacts of the Barometer project. As remarked by Woolgar (2004: 6); “Knowledge is not an insight into the essence of things, but a social accomplishment with uncertain consequences. Knowledge is ‘open-ended’ in the sense that its ‘use’ is not an inherent property, but depends on the articulation, representation and appropriation of knowledge in particular contexts” (quoted in Dahler-Larsen 2012: 25). Using knowledge derived from community monitoring and evaluation of government-implemented policy to bring about social accountability has its challenges, as “social accountability is about relationships” and these relationships “among individuals, institutions and societal spheres – are determined by a complex mix of political, social, institutional, cultural, and other factors” (McNeil and Malena 2010: 185). The relationships that can form between citizens and CSPR on one hand, and the service providers on district level on the other; has proven to be conducive in instances where the service providers on district level cooperates with civil society to improve the service facilities, and the delivery of services such as health care and water.

Gildemyn (2013:153) has argued that although CSO-led evaluations can lead to greater accountability, “too many initiatives that support accountability are directed only toward strengthening the answerability and transparency aspects, while forgetting the enforceability dimension.” The ZGF informant commented in a similar vein on policy monitoring and evaluation; “It’s not enough to only influence that the policy is shaped in a certain way, or that it is implemented in some form, but it is also equally important to understand to what extent it has met its expectations and to try and understand what worked well”. Enforceability in Gildemyn’s definition refers to the ability to punish those in power and impose sanctions (ibid.: 147) – which naturally poses a challenge for civil society who generally lacks this authority (on the other hand, for CSOs who can bend the ears of donors, the picture might look different). What CSOs can do, however, is to incentivize the government to take action by employing “soft” mechanisms such as media exposure of development issues, informal dialogue and mobilization of public opinion (ibid.:152). The CSPR strategies for disseminating the knowledge that is produced is tailored to different audiences, as my informant explained; “Those who can read a 30 page research document – let them have it; those who can read a flyer – let them have it; those who can read messages from a poster – let them see it.” For every identified problem in service delivery, the information will be
taken to the relevant government authority. Media channels and links throughout the network are also used;

Simple reports have run, in community radio stations, this time around there is a lot of glorification of community radio stations, so actually sometimes, depending on funds available we are able to buy air time on these community radio stations where a problem has been identified; a community member will feature on that program, we’ll even get relevant authority that should improve the situation, and a civil society organization working in that community to talk about that issue on air.

An example of informal dialogue is what CSPR refers to as “interface meetings” – corresponding to Long’s (2001:191) use of the concept in his study of interfaces between peasants and bureaucrats, where “interface” implies a face-to-face meeting between actors of different interests, resources, and power. My CSPR informant explained these informal dialogues in the following manner; “We also do what we call interface meetings, where we bring the local department heads of the six sectors to the communities to answer questions that the people have, for example why are there no drugs, or no books... and so far so good, we’ve seen some changes.”

What is particularly interesting in using a community M&E approach as a strategy is what Patton (1997) has termed “process use” of evaluation, whereby not only the findings of an evaluation can lead to outcomes, but the process of participation in M&E activities can have positive results such as feelings of empowerment among community members in the CSPR case. Researchers have proposed a shift in evaluation terminology and thinking from evaluation use to evaluation influence in an effort to move away from the instrumental view and consider unintentional and long-term effects of evaluation resulting either from the findings and/or the process. (Gildemyn 2013: 154) The provincial coordinator at CSPR also explained how the community facilitators, if they notice any changes in development, will come by her office and share the news, for example if a clinic is renovated, or if there are suddenly desks at school, so it is continuous monitoring of government-implemented development policy.

Engaging with the government on a national level takes an approach that one informant summed up as “consistency with persistency”, in order to receive any attention and be able to organize meetings where findings on the ground can be discussed, along with what actions will be taken. The next section explores some of these challenges, framed in the cloths of power and legitimacy.
6.3 Issues of power and legitimacy

“We go to the people who made the mess, and say ‘this is what we found’.”

This section discusses the interrelated issues of power relations and legitimacy concerns related to CSO-led evaluation in general and CSPR’s Barometer project in particular. The questioned legitimacy of CSOs involvement in M&E and the hierarchical relations of power between different actors on the field have been considered the biggest challenges for these kinds of social accountability efforts (Gildemyn 2013:152).

The political environment and the politics of evaluation

An enabling political context is deemed crucial for any accountability initiative, where a lot depends on the political will, basic rights, and a decentralized power. (McNeil and Malena 2010: 186) As noted by Chelimsky (2006), evaluation is a “fragile reed” up against the “giant oaks” of institutional and governmental powers and structures, and persistent patterns of behavior (quoted in McKegg 2013: 580). Any evaluation activity, whether taking place in a development context or not, has a political aspect where “controversy is in fact the rule rather than the exception” (Dahler-Larsen 2012:15). When discussing government reactions to CSPR’s M&E activities, my informant commented that;

You see when you are doing civil society work, normally you get… uhm… antagonizing from the government, because now they feel like “ok, you're in Lusaka, what kind of NGO is this that is going to advocate for people in Solwezi? How come the people in Solwezi themselves are not saying what is bothering them, so why should you?”

Zambia has a history of distrust between government and civil society, and the former regime used to label civil society organizations as opposing political parties if they were critical to the government’s performance and accountability. These fears are still present among civil society actors, as one informant explained;

You hear a lot of people expressing that there’s a lot of uncertainty around how your results are received. And how what you feed to the government is perceived, you know…are you perceived automatically as “oh, you’re supporting an opposition cause”, because you say so and so hasn’t worked well. Or are you perceived to be pro-government just because you say so and so has worked well.

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3 Solwezi is a town in the North-Western province of Zambia, one of the poorest provinces in the country.
For CSPR and their member organizations on district levels, the reception among local service providers are rarely without suspicion, as exemplified in this quote from one CSPR informant;

I remember when we started budget tracking and service delivery monitoring in a province called Luapula, Luapula is the most poorest in the country. When there used to be tracking going on in the development sector, the nurse in charge was very apathetic. He would allow people to come to the clinic, but he never wanted to be part of the discussions that we call them, to do with health sector in that community. But he was very shocked that, within a year or two, the community actually was able to advocate on behalf of that rural health center that it should have a face lift. So that's when this man walks in to the meeting one day and says 'you know, the time that I used to see you walking around this place, I really used to feel, you know, [like] you've just come to police us.

Building the capacity for civil society to undertake monitoring and evaluation is intended to influence public policy by giving society’s marginalized people a voice (Catsambas and others 2013: 44), but issues of representation often intervene in this neat chain of thinking. In trying to use M&E as a strategy for accountability and pro-poor development, ensuring the CSOs own legitimacy on community level is crucial for citizen participation. As Mumba (2014: 12) have argued, “questions surrounding who CSOs are accountable to tend to work against them in providing effective checks and balances and also in their attempt to influence public policy debates.” There is an acknowledged lack of framework for how CSOs can be accountable to those who they claim to represent – the intended beneficiaries usually have little insight into financial, administrative, and decision making matters in the organizations. (ibid.: 6) In the Zambian context, there is a flourishing of terminologies such as “Non-Governmental Individuals (NGIs)” and “briefcase CSOs”, referring to individuals who claim to be working for public good but has formed an organization solely for self-development (Elemu 2010: 20). The legitimacy of CSOs in communities in many cases needs to be “earned”, as there is an initial skepticism among the population about what the CSOs are actually doing, if it’s something that will benefit the communities or not. As my ZGF informant commented; “very often you find that there tends to be fatigue that arises, with seeing organizations going in, going out. And over time you don’t fully understand what exactly do they do? What does it mean for me that they come here and do all these things?” In building capacity for actors like CSPR to undertake monitoring and evaluation of service delivery, ZGF has encouraged the collection of “stories of change” as a means to: “show communities, ‘look, this is what’s possible with engaging in policy this way, this is what is possible in doing service delivery work this way, and we’ve been able to tangibly measure, that because of our intervention, this is what has happened.’ So it’s just about building legitimacy, and ensuring
that it gives organizations the support base they need.” What was evident from interviews with informants involved in the Barometer project was that district level change is much easier to accomplish than any broader social change on higher levels. On national level, challenges remain in accessing information, accessing the right officials to talk to, and finding out whether the CSOs recommendations are taken into account or not. As the informant at ZGF remarked:

At the district level kind of engagement, you see a very different kind of picture, it’s much more…of course the civil servants there feel they don’t have too much responsibility for the overall governance, because it’s too centralized. They can sort of engage a bit more, because they can say “oh, my boss in Lusaka is the one who has to make this decision” […] But it seems to be a much more fluid, much more open, much more engaging relationship at the district level.

One CSPR informant claimed that, by now, the local government officials and service providers know who the organization are and how they work, and gaining access to information is no longer as difficult on the district level. Before going to the service providers, an introductory letter must be issued from the Ministry of Finance, so that the service providers feel confident in that they are allowed to release the information on development issues. However, as my informant remarked, relations have now been developed between CSPR staff and the local officials, meaning that sometimes information is released even without the letter from the central government. Relationships between government officials on various levels and CSOs are critically important in gaining access, and for accountability initiatives to have the slightest chance of bringing about change. CSPR has gained a privileged position in this area compared to many other, smaller organizations that are not part of the network. I spoke to one informant working for such an organization, an all-women NGO called Society for Women Against AIDS (SWAAZ) with an office in a quiet but rather run-down area outside Lusaka. The organization recently undertook a monitoring project of their own, albeit in a much smaller scale, called the BMET (Budget Monitoring and Expenditure Tracking). This involved gaining access to documents on budget allocations, and then going to health centers in that area to interview patients, trying to discern whether needs were being met and resources spent on its intended areas. As the informant commented, gaining access to information from government officials is extremely challenging for this small organization, and the political climate was described as not very conducive, once an organization is labelled as being in opposition to the government.

Seeing as the demand (and funding) for evaluation in general, whether of service delivery or national development plans, are largely externally-driven by donors rather than by internal forces
(CLEAR-AA 2013: 32), donors are an influential part when CSOs are using evaluation as a strategy for social accountability. One of my informants at CSPR touched on the balancing act that is often required by the donors who support both the Zambian government and CSPR’s monitoring and evaluation activities of public policy. When asked if the results of the Barometer project and similar activities are delivered, not just to the government, but to the donors as well, he stated that;

Well, it’s a matter for the government, but the cooperating partners – that’s what we call them now, we don’t say donors anymore; just semantics if you ask me, the relationship is the same but the term has changed – sometimes we do invite them to disseminating seminars. But there is a very fine line between politics and our operations, so sometimes we have to balance on that line… But there have been situations where cooperating partners ask for reports from us, and then they use them in their meetings with the government agencies. But there are some diplomatic difficulties for them in using those documents in meetings…

Naturally, if a donor is funding the activities, there is a need to report on what actions have been taken. We can draw a parallel from this to a case study by Eyben and León discussed in Mosse (2005: 19) that centers on a similar dilemma that arises for donors in the new aid architecture of ownership and partnership. The question becomes one of “how do donors pursue their agenda of social and political inclusion, good government and democracy while retaining the impression that national governments are in control?” Eyben and León has shown how donors operate in complex social networks to both maintain and conceal contradictions in the new aid regime, reliant on vagueness and fragile alliances.
7. Conclusions

The analysis above has examined the interlinking of evaluation and development through rather abstract notions such as evaluation culture, capacity, social accountability, and global assemblages, with an empirical account of evaluation capacity building efforts and CSO-led evaluation on the ground in Zambia, which suggests that bold conclusions might be symptomatic of a case of hubris.

Nonetheless, we are able to draw certain conclusions about the main topic of the thesis. The recent strive to build evaluation capacity in developing countries like Zambia can be framed, as I have argued above, as the diffusion of an evaluation culture created – and now strongly embedded – in Western societies. When understood in relation to the developmentalist configuration, a number of different purposes emerge; (1) to increase national ownership of the development process, also termed “indigenous management” (to a large extent a result of the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action), (2) to increase accountability and reduce corruption (especially with the new aid modality towards general and sector budget support), (3) to strengthen democracy and policy making for pro-poor development, partly by supporting CSO-led evaluation. As noted in chapter two, the sociologist Dalher-Larsen has pointed to a potential doubt in “progress” as a reason why interest in evaluation has increased, whereas evaluation has been described as an important tool for social betterment and a universal good, much like “development” itself, suggesting that evaluation and development are forever locked in a “tango”.

Among the Zambian mediators of the global capacity building project, we’ve seen a flexibility on the issue of “expert” knowledge and the need for M&E experts, adjusting to social context and influenced by current values and trends. The means with which evaluation is used as a strategy for social accountability are to a large extent contingent on the same values and trends purported by the external donors supporting the CSOs. The power relations and legitimacy concerns that have often been characterized as the biggest challenges do of course pose some obstacles for the social accountability agenda, but in shifting the focus to evaluation influence instead of direct use, the CSPR’s community M&E project has interesting potential in terms of a long-term outcome of an active civil society that can be framed as social capital.

7.1 Further research

The indigenization process of a culture or “assemblage” can be analyzed and tracked in many ways. When it comes to M&E, more research is needed into the local perceptions of what it entails,
whether or not it is valued, and how it is used and transformed by local actors. Realistically, given all the resources that are poured into building “capacity”, the sustainability of such capacity especially in marginalized, rural areas need to be understood better.

As a complex and dynamic project, CSO-led monitoring and evaluation can be studied from a variety of different perspectives. The effects of “soft mechanisms” for social accountability hasn’t received much research attention. From a comparative approach, we might ask “how is M&E used as a strategy by civil society in other countries?” This should include not only “developing” countries but also societies in the “developed” countries. The recent shift towards evaluation influence, encompassing more long-term effects of evaluation and participation in evaluation, could also yield interesting findings and should be subjected to further inquiry.
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