Lund University Department of Sociology

Bachelor in Development Studies

Evidence of Development

A case study on the use of evidence within the work of the Danish Red Cross Youth

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Abstract

Development organizations work within a complex system where they have to show their expertise and ensure that their interventions have a positive impact, while simultaneously prioritize different accountabilities to both their patrons, clients and themselves. This case study of the Danish Red Cross Youth is focused on their participatory youth-leadership project in rural Zimbabwe; particularly the design and development of the project. The study is concerned with how the organization uses evidence and other types of knowledge within their work, and how their different accountabilities affect their engagement with evidence. The research shows that the organization uses not just evidence but also experience in their work. Through the monitoring and evaluation they work to create context specific evidence in order to show the impact of their work, but they also manipulate their experience to resemble evidence in order to appear evidence-based. Furthermore, the organization prioritizes their accountabilities differently at different stages of the project and for different purposes. This has a direct impact on how they use the evidence and experience they have.

Key words: *Evidence, Experience, Accountability, NGO, Danish Red Cross Youth*

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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
DRC	Danish Red Cross
DRCY	Danish Red Cross Youth
DYC	Danish Youth Council
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
RC/RC	Red Cross/Red Crescent
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
ToC	Theory of Change
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
YL	Youth Leader
ZRCS	Zimbabwe Red Cross Society

1. Introduction

Zimbabwe is a poor and fragile country which faces severe challenges for development (Fund for Peace, 2017). Within Zimbabwe the Nyaminyami district is the least developed and poorest area, and due to its remote rural location the district is frequently under-prioritized in development plans (DRC, 2015; Sibanda, 2004; DRCY, 2016a). Furthermore, the young people in this area suffer what can be described as a double marginalization by being both poor and young in a culture that equates status with age (Jespersen et al., 2016). The Danish Red Cross Youth (DRCY) are targeting youths in Nyaminyami with a project that aims to develop the youths capacities in order to become active citizens able to generate positive change in their community.

When working in the field of development the future of the target population is in the hands of the NGO. Therefore, it is paramount to be able to show with a high level of certainty that the NGO is able to create a positive change in the lives of the beneficiaries. Basing an intervention on evidence creates that certainty and legitimizes why funding and time have to be spent on their project and not on another project. However, the beneficiaries are not the only stakeholders that have to be accommodated. Najam (1996) argues that a development organization is accountable to three different groups: patrons, clients or the NGO themselves. Furthermore, Najam states that the configuration of accountability towards and priority of the three stakeholder groups shape how an NGO does its work. Consequently, an NGO has to balance basing their actions on evidence with their different accountabilities in order to create a project that both has broad support among its different stakeholders and is relatively certain to have a positive impact.

This research is motivated by a desire to gain a better understanding of the way evidence shapes development interventions. More specifically, it seeks to better understand how the DRCY engages with evidence in relation to their Zimbabwe project and how their changing accountabilities affects this engagement.

The boundaries of this study were largely made due to practical concerns of access to data and the natural time limitations that the thesis presents. Furthermore, using data from the clients and patrons of the organization would have been able to highlight how they influence the organization, but it was not possible to gain access to these stakeholders, and hence, the research was designed accordingly. Instead the research was conducted as a case study focusing on data from an interview with a key employee within the DRCY, organizational documents and participant observation.

This thesis starts with an introduction to the DRCY and to the project in focus. Then, a brief introduction to some of the core terms is provided, followed by an overview of the existing literature. After that the

conceptual and theoretical framework is outlined, and this is followed by a description of the methodological approach. Finally, an in depth analysis of the collected data in relation to the theoretical framework is conducted, which will lead on to the concluding remarks.

1.1 Aim, purpose and research questions

The aim of this research is to examine what role evidence plays in shaping and informing development interventions. Furthermore, the research also aims to give an insight into how accountability affects the way in which evidence and other types of knowledge is utilized. Specifically, the research aims to give a thorough insight into how evidence is used and understood in the DRCY in relation to their ongoing youth-leadership project in Zimbabwe.

The research hopes to highlight how the DRCY navigate the complex system of a developing society, while using evidence and managing their simultaneous accountabilities to their patrons, clients and themselves. The research questions that form the basis of this research are as follows:

- **How is evidence used by the Danish Red Cross Youth to shape the participatory youth-leadership project in rural Zimbabwe?**
- **How does the Danish Red Cross Youth prioritize their accountabilities, and how does this affect their engagement with evidence?**

These two questions are interesting for several reasons. Firstly, development organizations are in a situation where they need to show that they can create a positive impact in a developing society, and therefore need to base their interventions on evidence. Secondly, the questions open up for a discussion on how the organization accumulates and engages with evidence and knowledge. Thirdly, an organization's accountabilities to different groups of stakeholders have the potential to greatly impact how the organization engages with evidence. Lastly, the questions are a first step in bridging a gap in the research, as research on evidence, e.g. evidence-based policy research, has focused largely on politics and medicine; however, the same curiosity and scrutiny should be extended to the important field of development work.

The thesis will focus around the topic of evidence, but will use a framework of NGO accountability to assess and analyze how the DRCY engages with evidence in their work. However, it is important to acknowledge that the organization uses many types of knowledge when doing their work, and it is important to analyze how they view the relative importance of different types of knowledge. Consequently, a critical examination will also be made of how they gather knowledge, and how they utilize this in their project.

2. Background

2.1 The Danish Red Cross Youth

The DRCY have since 1988 been an autonomous organization under the Danish Red Cross (DRC), and they work specifically for and with children and youth in their national and international work (DRCY, 2017a). Thus, the DRCY have their own founding documents and structures; however, they abide by the seven basic principles of the Red Cross/Red Crescent (RC/RC) (ICRC, 2016). One of these principles states that there can only be one RC/RC organization in each country banner (ICRC, 2016); hence, internationally the DRCY only work in countries where the DRC is already present and work directly under the DRC (DRCY, 2017b). Importantly, the DRCY follow the DRC's international strategy which emphasizes youth and volunteers as change agents and which points out the great potential for youth leadership (DRC, 2014). The DRCY currently have projects in Greenland[1], Jordan, East and Central Europe and Zimbabwe. Moreover, the organization holds a yearly youth leadership workshop in Denmark and is currently working on an online learning platform for its volunteers (DRCY, 2015; DRCY, 2017c).

The DRCY have their main office in Copenhagen, Denmark. Their daily operations are managed by the secretariat, but their projects on the ground are mainly operated by volunteers – both nationally and internationally (DRCY, 2017d). All the national projects target vulnerable children and youth, and the volunteers are usually relatively resourceful individuals, e.g. university and high school students. However, internationally the projects target local volunteers instead, as most of the youth in the project locations, i.e. refugee camps, rural areas etc., are deemed to be vulnerable (DRCY, 2017c). Furthermore, the DRCY have a volunteer group in Denmark, which is specifically tied to the Zimbabwe project, called the 'Africa group'. This group helps with the development of core project documents and fund applications (DRCY, 2015).

The DRCY's goal is to create societies where every child and young person are recognized and have the opportunity to participate in positive relations (DRCY, 2017c). The DRCY work specifically to enhance youth's civic engagement through volunteerism, as this is seen to be a central component for the organization's goal (DRCY, 2017c). Furthermore, the DRCY boast themselves for emphasizing what they call a holistic approach, where they approach youths as both leaders, volunteers and beneficiaries. Moreover, they employ a participatory youth-to-youth method where the young people in their project work both for and with their peers (DRCY, 2015; DRCY, 2017c; DRCY, 2017e). This is the backbone of all the DRCY's projects and efforts, and it ties directly into their Theory of Change (ToC), which will be

[1] The project in Greenland is the only place where the DRCY works independently from the DRC, as the DRC does not work in Greenland due to tensions stemming from the history of Greenland/Denmark relations.

explained shortly. Moreover, core parts of many of their international programs focus on Life Skills training and capacity development; both of which will also be described in more detail below.

The international department of the DRCY work with a ToC that forms the founding rationale of all their projects. A ToC is the basic logic that shows how the organization believes change is brought about; in other words, it stipulates how different components of a project come together to create the desired change. The ToC has five central components; three refer to the project components or means, and two refer to the changes or ends. Firstly, young people need to have *capacity*, *skills* and *experience* in order for them to be able to lead development processes, and, hence, the DRCY work to aid the young people in these aspects. Secondly, there needs to be an *organizational platform* in order to drive the developmental process forward, which is why a key component of all DRCY projects starts with mapping out the capacities of the local partner organization and strengthening the place for young people in it. Thirdly, the young people need to have *access* to decision makers but also access to becoming decision makers themselves, as they need to be able to make their voices heard in order to create change. Fourthly, when these three components are all present, it is believed that young people will *actively engage* in civil society and act as agents of change able to respond to the challenges in their community. Lastly, the young people will also work together to have their *voices heard* by duty bearers, thus, creating a positive change for themselves but also for other vulnerable young people. This logic is present in the project design of the Zimbabwe project (DRCY, n.d.), and this will be visible in the following section detailing the project itself.

2.2 The youth-leadership project

The youth-leadership project is based in Nyaminyami Disctrict[2] in rural Zimbabwe and focuses specifically on three wards within this district, Mola, Nebiri and Negande (DRCY, 2015; DRCY, 2017c). As earlier mentioned, Nyaminyam is considered to be the least developed district within Zimbabwe, and both poverty and unemployment rates are very high (DRCY, 2015; DRCY, 2017c; Sibanda, 2004). The project is aimed at strengthening the capacity of youth volunteers within the Zimbabwe Red Cross Society (ZRCS) in order to enable them to be active citizens in their community and actively respond to the needs of the young people in the community by leading peer oriented activities and speaking up for the interests of young people. Furthermore, the project aims to strengthen the organizational structures for youth people within the ZRCS. As Nyaminyami Disctrict is significantly underdeveloped, all the young people in it are considered vulnerable and, thus, all men and women between 14 and 30 in the three wards are considered in the target group. As many of the young people are out of school due to insufficient

[2] The district is also called Kariba Rural or Nyaminyami rural district. However, as the DRCY calls the area Nyaminyami District that is what it will be called here.

educational opportunities, many of them are already ZRCS volunteers. However, most of the participants who are in school are not yet part of the ZRCS; in school youth form around one third of the participants (DRCY, 2015; DRCY, 2017c).

The project is funded by an organization called the Danish Youth Council (DYC) (DRCY, 2015; DRCY, 2016b; DRCY, 2017c). The DYC is a service and interest organization which focuses on promoting children and young people's participation in democracy and organizational life (DYC, 2015). It has a high emphasis on volunteerism, which will be discussed later in the analysis, as this has had an influence in how the Zimbabwe project is designed.

The project is based upon information gathered from two preparatory missions to the project area. The preparatory missions are within the DRCY also called context analysis, and here key stakeholders are interviewed with a heavy focus on listening to young people in order to understand the key priorities and challenges in the area. The context analysis is also used as a capacity assessment of the ZRCS and the future participants in order for the DRCY to best be able to shape the project to fit the local context (DRCY, 2015).

The project is largely overseen, implemented and managed on the ground by four Youth Leaders (YLs); two from Denmark and two from the local area, who are working on a volunteer basis on the project for five months at a time before being replaced by a new team of YLs. The project itself is divided into several segments: *organizational development*, *capacity building*, *youth activities*, *advocacy*, and *leadership skills*; a clear resemblance to the ToC is noticeable here. The first segment, regarding organizational development, aims to build up the organizational structures within the ZRCS to enable young people to have a strong platform for involvement in the organization. Capacity building refers to the development of capacity within a group of volunteers to be able to conduct the project activities. This segment is closely tied to the next segment, as the capacity building will revolve around the teaching of Life Skills in order for the group of volunteers to be able to teach these skills to the project participants later. The youth activities will be conducted in a youth-to-youth manner, which in other words is a youth based participatory development method. Here, the young people who were part of the capacity building will conduct Life Skills courses with the participants. Furthermore, when the Life Skills courses are finished, the participants will be able to apply for money from a 'local initiative pool' and use their new skills to conduct activities that address challenges faced by young people. The advocacy component of the project is implicit through the other segments, but the DRCY describe the advocacy as being inherent in the youth-led activities and the focus on promoting youth as agents of change capable of serving as leaders. The leadership skills are promoted in two ways; firstly, as the young people lead activities

themselves, and secondly, as two key volunteers will get a chance to participate in the yearly leadership workshop in Denmark (DRCY, 2015).

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) have been incorporated into the project as ongoing tasks and processes. The M&E have been divided into two parts, with the first part following traditional M&E practice with field visits and annual evaluation reports on the project progress, activities, coordination and recommendations for adjustments. The second part of the M&E is a participatory process called 'Measuring Social Change' in which the stakeholders help create scales to measure changes in mind-sets, capacity, and the general impact of the project. This part includes creating baselines during the initial stages of the project for the different scales that they create (DRCY, 2015), but this will be further elaborated in the terminology section.

3. Terminology

In order to understand the project and the concepts central to it, the coming section will introduce the different terms and concepts that have been mentioned above. This section will describe four core terms: participatory development, capacity development, Life Skills, and Measuring Social Change. These four terms form the backbone of the Zimbabwe project and are central to the work of the DRCY; consequently, they will be central components of the data that will be analyzed.

3.1 Participatory development

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) defines participatory development as actively incorporating the voices of the stakeholders into a development intervention in order to give them the ability to influence interventions that will directly impact them (ADB in Ondrik, 1999). Furthermore, participatory development aims to empower the participants through their direct participation, and according to the ADB it ensures long term sustainability by increasing local ownership (Ondrik, 1999). However, evidence showing these effects are largely lacking, and the championing of the approach stems from a normative view of the rightness of the approach (Cleaver, 1999). Thus, it can be argued that participatory development is considered an almost intrinsically good thing by many practitioners.

The DRCY use participatory development much in the same way as described by the ADB (DRCY, 2017e). Stakeholders are incorporated at all stages of the project from context analysis over project activities to evaluation. Moreover, large parts of the project are solely carried out by participants, i.e. the Life Skills course, and value is placed on the youth showing by example in order to positively influence their peers (DRCY, 2015). Participatory processes are also seen as inherently positive and in themselves

bringing empowerment, as seen by the fact that the youth-to-youth approach is part of the DRCYs advocacy work (DRCY, n.d.).

3.2 Capacity development and Life Skills

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines capacity development as the "the process through which individuals, organizations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time" (UNDP, 2009: 54). The DRCY use the same definition in their work, and just like the UNDP they differentiate between capacity development and capacity building (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017, DRCY, 2016a). Capacity building infers that there are no existing capacities, whereas capacity development implies that there are existing capacities that can be further developed, but it does not include the creation of new capacities (UNDP, 2009).

The DRCY work to develop the capacities of the project participants by working with Life Skills. Life Skills form a core component of much of the work within the DRCY and within the Zimbabwe project specifically. Within the DRCY, the term 'Life Skills' encompasses a broad range of abilities, competences and approaches, and at their core Life Skills empower the participants to cope constructively with challenges and changes in their lives. More broadly, Life Skills include a list of skills helpful to most people, e.g. good communication, analytical skills and cooperation. Thus, Life Skills help develop capacities that enable young people to make informed decisions, empathize with others and generally live their lives in a healthy and productive way (DRCY, 2017f).

Within the DRCY, Life Skills are divided in three categories: *skills for knowing and living with ourselves, skills for knowing and living with others* and *skills for living in society*. The first category refers to skills important at an individual level, e.g. self-awareness and self-confidence. The second refers to interpersonal skills needed to develop relationships with others, e.g. good communication. The last involves skills to engage with the wider world and to be able to navigate, understand and reflect critically upon the surrounding society. These three categories form the guiding structures of the Life Skills courses that are incorporated into most international DRCY projects (DRCY, 2017f).

3.4 Measuring Social Change

It can be hard for a development organization to measure the impact it has, and thus it is difficult to make informed decisions about changes in its projects (Sønderskov, 2016). In the past, the DRCY resorted to counting the amount of new volunteers and active participants or to collecting testimonies and success stories in order to map their impact (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017); however, these methods are not

very good indicators of the intangible goals such as empowerment and capacity development. These simple indicators tend to neglect much of the complexity that a project encompasses (Sønderskov, 2016).

Using scales instead allows for a systematic validation of the short and intermediate outcomes of an intervention. Scales consist of five phases with measurable steps ranging from the worst situation to the ideal situation. Each phase describes how a given situation will look during the phase, and what activities are to be undertaken in order to move towards the ideal situation. Furthermore, the scales should be created specifically for each project and ideally as a participatory process to incorporate the views of the stakeholders and the target group (Sønderskov, 2016).

In order to be able to properly use a scale, it is important to first create a baseline where the different parts of the target group are placed on the scale where they fit at the beginning of the project. The collection of data can be carried out in several ways, but focus group interviews, observation or self-assessments are most commonly used. The measurements should be done regularly to assess the progress of the project, and if the participants are not moving up the scale, there are good grounds for making changes within the project (Sønderskov, 2016).

4. Overview of existing literature

In this section a brief overview of the existing literature on the topic of evidence and its use in different fields and in different ways is provided. There is indeed diverse research in this field, but much of the literature is focused on evidence within the fields of politics or health. The main arguments of the literature will be presented, and the review presents four broad themes from the literature; firstly, how evidence is framed, secondly, how to make evidence more used within decision-making, thirdly, how evaluations can be used as evidence, and lastly, indigenous knowledge will be covered.

Du Toit's paper (2012) on how to make sense of evidence highlights that any debate on evidence inherently assumes that there is a right answer to policy questions and that the evidence just has to be generated. Furthermore, she points out that evidence-based policy is a normative discussion that directly states a desirable relationship between politics and evidence. This line of thought can be extended into the field of development where this normative thinking also exists. However, what the term evidence actually implies is a highly contested matter (Du Toit, 2012). Jasanoff (2011) argues that knowledge achieves its authority through claims of objectivity, but that this objectivity is highly time and context dependent, and thus, the authority can be lost when the knowledge is moved away from its original context. Along this line, Strassheim (2015) argues that science can never be completely value free, but the perceived objectivity of science lies within what he calls civic epistemologies, which refer to unquestioned

commitments to specific types of knowledge. Nutley et al. (2013) set out to discover what good evidence is and how different types of knowledge can be placed into a hierarchy of legitimacy. They argue that the quality of the evidence is largely dependent on what we intend to use that evidence for. They do not define evidence directly, but point out that the definitions that exist often end up excluding relevant, or equally legitimate, evidence solely based on study design (Nutley et al., 2013). Furthermore, the attempt to place evidence in hierarchies has largely favored already high-ranking research to the detriment of most other studies. Nutley et al. argue that there are three different ways of knowing: empirical knowing (meaning research knowledge), theoretical knowing (when theories are used to think things in a certain way), and experiential knowing (knowledge based of experience). However, theoretical and experiential knowing are often valued lower than empirical knowing. Furthermore, their findings also show that top-down schemes that endorse evidence-based practices are largely discouraging as most practice does not reach the set standards (Nutley et al., 2013). This goes to show that using evidence in practice is much more complicated than theorizing normative standards from the safety of a researcher's office. Hence, one must look at the different ways in which knowledge is utilized within development practice, which will be one focus of the analysis.

Strassheim (2015) brings us into the second theme of this literature review by arguing that with the increasing complexity of issues that decision-makers are faced with today, looking to evidence for answers on what to do seems like a clear answer. Breckon and Dodson (2016) highlight that there currently exists an extensive amount of research on the subject of how to best get decision-makers to use evidence in their work; however, many of these guides are themselves not clearly based on evidence. Furthermore, several authors point to the need of increasing the capacities of decision-makers to enable them to engage constructively with evidence (Breckon and Dodson, 2016; Newman et al., 2012; Strassheim, 2015; Weyrauch, 2016). Newman et al. (2012) go on to argue that by and large the supply of evidence is not the issue, but the lack of demand for evidence from decision-makers is what impedes the prospects of evidence-based policy. They define evidence demand in a twofold manner; firstly, the capacity to find, evaluate and use evidence, and secondly, the motivation to make decisions based on the evidence. Consequently, they argue that in order to create more evidence-based policies, the demand for evidence must be stimulated, which can be done by influencing the behavior of the individuals and the organizational culture, but also by influencing the broader external environment in which they exist (Newman et al., 2012). Contrastingly, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) (2009) points to lessons with which researchers can help stimulate the supply side to fit better with the policy process. They specifically point to the complexity of the policy process which researchers must adapt to and that research must tell a compelling story with the evidence in order for decision-makers to use it. Importantly,

the ODI points out that policy is often only weakly based on evidence and is instead largely informed by values, experience and judgement, as decision-makers find it hard to base their decisions on evidence due to issues such as spin, secrecy, scientific ignorance and the timeliness of the findings (ODI, 2009). In other words, if the context is not right it can be almost impossible to get decision-makers to use evidence (Weyrauch, 2016). Furthermore, Strassheim (2015) rightfully points out that a risk of evidence-based policy is that it will give increasing power to the existing elites by valuing only specific knowledge. This line of argument is also central to the work of Foucault, as he argues that knowledge is nothing more than the exercise of power (Allan, 2006: 295).

Importantly, evidence is not necessarily created within the realm of research, but can also stem from evaluations, as will be argued in this third theme. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) (2016) frames evidence as including the results of project evaluations. However, it points out that although evaluations cannot answer all questions, they can answer many important questions regarding the workings of a project. The USAID has created very specific standards for evaluation practices but also points to the issue of timeliness, as brought up earlier, that occurs when evaluation results are not available when decisions must be made. Consequently, the USAID emphasizes the need for a systematic collection and analysis of data, which also enables an ongoing improvement of effectiveness within the projects (USAID, 2016). Furthermore, Palerm (2000) highlights that evaluation findings are often extremely context specific, and findings, therefore, can only rarely be exported elsewhere. Thus, although evaluation findings can be used as evidence, they can mainly be used in the context in which they were created. The issue of context specificness is also highlighted within complexity theory, where Ramalingam et al. (2008) argue that it is an issue with findings from all types of research that they only truly apply to the context in which they were created.

The overall assumptions of most of the literature thus far have been that using evidence in decision-making is inherently a positive thing; however, in this last theme this assumption will be slightly challenged. Agrawal (1995) points out that many Western development efforts have largely failed, and that the focus, therefore, has turned to indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge is knowledge unique to a given culture or society (Agrawal, 1995). Traditionally, Western knowledge has been seen as superior, and indigenous knowledge has been seen as inferior; however, Agrawal (1995) argues that in the light of development failures only ignorant people will dismiss indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge does not conform to the same standards, methodologies, or possess the same objectivity as Western knowledge; however, it evolves organically and often builds on many years of experience and knowledge. Nevertheless, a strict dichotomy between the two types of knowledge can hardly be sustained, as they have been engaging with each other for a significant amount of time (Agrawal, 1995).

Only very limited accounts were made in the literature pertaining the work of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and their engagement with evidence and other forms of knowledge. Therefore, this thesis is situated within a larger field of existing research, but aims to build further on the literature to breach this gap.

5. Conceptual and theoretical framework

The conceptual and theoretical framework is twofold: firstly, a definition of how evidence is used and assessed in the analysis will be provided, and secondly, a framework of NGO accountability, which will also serve as a major analytical tool, will be presented. The two parts will be presented separately, although they will be used in connection to each other in the analysis.

5.1 Evidence and experience

Evidence is very often mentioned in research literature and especially in relation to evidence-based policy or evidence-informed policy. However, the term evidence seems to be taken for granted and is only defined very rarely and only in relatively loose terms. Consequently, it is necessary to delineate the concept of evidence in order to be able to build an argument about the use of evidence.

However, before we can move into a definition and discussion of evidence, it is important to acknowledge that evidence in this thesis exists in two separate ways. Firstly, evidence exists as a product of the thesis and the academic enquiry into the subject matter, and secondly, it exists as the subject matter itself. The definition and use of the term evidence throughout this thesis revolves around the second. Engaging with evidence in the first way will take the thesis to a meta-level that will not aid to answer the research questions, and this will therefore be avoided.

Oxford Dictionaries define evidence as: “The available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017cx). To build further on this definition, efforts must be made to keep the evidence objective (Jasanoff, 2011; Newman et al., 2012), and it must be produced based on some specific guidelines or methodologies (Du Toit, 2012). Importantly, though, the methodologies are not specified as there are many different ways to create evidence, e.g. by randomized control trials (Nutley et al., 2013), robust evaluations (USAID, 2016) etc. Hence, evidence has three parts to it: firstly, it is information or knowledge about something specific, secondly, it is objective in its position, and, thirdly, it is created based on a specified set of standards or methods.

In order for evidence to maintain a broader validity it must rest on more than a single study or evaluation (Flay et al., 2005; De Vaus, 2001: 338). However, it can be argued that what counts as sufficient

knowledge depends on what you want to know and for what purpose (Nutley et al., 2013). Furthermore, evidence as described above is a normative standard, and development interventions always take place within a larger complex and dynamic system, in which variables are not controllable (Du Toit, 2012). Therefore, it can be difficult to adhere to the standards above, and in some instances one must accept different types of knowledge. Moreover, differences in context also make it inappropriate to blindly move evidence away from the context in which it was created (Du Toit, 2012; Palerm, 2000; Agrawal, 1995). Du Toit (2012) argues that a narrow focus on science to inform decision makers of 'what works' leaves out the many ways in which science can clarify, educate, and add insight to a complex issue. Furthermore, a goal can often be reached in many different ways, and thus, there might not only be one correct answer to a certain question (Du Toit, 2012).

It is often argued that knowledge cannot be separated from power (Newman et al., 2012; Allan, 2006: 295), which means that interventions only based on research evidence will exclude many local and tacit forms of knowledge, professional judgements, and experience (Strassheim, 2015). Consequently, this would lead to the party with access to evidence being the one setting the agenda, which would almost inevitably lead to a Western bias in the knowledge that shapes development interventions. This is an important factor to consider, and it is also the reason why it is not argued here that development interventions should be solely based on evidence, but only that it is important that the interventions are actively engaging with evidence and are letting evidence inform at least parts of the work. As Newman et al. (2012) argue, evidence-informed policy does not necessitate that it should be exclusively based on evidence. Evidence-informed policy requires aspects of the policy to be informed by or shaped by evidence, but there is room to co-inform the policy with other sources of knowledge.

It can always be debated to what extent evidence really is objective, as it is inevitably tainted by the values, ideas and preconceptions of the people seeking it out (Newman et al., 2012). In a post-modernist sense, all knowledge is questionable and a truly external reality does not exist, and hence evidence is essentially the producer's own subjective construction. Although this line of argument does hold value, focusing too much on the relativity of all knowledge will paralyze any line of argument, and therefore, this will only be discussed in relation to context specificness of knowledge.

As argued above, evidence is ideally objective, in stark contrast to experience which in its nature is subjective. Experience is a different form of knowledge that does not have to conform to the same rules as is outlined above. Experience is defined in the Oxford Dictionaries as follows: "Practical contact with and observation of facts or events" (Oxford Dictionaries, 2017b). Thus, experience is anything that someone has witnessed or done, and hence it is subjective at its core. Experience will be vastly different for each

individual, even if they derive their experiences from the same event. Furthermore, there is no normative goal of making experience objective, as there is with evidence. However, it is important to still acknowledge the benefit and use of experience in informing decision-making. Both experience and evidence have value for forming the basis of a development intervention, but it can be argued that the normative standards for evidence make this the most reliable and promising option.

5.2 Framework of NGO accountability

In order to analyze the use of evidence within the DRCY and their Zimbabwe project, a framework of NGO accountability will be used. Najam (1996) sets forth a framework with which to analyze who an NGO is accountable to. He argues that NGOs in general can be accountable to three different groups: their patrons, their clients or themselves. However, it should be pointed out that NGOs often are accountable in different ways to different groups at different times. The three types of accountability will now be explained in more detail:

NGO accountability to patrons. "A relationship becomes one of patronage when failure to fulfil the stated or implied responsibility can lead to a withdrawal of whatever support, in kind or in service, is being provided to the NGO" (Najam, 1996). This is mostly used in terms of an NGO's relationship with donors where a lack of compliance to agreements, specific standards or responsibilities can result in the withdrawal of funding. However, it can also refer to a relationship with other NGOs or organizations. In the case of the DRCY, this could be their relationship with the DRC in their international work, where the DRC holds significant power by being the lead organization. Consequently, being accountable to patrons means focusing on or even adapting to the wishes of the patron, which could mean altering a project to fit with the patron's request; this being highly relevant to the discussion about evidence, as it could mean a discarding of evidence to accommodate a patron.

NGO accountability to clients. Najam (1996) defines clients as any individual or group, which the NGO provides services for or who are targeted by a particular project. However, the term clients also extends beyond this and includes everyone who will be impacted by an intervention – directly and indirectly. A goal often stated by NGOs is to be accountable to the needs of the target group, but as Najam (1996) points out that is often not the reality. Participatory development is often used as a way to create accountability towards the clients; however, it sometimes just results in the clients agreeing to the wishes of the NGO (Najam, 1996). In the context of evidence, this is interesting as the clients might express a need for a certain thing or a desire to follow a specific method that the NGO has evidence or knowledge to discount. However, accountability to the clients also opens up a discussion about whose knowledge counts and about the importance of local knowledge; this will be discussed further in the analysis.

NGO accountability to themselves. Not many NGOs will openly state that they are accountable to themselves; however, being accountable to employees, mission statements, members etc. is an important aspect to consider (Najam, 1996). The NGO might have specific targets or mission statements for themselves that they want to achieve, and they have employees that they have to pay salaries to, both of which are important factors when considering accountability. In regard to evidence, this can lead to a blind following of the NGO's own normative ideas instead of listening to the evidence, or it can be a strict adherence to the NGO's evidence and knowledge with no regards to the clients or the patrons.

Najam's framework was not created to focus on and analyze the use of evidence within NGOs, although, as described above, it is easily transferable to the subject. Thus, the framework will be used to highlight how accountability affects the ways in which an organization engages with evidence and knowledge. Furthermore, it is again important to underline that NGOs are subject to 'multiple accountabilities' (Najam, 1996), which means that they are simultaneously accountable to multiple groups. However, it is important to distinguish their rhetoric from their actions in order to see how their priorities lie and when they lean towards certain groups, e.g. when an organization shapes an intervention strictly to comply with donor demands with little regard to the specific needs of the target population.

6. Methodology

In this section, the research design, the different data used for the research, and the method of analysis is outlined. The research is based on three different types of data material, as an organization inevitably represents itself differently depending on who it is addressing. In order to get a comprehensive view of the organization, both an interview, documents, and participant observation are used – and to bring the data together, the same frame of coding is used for all the data.

6.1 Research design

This research is designed as a case study of the DRCY's project in Zimbabwe, as this design will make it possible to view the entire case and thereby to get a more comprehensive understanding of the causal process (De Vaus, 2001: 235). As I had access to the organization through an internship, the DRCY were chosen as a convenience sample (Bryman, 2008: 183). After choosing the case, the research has been narrowed down and focused to best fit the case in question.

The unit of analysis is the Zimbabwe project and the considerations surrounding its initial conceptualization and subsequent development (De Vaus, 2001: 220). This means that the organization as such is not the focus of the study but mainly forms the backdrop of the research. The organizational

structure and environment, however, may prove to be important factors, and it is therefore not outside of the scope of the study.

When conducting a case study, it is important to be aware of the limitations of the design. Notably, the lack of external validity is a frequent critique of this design (De Vaus, 2001: 237). Specifically, this refers to the difficulty of making generalizations based on a case study due to the small sample size. However, a case study can open up for further research into a specific field or be used to test theories on a special case (Lijphart, 1971). Nevertheless, this research will not attempt to make any generalizations, but will hope to open for further studies with the topic of NGO's engagement with evidence.

6.2 Data

6.2.1 Interview

The main focus on of the analysis will be on a semi-structured interview. The interview was done with a key DRCY employee working on the Zimbabwe project. The interviewee was chosen as a purposive sample (Bryman, 2008: 458), as she has specific knowledge on the project and has been instrumental in its development.

The interview was designed as a semi-structured interview (Bryman, 2008: 438), with five questions prepared in advance as part of the interview guide. The questions were based on research done on the topic and my own experiences at the organization. The interview lasted for around 40 minutes, but the recorder was kept on during the informal conversation that followed, and with approval from the interviewee this part was incorporated in the data as well. The semi-structured format left room to explore additional topics and information, and exploratory questions were therefore added during the interview. The ad hoc questions allowed for the interview to flow naturally but also expanded the interview to explore unexpected information. The interview was later transcribed and has subsequently been analyzed using coding, which will be described in a later section.

The interview was set up during my internship at the DRCY, and thus, it was easy to gain access to the field. During my internship the interviewee had been my immediate boss and contact person, but there was only little hierarchical distance between us due to the flat organizational structure of the DRCY. Nevertheless, it was a cause for consideration before the interview, although the interaction during the interview eased the initial concerns.

6.2.2 Documents

During my internship, I managed to arrange access to written information on the organization and specifically on their international department. The documents are internal to the organization and not

available to the public. Importantly, documents should always be viewed in relation to the context in which they were produced, but also in relation to the intended readers (Bryman, 2008: 527). Furthermore, much of the detailed information on the Zimbabwe project, i.e. activities, goals etc., comes from fund applications to the DYC, but documents written for internal use as well as status reports will also be used. There exists an inherent subjectivity in organizational documents, and these alone cannot give a full picture of an organization. Furthermore, organizations are in a position where they control the flow of information; however, the participant observation will be used to counteract this and will therefore be actively used to critically assess the documents, which I will elaborate on in the next section.

6.2.3 Participant observation

As parts of the previous course SOCB24 at Lund University, I did a 10 week internship at the DRCY where I worked specifically on the Zimbabwe project. Shortly after I started there, the topic of my thesis became clear, although using my experiences there as participatory observation was not considered at that point. Consequently, this has led me to conduct what Bryman calls *retrospective ethnography*[3] (Bryman, 2008: 405), which essentially means that it is decided at a late stage that the experiences and knowledge gained through a certain interaction in a social setting will be analyzed and used as ethnographic material. However, this carries both positive and negative implications for the research. As data collection was not done systematically, the only written data from the participant observation are the internship diaries done for said course. Nevertheless, not knowing that I was collecting data has allowed me to gain a completely authentic insight into the organization. However, I have been aware of my research topic and have, thus, indirectly viewed my work through that lens, although it has not influenced what I worked on. In other words, the internship was as such not consciously used for data collection, even though I made an effort to arrange access to organizational documents and setting up the interview.

Using the internship as participant observation opens up for a large pool of knowledge and it highlights my unique position to understand the organization, their documents, and the interview in depth. As Bryman (2008: 465) argues, if qualitative interviews are used alone they will likely reflect a much more superficial understanding of a subject matter than when they are used in conjunction with participant observation. However, the participant observation data will mainly be used to set the context and background and to understand the other data in more depth and nuance.

6.3 Coding

For the analysis of the data it has been decided to use coding. Coding is a process of going over the data and dissecting it and placing labels, or codes, to different parts of it. However, the literature is vague on

[3] Bryman uses the terms ethnography and participant observation interchangeably.

specific guidelines for this, and different scholars have their own methods (Punch, 2005: 199). Furthermore, coding allows for the extraction of themes and concepts central to the research and enables a thorough analysis of these parts (Bryman, 2008: 543; Punch, 2005: 199-200). In order to bring the different types of data together, the same codes have been used throughout the coding process. The interview and the document data have been coded, but the participant observation data is used in a more indirect fashion. However, the vast knowledge stemming from the participant observation has played a big part in the coding, as it has allowed for a deeper understanding of the data.

The initial codes were predefined to center the analysis around the conceptual and theoretical framework. Thus, the coding started with six codes; three codes for the accountability framework and one code for evidence, one code for experience and one code to encompass the other types of knowledge that the organization engages with. Furthermore, as a significant amount of knowledge did not fit neatly with neither evidence nor experience, this code was further analyzed. This exercise led to a further distinction between knowledge stemming from monitoring and evaluation practices, which in accordance with the evidence definition and the literature on the subject can also be defined as evidence (USAID, 2016).

The three codes on accountability have served to dissect how knowledge is used and prioritized through the work of the DRCY. Importantly, in some instances the data has shown a simultaneous accountability to more than one group, and this has therefore been noted in the coding. Furthermore, the accountability is often not mentioned directly, and to properly understand the data and underlying actions and meanings the participant observation was used along with a comparison between the different data material.

6.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are important in all types of research, as it is important to acknowledge the implications that one's research might have (Bryman, 2008; 113-115). In regards to this research, the main ethical consideration pertains to the participant observation as this was done retrospectively, and therefore, in a covert fashion. However, Bulmer (in Bryman, 2008; 116) argues that covert retrospective observation is a special case and that this type of research is acceptable, even within ethical universalism. It can also be argued that it is simply not feasible for a researcher to always introduce oneself as a researcher, in case one might come across something that will later be subject to research (Bryman, 2008; 2016). Moreover, I had informed my boss from an early point that I would be doing my thesis on the organization. Finally, as the participant observation within this research is mainly used as background information to bridge gaps in the data and to create a deeper understanding of the data, it does not pose a major ethical issue.

In relation to the interview and the document data, consent was given to the use of both in the research. Although all documents were not individually approved for use, the only limitation given from the organization was that contracts with donors and grant letters were confidential and could therefore not be used. This has all been respected throughout the research.

6.5 Limitations

The design and execution of this research creates several limitations for the findings of this thesis, and in this section the two most significant ones are described. Firstly, the case study design does not make the findings suitable for generalization beyond this particular case. As this was already covered in the methodological section, it will not be elaborated further here. Secondly, the fact that the research only includes a single interview is a limitation. An additional interview had been set up; however, for practical reasons the interviewee had to cancel and was not able to reschedule. Nevertheless, the interview that was conducted provided sufficient data to help answer the research questions, and the use of a significant amount of additional data made it possible to create a full picture of the organization. Furthermore, due to the topic of the research, there are only two people who would be of interest to interview, as there is only a few people working on the Zimbabwe project within the DRCY; and thus, the research itself sets a certain limitation for the amount of interview data that can be generated. Data saturation was reached through the use of participant observation and organizational documents.

In summary, the research is designed as a case study of the DRCY and their Zimbabwe project, and both an interview, documents, and participant observation are used as sources of data in order to give a full picture of the case. Furthermore, the data has been dissected and analyzed using the method of coding with codes specifically chosen to fit with the theoretical and conceptual framework. Lastly, the retrospective participant observation does open up for some ethical concerns; however, as it will be used mostly in an indirect fashion, this is not a major concern.

7. Analysis and discussion

In the following there will first be an extensive analysis of the data which is divided into separate sections creating an overview in line with the theoretical framework and the themes coming from the data. The analysis is then followed by a discussion where the findings from the analysis will be combined and discussed as a whole.

7.1 Defining and gathering evidence

The DRCY claim to be evidence-based, but they largely fail to directly explain what they actually mean by this statement. As mentioned in the literature review, being evidence-based is considered an almost universally positive thing, and thus, it is rarely questioned when organizations claim to be so. Nevertheless, the DRCY seem to be using the term evidence as a narrative umbrella for the different types of knowledge they base their work on. Moreover, in the interview it was mentioned that the DRCY in general do not distinguish clearly between experience and evidence (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). This is supported by the organizational documents, which have shown that the DRCY to a large extent rely on their experience and the evidence that they create themselves based on their M&E practices, i.e. the measure of social change framework (Jespersen et al., 2016; DRCY 2016a). When analyzing the framework of Measuring Social Change, it is clear that it conforms to all three rules of the evidence definition. The method of creating scales and baselines for the project goals creates a rigorous frame for the collection of knowledge, and as the DRCY make an effort out of including voices from all their stakeholders, especially the youths as the direct beneficiaries, they keep the measures context specific and reasonably objective (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017).

Monitoring and collection of data are done continuously throughout the project to constantly follow the progress. However, due to the poor infrastructure and lack of cellular reception, it is hard for the YLs to reach all three wards and gather participants for interviews and group discussions (Jespersen et al., 2016). This means that for the baseline not possible to have equal representation of all three wards, and the participants who were out of school were also poorly represented in the interviews. Hence, the DRCY relied on the testimonies they could get and further incorporated knowledge from the Zimbabwean YLs and from the adults working at the local ZRCS branch. This is not an ideal situation and it damages the baseline study's overall reliability; however, it is a testament to the complex reality of working in a development context, and these practical considerations are being incorporated into the project and solutions are being tried out (Jespersen et al., 2016). Nevertheless, these constraints have to be kept in mind when the DRCY state that they consult and interview stakeholders, as they in most of their documents fail to comment on the difficulty of actually reaching all the stakeholders.

As mentioned in the methodological section, the coding of the data was done with six separate codes; one of which was a code for knowledge that did not fit into the category of neither evidence nor experience. Even after re-analyzing most of the data in this code, one thing remained. The DRCY did two preparatory missions to the project site to gather information about the local context and to assess the needs and capacities of the partner organization, ZRCS, and the future participants. During the preparatory missions interviews were made with stakeholders, both individually and in focus groups, and observations were

made about the local community, organization and people. However, these missions do not seem to be based on any real methodological data collection procedure, but instead they seem to be more exploratory in their procedure; therefore, they cannot be defined as evidence. At the same time, the missions do have more formal structures to them than what would constitute as experience, and hence, they cannot be defined as experience either. Consequently, the knowledge created through these missions must be acknowledged as a type of knowledge in its own right.

The context analysis and capacity assessment of the stakeholders, which were done during the preparatory missions, form a core component of the knowledge that the entire project is built on. A variety of viewpoints from the local stakeholders and observations were gathered and the project design was discussed (DRCY, 2015; DRCY, 2016b). The interviewee pointed out that the missions led to a lowering of the project goals, specifically in the area of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) as well as to a simplification and contextualization of much of the teaching material for the Life Skills course. Thus, the capacities and the level of knowledge of the future participants were lower than expected, which necessitated the changes in order to ensure a positive outcome of the project (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). Consequently, the DRCY used information from the context to shape their project in order to best match the local circumstances and capacities. Although the knowledge here is not considered evidence, it is important to still acknowledge the importance of this information in the formation of the project and in the general work of the DRCY.

The context analysis can be argued to be a sign of the DRCY's commitment to be accountable to their clients. However, as the context analysis forms the basis of knowledge that the project is made from, it can be argued to benefit all three groups, i.e. patron, client and NGO, and it could thus be a sign of accountability to all. Having a well-informed and functioning project can be seen as a way of the DRCY being accountable to themselves in the sense that they find the best ways to incorporate the specific DRCY methods and views into the project, so that these will have the best effect and thus be validated through the project's success. Furthermore, the context analysis can also be viewed as a way of being accountable to the patron as the DRCY then fulfill the requirement to have an extensive analysis of the context in which they are working (DYC, 2015).

The ways in which the DRCY gather evidence have now been outlined, and the context analysis has been presented to show how they also incorporate a different kind of knowledge into the Zimbabwe project. Now, the analysis will focus on how the DRCY use evidence, and how their shifting accountability influences this.

7.2 Accountability to the patron

When talking about patrons, it is important to define exactly what type of patron is being addressed. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, patrons are the ones who can assert power by withdrawing support given to the NGO if the NGO does not fulfill its responsibilities. Donors in particular are in the position of being a patron, but in relation to the DRCY and the Zimbabwe project the Zimbabwean state may act as a patron as well. The Zimbabwean state holds a position as a patron in regard to specific aspects of the project where changes had to be made to comply with national legislation on subjects, specifically in relation to SRHR (Jespersen et al., 2016; Participant observation, February, 2017). Nevertheless, when discussing accountability to patrons, the main focus will be on the donor, DYC, as it is the most relevant. Hence, when the phrase 'patron' is used it will for the most part refer to the donor; consequently, when addressing accountability in relation to the Zimbabwean state, this will be stated explicitly.

Furthermore, another important point to consider when discussing the DRCY's accountability to their patrons is that they have no means of self-funding[4] and are relying solely on donors for funding; thus, they are being forced to prioritize their accountability to patrons. Moreover, donors will in most cases have their own requirements that need to be fulfilled, and often it is so that the larger the grant is, the stricter the requirements are (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). Consequently, the DRCY have to compromise and agree to possible tradeoffs between their knowledge of what will work and the requirements from the fund in order to get the money needed. Furthermore, it can be argued that getting funds even for a less ideal project is better than getting no funds for a perfect project. Accountability to the patron is, thus, a necessary thing for the organization in order to ensure continuity in the funding for the project, albeit it is never guaranteed to succeed in securing funding.

The need for funding affects how the DRCY can engage with evidence. The Life Skills manual for the Zimbabwe project has a specific focus on SRHR, and the interviewee expressed that in relation to this the DRCY made a very deliberate effort to consult experts and to read studies on the subject (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). Their research showed that a peer-to-peer approach had significant margins of error when it came to effectively disseminating information on SRHR, which therefore, necessitates strong supportive structures in order to secure a positive impact (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). However, as mentioned earlier, the DYC is very hesitant to grand funds for anything else than volunteer work, and thus, there was only limited room for creating these vital supportive structures. Moreover, the

[4] The DRCY have a variety of ways in which they get funding, e.g. through the DRC, from different funds, companies, members etc. However, within the international department all the projects are funded separately from the rest of the organization, and only staff is funded from the general DRCY funds.

baseline study found that there was only very limited knowledge on SRHR within the target group (Jespersen et al., 2016), which together with the aforementioned limitations from the donor led to a lowering of the project goals in this area and a reduction in the complexity of the Life Skills material on the subject (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). Consequently, the DRCY worked in accordance with the evidence, but the evidence in conjunction with the donor's requirements made is necessary to revise the project and to downscale the goals on the topic of SRHR. This shows how the need for funding and the following need to be accountable to the patron shape how the DRCY can act on the knowledge gained from evidence.

Nevertheless, the DYC is a fairly flexible donor, and they have proven to be willing to work with the DRCY to find solutions to disagreements. The interviewee pointed out that the DRCY use the evidence they create through the M&E to prove to donors that their methods and project design have a positive impact. The DYC also shows a level of acknowledgement when it comes to the DRCY's experience and capacity, which makes it easier for the DRCY to convince them to allow for leniency in regards to the specific requirements (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). The DRCY, thus, use their evidence to make the patron compliant to their methods instead of the other way around, showing that although they are reliant on donor funding, they will try to influence the patron in order for them to stick to their core competences and values.

As argued earlier, the Zimbabwean state has taken the role of patron in certain aspects of the project. In earlier projects done by the DRCY, education on SRHR has included sharing knowledge about the use of contraceptives and an understanding of homosexuality (Participant observation, January, 2017). However, in Zimbabwe there are strict laws on these subjects, which prohibit any education on contraceptives and handing out of condoms to people under the age of 16. This is an issue for the project as the target age of participants starts at 14. Thus, the project has had to exclude this aspects of the training in groups where participants are younger than 16. Furthermore, in Zimbabwe there are strict laws against homosexuality, which has made it necessary to exclude all mentions of this in the project. Consequently, the state has set boundaries for what could legally be included in the project and has the power to enforce the law if the project does not comply. Thus, the state has become a patron in that instance, and the DRCY were forced to prioritize their accountability to that patron as they could otherwise face serious legal consequences. Complying with the law is not normally considered an act of accountability to a patron, but in this case the law is significantly different from that of the Danish state and goes against much of the customs and norms of the DRCY. In this instance of accountability to a patron, the DRCY were forced to abandon their experience and evidence on the subject and instead fit the project inside the boundaries created by the Zimbabwean law. This again shows how the organization, in spite of what the evidence and

knowledge on the subject might say, can be forced to comply with certain limitations in order to be able to work. Consequently, a patron can dictate the boundaries within which the organization can engage with evidence.

7.3 Accountability to clients

Accountability to clients is something most NGOs aim to show as their main focus; however, this is often not the reality when you look beyond the surface (Najam, 1996). The clients include all the people or groups who are either directly or indirectly affected by the project, but who do not hold much power to influence the project. The DRCY promote their participatory methods as core to their values and goals, and thus claim that accountability to their clients is central in their work.

It is debatable to whom the DRCY is accountable to when they put the client at the center. It is on the surface obviously an act of accountability to the client, but as the participatory method and the incorporation of the client are parts of DRCY's mission and strategy, it can also be seen as an act of accountability to themselves. However, for the sake of this analysis, it is considered as an act of accountability to the client. Therefore, the incorporation of participatory methods in the mission and in the strategy of the DRCY is considered a display of their commitment to this accountability, and thus not something they do for themselves.

Within the framework of the M&E, the DRCY gather significant amounts of evidence and knowledge on their client and on the local context. The incorporation of these into the project and the high value placed on these in the project show a clear willingness to be accountable to the client. This is further exemplified by the fact that one purpose of the preparatory study was to "ensure that the development goal, objectives and proposed activities for the future collaboration between ZRCS and DRCY directly respond to the targeted youths' own understanding of their needs and capacities" (DRCY, 2015).

The M&E practice of making scales and systematically monitoring the progress is a continued process of creating evidence centered in the viewpoint and perspectives of the client, and thus, a systematic incorporation of the clients into the project. Furthermore, efforts are made to gather information from all participants, but as mentioned earlier, this is difficult due to practical problems of transport and communication. However, special focus is put on placing the voices of the youth central in the project, as the work is targeted at them. Within the framework of the M&E, it is the clients who define what the current situation is and what steps that could help move towards the goal (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). Furthermore, the centering of the client and the local knowledge they possess means that the DRCY are not just relying on what they know, but are also actively seeking out the indigenous knowledge that Agrawal (1995) argues is often lost in development interventions. The DRCY argue that

this is an effort not just to make the project have a positive outcome, but also to create ownership of the project within the local community and to ensure a level of sustainability of the outcomes (DRCY, 2016a). In order to effectively create ownership of the project within the community, the YLs pointed to the importance of continued contact with the local leaders and the local community at large (Jespersen et al., 2016). This shows that the evidence used to shape the project is anchored in the local knowledge, and that the DRCY actively develop context specific evidence with a focus on their main target group, the youths.

The youths are kept at the center of much of the M&E work and they therefore have a significant influence on the project (Jespersen et al., 2016; DRCY, 2016a). Furthermore, the participatory practice within the project is designed so that the youths get a feeling of acknowledgement, but also show by example in order to inspire more young people to become active in the community (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). This incorporation of the client's needs is again a way in which the accountability to the client it set at the center stage by the DRCY.

In the past, the Life Skills manuals, that were created and contextualized for each DRCY project, were made by professionals in the field. However, these manuals did not gain widespread acceptance with the participants, and therefore, the DRCY started to co-create the manuals with the participants. This has led to a larger ownership of the manuals and of the Life Skills courses in general (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). This shows the willingness of the DRCY to incorporate their experiences into the project and to change the ways in which they work in order to better accommodate the client. Nevertheless, the Life Skills manuals are still very similar from project to project, and the DRCY are still the principle authors of the manuals. The youths who are engaged at this stage of the project read the material and give suggestions on alterations, but the general form of the manual is decided from the beginning (Participant observation, January, 2017). This goes to show that although the DRCY promote co-creation of the Life Skills manuals, they are still largely created by the organization itself. The interviewee argued that the DRCY control most of the processes within the project, including the creation of the Life Skills manual, in order to not overburden the participants and in acceptance of the capacity level that the participants have (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). This does build on their experiences from the past, but it is also a way for the DRCY to maintain a large portion of the control within the project while arguing it is for the best of the client.

Najam (1996) argues that when you cut beyond the rhetoric and the façade of an NGO, most NGOs are almost solely accountable to their patron to the detriment of their accountability to their clients and themselves. However, this does not seem to be the case for the DRCY. The data suggests that they

effectively are only accountable to the patron to the extent that they have to, meaning that they actively try to sway the donors to their benefit and only comply with the minimum standards in order to get funding. The DRCY thus use their self-created evidence and experience to influence the donor to be flexible (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). Furthermore, during my time at the organization, I witnessed an instance where the donor refused to grant the organization money unless they changed aspects of the budget. However, the DRCY found that change to be impossible if the project was still to have legitimacy with the clients and be feasible to execute, and they then used their context analysis and previous experience to get the donor to approve the initial budget (Participant observation, March, 2017).

The prioritization of the client within the project is based on the experience of the organization and the evidence it creates through the M&E (Participant observation, March, 2017). This means that the organization uses these sources of knowledge to decide how to prioritize its accountability to the client. It can therefore be argued that it is not only the accountability that affect how the DRCY use evidence, but also the evidence that affects how they prioritize their accountability.

7.4 Accountability to themselves

Najam (1996) argues that most NGOs spend a significant amount of time focusing on their accountability to themselves, i.e. their mission statement, their values, their employees etc., and the DRCY are no exception to this statement.

Experience was within the conceptual framework defined as being inherently subjective and not conforming to any standards of objectivity or methodological practices. During the coding, it became apparent that most of the knowledge that was not part of the M&E was in fact experience. However, much of this experience is framed as being evidence. Much of the experience has been gathered through many years of work, which does give it more credibility than it would otherwise have had. Furthermore, as also mentioned in the conceptual framework, it is important to acknowledge the usefulness of different types of knowledge. Nevertheless, the blurry line made between evidence and experience and the framing of experience as evidence is problematic, as it misleads the organization's stakeholders.

The DRCY utilize their experience to shape much of their work and to define their core competences. The interviewee underlined that although they were willing to compromise and accommodate in relation to the demands and needs from both beneficiaries and donors, they would never compromise on their core competences (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). Thus, staying true to the experience the DRCY have gained through their work can be argued to be a way in which they show accountability to themselves. The core competences that the DRCY have, i.e. their specific methods and views on development, were

by the interviewee also referred to as the unique DRCY method. This is also a topic that much talk in the organization at large circled around (Participant observation, January, 2017).

The DRCY method includes their theory of change, their focus on participatory methods and specifically their focus on youth and volunteerism: "In DRCY […] volunteerism is seen as central to youth engagement and as an effective and meaningful way of strengthening youth's civic engagement" (DRCY, 2017c). It is unclear what knowledge or evidence this view is based on, but it is central to how the DRCY work. It can be argued that the DRCY base much of their work on the normative view that youth volunteerism has an inherently positive effect. Furthermore, they mix this normative framework with their experience and the evidence they create through the M&E, but ultimately their focus on setting the unique DRCY method as the basis of all their work is a display of their commitment and accountability to themselves.

Importantly, in working with their unique method the DRCY also decide many of the basic structures within the project. As mentioned earlier, they actively sought out research evidence in relation to SRHR; however, the interviewee pointed out that they do not see a need for the same level of evidence when working with the other aspects of Life Skills, i.e. the more intangible mind-set oriented skills, as the interviewee said: "A condom only works in one way. If you use it wrong you will not be protected, even if you thought about it" (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017: *translated from* Danish). So, the mind-set oriented skills are to a much greater extent based on experience alone, although aspects and formulations within the Life Skills manual make it appear as if they are evidence-based; e.g. the DRCY write that certain actions will lead to a specific outcome with little justification of such statement (DRCY, 2017g).

The DRCY place a great deal of emphasis on the fact that the Zimbabwe project is a joint partnership project with the ZRCS. However, it is the DRCY who are in charge of funding and also the ones mainly in charge of the project design (Participant Observation, January, 2017). Furthermore, the ZRCS is for the purpose of this analysis considered a client to the DRCY, as the DRCY hold the power in the form of funding and general expertise in project design and roll-out. Consequently, although the project is put out as a partnership, it is not an equal partnership, and the DRCY are in a position where they hold the power over what knowledge is considered valid. There is therefore a large emphasis on the knowledge of the DRCY, but the influence of the ZRCS's experience and knowledge is much harder to find. This is evident by the fact that the knowledge of the ZRCS is treated in the same way as the knowledge of the participants (Participant observation, March, 2017). As mentioned in the background section, the project is framed much in the same terms and with the same components as the ToC. However, in the report from the preparatory study it is stated that the two organizations agreed on this structure and frame (DRCY,

2016b). As Najam (1995) argues, this could be a sign of 'aspiration manipulation', where the powerful NGO, however well-meaning, shapes the aspirations of the clients to match those of the NGO in order to outwards show a larger accountability to the clients than actually is the case. It is however unknown if that is the case here, but it is safe to assume that it was not the ZRCS who proposed the frame. It is important to be aware of this power dynamic within the project setup. Nevertheless, the DRCY arguably is the organization with the most experience and knowledge in conducting a project focusing on youth empowerment and capacity development (DRCY, 2015), and hence, it is somewhat understandable that the project is based on their experience.

7.5 Discussion

As shown in the analysis, the DRCY engage with many different types of knowledge and prioritize their accountability differently at different stages of the project. Evidence plays a large role within the work of the DRCY, but they do not use a significant amount of evidence created outside the bounds of the organization. Instead, they use their M&E framework of measuring social change as a way to create evidence themselves within the project, and use this to measure and shape the project. However, the experience the organization has gathered through its many years of working with international development plays an even larger role in its work. The experience is often framed as evidence, or simply not expressed as being experience, and is thus used to create an image of being evidence-based. This manipulation of experience in the framing of the DRCY's work is problematic as experience has not been subject to the same standards of objectivity and methodology as evidence and is thus not as reliable. Nevertheless, both the experience and the evidence they use help them to shape the project to the specific context in which they work. Furthermore, the interviewee made it clear that the DRCY do not attempt to make any generalizations outside of the bounds of their target group and area based on the evidence they create (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). However, it can be argued that with their heavy emphasis on experience within their work, they are indirectly making generalizations and transferring evidence from different contexts and project into their current work. Importantly, the DRCY aim to be flexible and often make changes through the project when new evidence surface, or if they find a better way of working (Anonymous interview, 26-04-2017). This is an important factor as it makes it possible for them to adjust if their experiences or evidence should turn out to have an adverse effect on the project, which is essential when working within a complex system where much knowledge is context specific.

The way the DRCY engage with evidence and other kinds of knowledge is very much determined by how they prioritize their accountability at that given point. Importantly, the DRCY are relying heavily on donor support, and are therefore forced to show a significant level of accountability to the patron. This leads to the project being shaped to accommodate the restrictions set up by the donor, although the DRCY

make efforts to ease these restrictions to keep the project in line with their expertise and experience. Nevertheless, it is a significant aspect of the project in which the accountability is mainly with the patron, but the DRCY seem to work towards placing their accountability with the client for most of the project details. The M&E practice, i.e. the evidence creation, is mainly focused on the client, and through this the client enjoys the continued attention from the DRCY, whereas the patron mostly is accommodated out of necessity in the stages of the project where funding is secured. Moreover, the DRCY maintain accountability to themselves by keeping the project within the frame of their own experience and organizational methods. This means that the client gets to have a say about the details of the project, but that the overall structures are largely predefined by the DRCY. Nevertheless, it can be argued that most of the experience of the DRCY is created from their engagement with past clients, and thus, their experiences largely speak to their high priority for accountability to their clients.

8. Conclusion

To summarize, a case-study of the DRCY's participatory youth-leadership project in Zimbabwe has been the focus of this thesis. The aim has been to answer two questions about how the DRCY engage with evidence to shape the Zimbabwe project, and how their accountabilities to their stakeholders influences this engagement. The analysis has been based on an interview, organizational documents and participant observation, and has been guided by a definition of evidence and a framework of NGO accountability. Lastly, the individual sections of the analysis have been discussed in combination with each other in order to connect the findings.

The findings show that the DRCY engage with several different kinds of knowledge, but most significantly evidence and experience. They create evidence themselves through their M&E framework of measuring social change, and subsequently use this information to modify the project. However, the DRCY put even greater emphasis on their extensive experience within the field of international development, and this experience creates the basis of all their work. Importantly, the experience is often manipulated to appear as evidence in order to bolster their image of being evidence-based. Nevertheless, both the evidence and experience is focused around the project's target group, and hence, are used to shape the project to best fit the local context.

Furthermore, the DRCY have proven to be accountable to both patrons, clients, and themselves at different times of the project and in different ways. They are largely only accountable to clients to the extent that is needed in order to secure funding for their project. However, this means that the DRCY have to accommodate the patrons' requirements in different ways, and then set aside their own evidence

and experience if they do not fit these requirements. However, the DRCY do work to influence the patron with their evidence and experience in order to make the patron more flexible, and the organization will only accommodate the patron as long as it does not interfere with its own core competencies and methods.

The DRCY prioritize accountability to themselves in order to keep the project in line with their unique methods and their ToC. Their methods and views on development are largely shaped by their experiences from earlier projects. However, the experience has been gathered over a long period of time, and thus, it does gain legitimacy through that.

Most significantly, the DRCY put their clients at the center of the project through their participatory methods and through their M&E framework; hence, they show a high level of accountability to the client. The client is the main focus of the M&E practice, and therefore the evidence created is bringing forth the client. Furthermore, the experience that the DRCY rely on is created through their engagement with current and past clients and can therefore be seen as a way in which the accountability to the client is embedded deep within the organization's structures.

The findings from this thesis have shown that the DRCY frame their experience as evidence in order to give the impression that their work is evidence-based to a larger extent than it really is. This manipulation and framing of experience as evidence show a need to create a better understanding of the relationship between the two within development organizations. A further study of this would yield important knowledge about the work of development organizations.

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