

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The overall focus of this thesis is the analysis of the implementation of RBM in development organisations of multilateral nature with a focus on **M&E systems** so as to further our understanding of the influence these systems have in **organisational effectiveness**.

Data has been collected on a primary and secondary basis, respectively through qualitative interviews with key experts and practitioners and a number of reports produced by international organisations and relevant stakeholders.

The point of departure has been a literature review on the introduction of RBM in the public and subsequently the development sector. The review has permitted to discover the case of **UNDP** as critical in adjusting its M&E frameworks towards a results-orientation. UNDP has been considered a critical case enabling for generalisation, particularly because of the agency's strong commitment to adopt the general principles of RBM throughout all its procedures and operations including M&E. In this respect, UNDP is today positioned as one of the most advanced in its approach to RBM of all international development agencies.

The use of M&E systems in a context of RBM has been examined by looking at various organisational theories, namely **rational**, **political** and **institutional perspectives**, as well as **learning organisation**. The application of organisational theory for the analysis of Results-based M&E have proved to be very relevant.

Rational theory and learning organisation are valuable at explaining the underlying principles around of which these systems are build and the potential they have to contribute to organisational and development effectiveness. Both perspectives have evidenced descriptive and prescriptive in the introduction and understanding of M&E systems.

The reason behind adopting theories, other than the rational and learning organisation, lies behind the fact that international development agencies are not creating enough organisational learning neither significantly improving performance to have an impact on effectiveness. This in turn underscores the importance of incorporating new variables into the study that can account for such phenomena. The political perspective highlights quality hindrances of M&E in account of the existence

of a mix of **interests**, while the insitutional perspective underscores the importance of **values** and **norms** in shaping M&E procedures.

The adoption of all theories in combination rather than exclusively has set a comprehensive explanatory framework for the assessment of M&E' use in RBM of international development organisations. Through the different lenses, a variety of organisational aspects in connection with M&E systems have been reviewed, namely the context of development cooperation, the relevance of undertaking M&E, characteristics of both users of information and the evaluators, the methodology and evaluation design applied, and the means to follow-up on evaluations and disseminate the information. The review of those aspects have set the path for the analysis and reaching the conclusions.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1 INTRODUCTION: RESULTS-BASED MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 A rational use of Monitoring and Evaluation in Development Co-operation?	1
1.2 Understanding the use of Monitoring & Evaluation in Development Cooperation	2
1.2.1 Research Question	3
1.2.2 Hypothesis	3
1.2.3 Definitions of key concepts	4
1.2.4 Delimitation and Scope of Analysis	6
1.3 Structure of Thesis	7
<b>2 METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1 Research Strategy	9
2.2 Theoretical Considerations	11
2.2.1 Theory-building	11
2.2.2 Choice of Theory	12
2.3 Research Design	15
2.4 Empirical Data	16
2.5 Limitations of the Methodology	19
2.5.1 Reliability	19
2.5.2 Validity	19
<b>3 UNCONVERGING THE USE OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1 The Raise of a Paradigm	21
3.1.1 The emergence of Results-oriented Public Sector Management	22
3.1.2 Results-based Management in the Development Aid Industry	24
3.1.3 Management Reforms in main International Development Organisations	26
3.2 The use of Results-based Monitoring and Evaluation	29
3.2.1 The purpose of Monitoring and Evaluation in a context of Results: Accountability versus <i>Learning</i>	30
3.2.2 Results-based Monitoring and Evaluation and Development Effectiveness	32
<b>4 A THEORETICAL MODEL TO GRASP DEVELOPMENT AID ORGANISATION'S BEHAVIOUR</b>	<b>34</b>
4.1 Organisational Theory	35
4.1.1 The Rational Perspective	35
4.1.2 The Political Perspective	38
4.1.3 The Institutional Perspective	40
4.2 The Learning Organisation	42
4.3 The Model	46

<b>5 THE APPROACH OF UNDP TO RESULTS-BASED M&amp;E OF INTERVENTIONS</b>	<b>48</b>
5.1 Context for RBM	48
5.1.1 Development and donor context for RBM	48
5.1.2 Context for RBM and Accountability at UNDP	49
5.2 Users of performance information	49
5.3 Relevance of Results-based M&E	51
5.4 Evaluators' characteristics	52
5.5 Methodology and design of Results-based M&E	53
5.6 Feedback mechanisms	55
5.7 Dissemination of performance information	55
5.8 Summing up on UNDP's approach	56
<b>6 ANALYSIS</b>	<b>57</b>
6.1 Rational lens	57
6.2 Political lens	59
6.3 Institutional lens	63
6.4 Learning organisation perspective	67
6.5 Rounding off	69
<b>7 CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>72</b>
7.1 Main Findings	72
7.2 Theoretical Implications for Future Research	73
<b>LITERATURE</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>ANNEXES</b>	<b>81</b>
Annex 1: Organisational Chart of UNDP and roles in evaluation	81
Annex 2: Key Principles of Results-based Management at UNDP	83

## LIST OF FIGURES and TABLES

<b>FIGURE 1: STRUCTURE OF THE MASTER THESIS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>FIGURE 2: RESEARCH STRATEGY.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>FIGURE 3: ACCOUNTABILITY &amp; EFFECTIVENESS THROUGH M&amp;E SYSTEMS .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>FIGURE 4: LOGICAL CHAIN FOR RESULTS.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>FIGURE 5: PRINCIPLES OF A LEARNING ORGANIZATION .....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>FIGURE 6: INFLUENCING AGENTS ON UND AND IN THE DEVELOPMENT INDUSTRY.....</b>	<b>65</b>
 <b>TABLE 1 INTERVIEWEES CHART .....</b>	 <b>17</b>

## ACRONYMS

ARDE	Annual Review of Development Effectiveness
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CO	Country Office
CPD	Country Programme Document
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DANIDA	Danish Development Assistance Agency
EO	Evaluation Office
ERC	Evaluation Resource Centre
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LFA	Logical Framework Analysis
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MfDR	Managing for Development Results
MYFF	Multi-Year Funding Framework
NPM	New Public Management
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – Development Assistance Committee
RBx	Regional Bureau
RBM	Results-based Management
ROAR	Results-oriented Annual Report
RPD	Regional Programme Document
SIDA	Swedish Development Assistance Agency
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank

# 1 INTRODUCTION: RESULTS-BASED MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION

## 1.1 *A rational use<sup>1</sup> of Monitoring and Evaluation in Development Co-operation?*

A growing debate has surrounded for many years development aid organisations and the effectiveness of their interventions.<sup>2</sup> Especially during the 1990s, the international development community faced a crisis of confidence by the public<sup>3</sup> as many questioned the impact of development aid (UNDP, 2000). Development aid organisations were imbued by perceptions of poor management and poor performance, and resources made available for them were limited. In view of this crisis, the public and the organisations themselves increasingly raised voices for greater accountability and transparency, enhanced effectiveness and demonstrable results to show the progress made while justifying their purpose to the public. The debate especially reached a peak with the introduction of the **Millennium Development Goals** (MDGs) in 2000, placing poverty reduction as the paramount mission of development, while stressing the importance of achieving the desired results by 2015.<sup>4</sup>

In an attempt to outstrip the crisis of confidence and satisfy these public demands, while adjusting to a results-orientation, a wide-ranging process of reform took place in the vast majority of development aid organisations. This process of reform was premised on the introduction of a **Results-based Management (RBM)** or **management-for-results** approach.<sup>5</sup> This approach is defined by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as a broad management strategy focusing on the performance

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<sup>1</sup> The use of M&E refers here to how development aid institutions implement and organise their M&E systems and utilise resulting information.

<sup>2</sup> The term (development) intervention is understood as an instrument for donor and non-donor support aimed at fostering development. The term usually refers to a country programme, thematic or sectorial component within a country programme or a single project. (OECD, 2002)

<sup>3</sup> The public here refers to tax payers from donor countries, governments and parliaments, and civil society groups.

<sup>4</sup> The MDGs consist of 8 goals, 18 targets and 48 performance indicators. The 8 goals, which were agreed by 192 United Nations members in September 2000, are to be achieved by the year 2015 and include: 1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; 2. Achieve universal primary education; 3. Promote gender equality and empower women; 4. Reduce child mortality; 5. Improve maternal health; Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; 7. Ensure environmental sustainability; 8. Develop a global partnership for development. More information can be found at: [www.un.org/millenniumgoals](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals)

<sup>5</sup> Although the approach has been given many other names, such as performance-based management, outcome management and New Public Management, in this report we will refer as to RBM or management-by-results.

of organisations and achievement of outputs, outcomes and impacts, frequently defined as results of a development intervention (OECD, 2002). The fundamental objective of RBM is to enhance agency performance and, eventually, development effectiveness while ensuring a substantive level of accountability (UNDP, 2000).

At the centre of the approach is the implementation of **Monitoring and Evaluation** (M&E) systems. The challenge here is to demonstrate value for money. In that regard, Results-based M&E differ from traditional approaches in that they move beyond emphasis on inputs and outputs to a greater focus on outcomes and impacts (namely, results) of development projects and programmes (Kusek and Rist, 2004). M&E systems in the light of RBM are, therefore, concerned with the provision of information about results that shall enable to verify the progress of development interventions towards the achievement of outcomes. The use of this information is, beyond reporting purposes, for creating knowledge and learning around results (Kusek and Rist, 2003; UNDP, 2000, 2001). These are key assets to improve performance and effectiveness of development aid organisations. In this light, learning is thus understood as a process linked to a change of practice aiming at increasing development effectiveness (Carlsson, 2000).

## ***1.2 Understanding the use of Monitoring and Evaluation in Development Co-operation***

All in all, the achievement of results and continuous improvement of management based on performance information shall be central to the process in order for a RBM system to be fully effective (Meier, 2003; Binnendijk, 2002). Nevertheless, many scholars (Britton, 2005; Hailey and Sorgenfrei, 2004) maintain that performance measurement is too commonly seen as a mechanism to ensure a level of accountability rather than a basis for organisational learning. In fact, the interpretation of results and use of this information for policy and management purposes by development aid organisations is uneven (Dahler-Larsen, 1998), evidencing that many other purposes are more prominent (Carlsson, 2000).

In view of this, it is a wide expressed concern that development aid organisations may be frequently missing important opportunities for learning and generating knowledge through Results-based M&E, which in turn is crucial to enhance development performance (Britton, 2005; King and McGrath, 2004; Hovland, 2003). Consequently, even though these organisations have finally been able to be held



accountable for the achievement of specific results, it remains in question whether the potential to enhance effectiveness through the use of Results-based M&E has been fully exploited.

### 1.2.1 Research Question

Hence, the **Research Question** of this Master Thesis attempts to assess *whether* and understand *how and why is M&E in RBM<sup>6</sup> of international organisations operating in the development aid industry (not) contributing to improve organisational effectiveness.*

The study therefore focuses on the implementation of RBM with a focus on M&E systems, and the object at test is international organisations of multilateral nature<sup>7</sup> operating in the development industry, to explore the use of information on results. The overall aim of this study is to further our understanding of the influence these systems have in organisational effectiveness.

### 1.2.2 Hypothesis

In order to find an answer to this question, a number of **Hypothesis** need to be drawn to better interpret the nature of the problem formulated:

- **H1:** The use of Results-based M&E by international development organisations in the development aid industry, and particularly the opportunities M&E offer for learning have not been entirely exploited so as to significantly enhance organisational effectiveness and cause greater development effectiveness.
- **H2:** On the one hand, the adoption of Results-based M&E frameworks is more attuned at insuring accountability, boosting legitimacy and securing social fitness, than at enhancing organisational learning and then performance and effectiveness. On the other hand, the process and outcome of organisational learning eventually generated through the implementation of Results-based M&E systems is significantly hampered by political behaviour of actors involved in the process.

H1 and H2 are working hypothesis of **descriptive** and **explanatory nature**, respectively. Those are two distinct hypothesis dealing with two aspects of the RQ, one descriptive (the 'How') and one explanatory (the 'Why') herewith summing up

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<sup>6</sup> M&E understood as a key component of RBM (see subsection 1.2.3 Definition of key concepts)

<sup>7</sup> Hereafter, multilateral development organisations are referred as international development organisations or agencies. A distinction will be made when it concerns organisations of bilateral nature.

into the overall 'Whether' piece of the RQ. In essence, H1 underscores a basic assumption by which proper implementation of Results-based M&E shall foster learning around development interventions and thus the effectiveness of development aid organisations. H2, on the other hand, hints at one of the main premises of this paper, which is Results-based M&E is **socially constructed** and **politically articulated**. Such premise does not clash with the belief that M&E plays an essential role in reaching judgements about development interventions. Rather, it suggests that M&E needs to be set within a wider understanding of organisational reality.

Thereby, stemming from this set of hypotheses is the main assumption that, although international development agencies are defined by their mandates as technical, functional and rational organisations, in practice organisational behaviour is politically defined and institutionally shaped. In this vein, different perspectives of organisational theory shall be applied to fully understand their behaviour with relation to the use of Results-based M&E and learning they generate.

Based on this assumption, the theoretical objective of this Master Thesis is to provide a holistic and comprehensive model to explain the behaviour of development aid organisations concerning the use of Results-based M&E systems. The model shall entail the rational, institutional and political perspective from organisational theory, as well as theory concerning the learning organisation.<sup>8</sup>

### 1.2.3 Definitions of key concepts

Throughout the study I use a variety of terminologies encompassing this field of research that are best defined at the outset.

Some discussion upon the concept of effectiveness is indispensable. In effect, as A. Scott (2004) maintains, effectiveness is a critical and controversial issue exacerbated by the confusion over concepts and definitions. In accordance with a DAC glossary on RBM, **effectiveness** is defined as "*an aggregate measure of (or judgement about) the merit or worth of an activity, i.e. the extent to which an intervention has attained, or is expected to attain, its major relevant objective efficiently.*" (OECD, 2002:21) Effectiveness, thus, ascribes to the relationship between outputs and outcomes.

Accordingly, at the organisational level, we shall understand by **organisational effectiveness**, "*a measure of the extent to which an organisation has fulfilled the*

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<sup>8</sup> Refer to section 2 – Methodology (Chapter 2.2) and section 4 - Theoretical Framework.

*aims and objectives it has set for itself, as reflected in project and program activity.*" (UNDP, 2001bis:38) Following this definition, improved organisational effectiveness shall accompany enhanced **development effectiveness**, terminology that *"reflects the extent to which an institution or intervention has brought about targeted change in a country or the life of the individual beneficiary"* (UNDP, 2001bis:11). The term, therefore, refers to long-term results or impact attributable to a single agency. Development effectiveness represents a different concept than that of aid effectiveness, understood as the collective impact of aid in fostering development.

The research question is in addition enclosed in a field, namely performance measurement, which is beset by definitional problems, as expressed by many authors (Meier, 2003; Paton, 2003; Hailey and Sorgenfrei, 2004). I shall, hereby, confine the meaning of **performance measurement** to the effects of organisation action that are measurable. This choice seems legitimate since it matches most of today's terminology used in organisations. Performance measurement is encompassed in **performance management**, and not the other way around, as it is often mistakenly believed (Binnendijk, 2000). Indeed, performance management is a much broader strategy that incorporates aspects of strategic planning, risk management, monitoring, evaluation and even audit (Meier, 2003) and it is a synonym for RBM. The central orientation of the RBM approach is **results**. According to the Glossary of DAC (OECD, 2002), a result is *"the output, outcome or impact (intended or unintended, positive and/or negative) of a development intervention"* (2002:33). M&E has herein become a key component of and has evolved according to the fates of RBM.<sup>9</sup> Having said that, hereafter **Results-based M&E** will be referred to throughout the Thesis under the consideration that it is RBM which is being reviewed with a focus on M&E.

**Organisational learning** is another growing field of research closely related to this study. The term organisational learning is ambiguous and ill-defined. However, it is appropriate to use *"as shorthand for the process by which organisations obtain and use knowledge to adapt old policies, programs and strategies, or to innovate more broadly."* (Berg, 2000:25) Learning is, hereby, understood at an organisational rather than at an individual level and is concerned with whether and how knowledge changes organisational behaviour accordingly.

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<sup>9</sup> M&E in a context of RBM is understood as an integrated tool (as Monitoring facilitates later Evaluation) both focusing on results but with different purposes: Monitoring for operational management and Evaluation for strategic management.

#### 1.2.4 Delimitation and Scope of Analysis

The Master Thesis is embedded within a broader debate on how performance information resulting from M&E systems based on results, and its potential for learning and knowledge, is used in development cooperation. In that respect, the purpose is not to provide a thorough examination of how M&E contributes to learning and creating knowledge,<sup>10</sup> but to understand how Results-based M&E systems are introduced and employed with regard to learning opportunities focusing on the long experience of UNDP's RBM approach. The emphasis is, therefore, on the role M&E systems have in the light of RBM as concerns to management learning and decision-making applications. This is important to consider bearing in mind the multiple usages mentioned in literature about the utilisation of M&E frameworks within the public sector and development cooperation.

In addition, the Master Thesis gives input to the question surrounding international development organisations on development effectiveness. This question has come to the forefront of today's international development discourse since late 1990s, especially after the MDGs and the Monterrey Consensus.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, it is not the purpose of this study to assess whether and how the introduction of Results-based M&E frameworks is contributing to enhance organisational effectiveness. The challenges faced when measuring organisational and in particular development effectiveness are many and very complex. Such assessment would, therefore, prove too ambitious for the scope of this Thesis. It is hereby assumed that the effective implementation of Results-based management strategies, including M&E processes, has a potential to increase organisational and consequently development effectiveness.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note as well that in order to further limit the scope of research, the thesis will mainly focus on the implementation of M&E systems at the project and programme level. The scope does not look into an overarching implementation of RBM at the agency level, mainly, because such implementation entails very long, enduring, and complex reform processes meaning that very few development

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<sup>10</sup> For such a study, see for instance Preskill and Torres (2000) "*Evaluative Inquiry for Learning in Organisations*"

<sup>11</sup> The Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference for Financing for Development was held in 2002. The Consensus defines a set of actions to address the challenges of financing for development in developing countries, so as to secure the mobilisation of the needed resources to meet the MDGs. More information at: <http://www.un.org/esa/ffd/monterrey/MonterreyConsensus.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Refer, for instance, to the report *Development Effectiveness: Review of Evaluative Evidence*, 2001 by UNDP

agencies have embarked into agency-wide reforms (and thus experience is yet very limited).<sup>13</sup> Some agency issues will be highlighted in any case.

The attention will be further concentrated on a single international development agency, namely the UNDP. This organisation offers an interesting example of readjustment towards a RBM approach, including an adjustment of their M&E systems at project and programme level, undertaken at least a decade ago. UNDP has therefore large experience with implementing Results-based M&E systems at the operational level. The reasons behind the choice of this development organisation are further detailed within the Methodology section.<sup>14</sup>

### **1.3 Structure of Thesis**

This thesis is organised in seven sections. The present section (*Section 1*) forms the Introduction, which contains the formulation of the problem - resumed in the Research Question and the set of Hypothesis-, as well as the objective and justification for its study. Subsequently a methodological section follows (*Section 2*), which aims to devise an approach to study the problem, mainly describing the research strategy and design, and data construction processes.

The following section (*Section 3*) contains a review of literature that explains the framework of RBM through an overview of the history of performance measurement in the public sector, an outline of the introduction of RBM in development cooperation and, in particular, its related M&E processes. It follows a section of theoretical discussions (*Section 4*) on organisational theory (namely, the rational, institutional and political perspectives) and learning perspectives. The main aim of this section is to build up the model for the analysis of development agencies' behaviour in connection with the use of M&E systems in a RBM context.

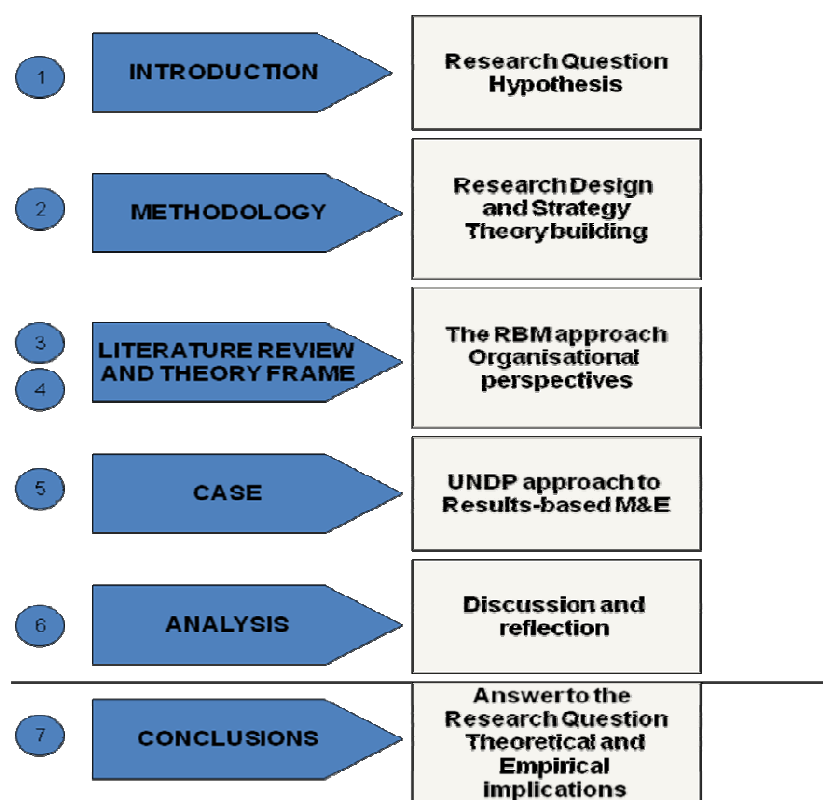
The subsequent section (*Section 5*) describes in detail the case of UNDP as regards the its results-led approach to M&E particularly at project and programme level. It follows a section of analysis (*Section 6*) that adopts the theoretical framework to explain why RBM is undertaken and used in such a way. The final section (*Section 7*) attempts to answer the Research Question and round off the study, while outlining further theoretical and empirical implications for future research.

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<sup>13</sup> Refer to subsection 3.1.2 Towards a Results-Oriented Development Co-operation.

<sup>14</sup> Refer to subsection 2.5.2 Validity.

**Figure 1: Structure of the Master Thesis**



Source: Own

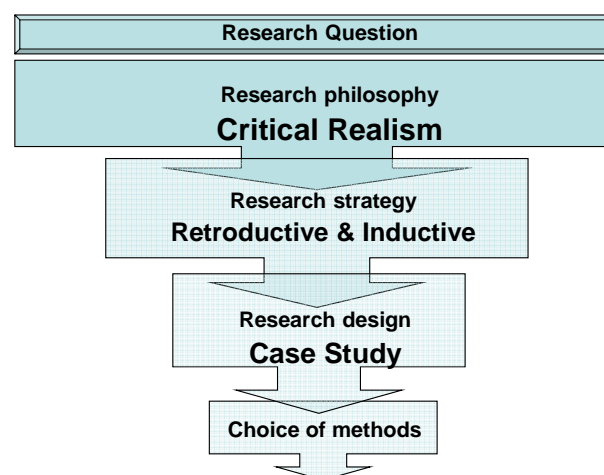
## 2 METHODOLOGY

The aim of this section is to explain how the research is to be conducted: what data will be included, and how it will be gathered, structured and analysed. Accordingly, the methodology section firstly outlines the research strategy as well as the research philosophy of this study. It secondly provides a variety of theoretical considerations in regard to the theory-building process and to the choice of theory to undertake the study. It follows a presentation of the research design, and data collection processes and sources. The section finishes with a discussion concerning the issues of reliability and validity of the methods applied.

### 2.1 Research Strategy

The way the **research question** has been formulated, and thus what answers are sought within the paper, determines the methodological approach to be selected. As the picture depicts (figure 1), the choice of research philosophy is the fundament towards the choice of research strategy, and research methods.

**Figure 2: Research Strategy**



Source: Own

In shaping the philosophy, we use the term *epistemology*, which is better defined at the outset. The term epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge and thus studies

the nature and scope of meaning and knowledge (*the how we come to know*).<sup>15</sup> The philosophical assumptions underlying the research come from **critical realism**. critical realism is an important research philosophy strongly influenced by the transcendental realism of Roy Bhaskar.<sup>16</sup> This tradition recognises the existence of a reality independent of our knowledge about it, but that science can study. Reality is in addition not transparent, but it is full of mechanisms “*which we cannot observe but which we can experience indirectly through their ability to cause – make things happen in the world.*” (Danermark, 2001:8) Thus, the aim should be to uncover the mechanisms and structures that can account for the explanation of the phenomenon or events being investigated.

Herein, the ontology of critical realism advances that reality is stratified in three levels: the real, the actual and the empirical level, respectively constituted by mechanisms (structures, powers and cause-effect relations which exist only as part of the real domain), events (actual happenings that may or may not be observed) and experiences (what we as human beings can observe). Epistemologically speaking we can to certain extent describe the events based on experiences but we can only infer mechanisms from their effects in terms of actuality (i.e. events). Inferring the structures and mechanisms underlying events is addressed through processes of abstraction and concretisation, i.e. **retroduction**. In a retroductive approach, the research starts in the actual level with empirically observable phenomena, e.g. the non-utilisation of M&E in the development aid industry. It then moves into a deeper strata of reality to hypothesize about the existence of causal mechanisms, which if they existed, would explain the phenomena. Then it is about demonstrating the ‘functioning’ of these mechanisms, i.e. testing whether the hypothesis fits the data.

The logic of this study follows as well an **inductive** and **deductive reasoning**. The reasoning is inductive in the sense that the descriptive part of the research documents a single observable phenomena of UNDP that is induced to an empirical pattern and regularity of UNDP. Induction is further taking place when moving from the case of UNDP to a broader generalisation on multilateral development organisations.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/positivism.php> (February 2008)

<sup>16</sup> See e.g. Bhaskar (1978) *A Realist Theory of Science*. Harvester Press, 2nd edition: Hassocks.

<sup>17</sup> Refer to Methodology chapter 2.3. Research Design and 2.5.2. Validity.



On the other hand, it is deductive because the theory and explanatory framework, which has been reached through the retroductive process, is to apply to the (induced) empirical pattern, hereby the process to follow moves from methodology to theory to data to analysis to conclusion.

## **2.2 Theoretical Considerations**

The aim of this section is to offer argumentation with regard to the choice of theory, given that a variety of theoretical perspectives could be applied for the study of the implementation of M&E systems in international development organisations.

### **2.2.1 Theory-building**

Theories can help us uncover and structure reality, and are thus fundamental for research. In this study, the strategy followed to build theory is labelled as *metatriangulation*, and consists of building theory from multiple paradigms<sup>18</sup> to foster greater insight and creativity (Lewis and Grimes, 1999).

The strategy of metatriangulation is “*particularly appropriate for investigating vibrant and vast domains of organisation theory, marked by continuing debates and/or contradictory findings*” (Lewis and Grimes, 1999:686). It does not contradict single-paradigm theory building but, rather, offers an alternative for investigating complex organisational phenomena. Applying multiple paradigms permits, on the one hand, to observe the same phenomena (e.g. the implementation and use of Results-based M&E at UNDP) through different lens, bringing out more issues than would be uncovered by just applying a single paradigm. On the other hand, it permits to explore the disparity and interaction or complementarity amongst paradigms, thereby resulting in a more holistic view of the phenomena (ibid.).

The process of research, as previously outlined, briefly consists of defining a phenomena and subsequently moving on to theory building. Through metatriangulation, the different theories to apply are defined, revealing disparity and complementarity and then bracketing and bridging them.<sup>19</sup> After theory is built (Section

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<sup>18</sup> Based on Burrell and Morgan (1979), Lewis and Grimes (1999) define “*paradigms as tightly coupled ideologies, ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies that guide mode of organisational analysis*” (1999:674). A paradigm is currently less sophisticated than a theory.

<sup>19</sup> Bracketing paradigms entails making the assumptions and selective focus of each perspective explicit, thereby accentuating theoretical discrepancies and aiding awareness, use and critique of alternative perspectives (Lewis and Grimes, 1999). On the other hand, bridging paradigms entails suggesting transition zones, i.e. theoretical views that transcend paradigms (ibid.)

4), the process moves on to data work and analysis using the theory frame (Sections 5 and 6)

### 2.2.2 Choice of Theory

Traditionally, research on M&E has found its theoretical ground on the classic rational organisational paradigm (Albaek, 1996; Everett, 2003). With the advancement of scientific development, utilising scientific knowledge proved the best devise to research and develop public policy (Albaek, 1998). Consistent with the then prevailing view of the world,<sup>20</sup> the rational paradigm, which was hereby a reflection of dominant paradigms in physical and biologic sciences, emerged as the most appropriate model for explaining social phenomena, including organisational reality (Albaek, 1998; Everett, 2003). Nevertheless, expectations of a rational behaviour as well as instrumental utilisation of evaluations proved unrealistic after a while, becoming clear that evaluation, and organisations in general, ought to be understood from different angles.

Widely suggested in the literature is the use of political and institutional perspectives drawn from organisational theory to complement the analysis of the use and purpose of M&E in organisations (Albaek, 1996; Dahler-Larsen, 1998; Schaumburg-Müller, 2005). Yet, the rational instrumental model has great explanatory power concerning how M&E systems are used (Carlsson et al., 1999). In his article of 1996 "*Why all this Evaluation?*"<sup>21</sup> Albaek demonstrates how all three theoretical approaches can be extremely helpful to uncover why organisations conduct M&E and how these systems are used. Therefore, in Albaek's opinion, organisations can still be seen as either rational systems, political systems or institutional systems. Other researchers prefer to view organisations through the lenses of institutional theory. For instance, Dahler-Larsen finds that institutional theory uncovers and accounts for all aspects of organisational reality, making other organisational perspectives unnecessary. In particular, through his article "*Beyond Non-utilisation of Evaluations: An Institutional Perspective*," (1998) he defends that an institutional perspective, firstly, accounts for the blossoming of evaluation procedures and, secondly, help us understanding empirical findings about the (non-) utilisation of evaluations. Although Dahler-Larsen acknowledges that a political perspective could help us explain some of the empirical patterns suggested in his article, he asserts that both classic rational and political

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<sup>20</sup> A positivist view of the world was the dominant view in the mid-twentieth century. Through positivism, "science was seen as the way to get at truth, to understand the world well enough so that we might predict and control it." <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/positivism.php> (February 2008).

<sup>21</sup> The full name of Albaek's article is "Why all this Evaluation? Theoretical notes and empirical observations of the functions and growth of evaluation, with Denmark as an illustrative case."

approaches fail in addressing why evaluation procedures have grown and diffused in the past decades. Scott (1987), on the other hand, opts for formulating institutional reasoning neither as an alternative nor in opposition to rational or political premises, but rather as a complement to contextualise them.

Schaumburg-Müller (2005), as Albaek (1996), writes in his article “*Use of Aid Evaluations from an Organisational Perspective*” that all organisational theories are relevant for the analysis of evaluation of foreign aid, the focus of his study. Most importantly, both researchers hold that these organisational perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Contrarily, the intersection of them can elucidate organisational behaviour. Yet, the difference in theoretical premises means that the adoption of a particular theoretical view will determinate how organisations (and the use of evaluation) is perceived (Albaek, 1996; Schaumburg-Müller, 2005). The researchers conclude that by adopting different perspectives to observe the use of M&E, we can suggest different interpretations, revealing more aspects of the issue in question. Most importantly, they round off by saying that the understanding of particular facets of M&E and organisations in general is enhanced by specific organisational perspectives.

Moreover, as part of his conclusion, Albaek (1996) points out that the rational, political and institutional organisational perspectives fail to capture all functions of evaluation. One of the most prominent functions and widely reflected in the literature, the so-called conceptual utilisation, does not fit inside any of the organisational theories discussed. As Albaek states, “*this suggests that we must supplement our theoretical and empirical analyses of evaluation utilisation with other perspectives of organisational theory*” (1996:28). The proposition of Schaumburg-Müller (2005) is to include learning organisation theory, which he believes might as well contribute to an understanding of how M&E is used. The adoption of such perspective seems appropriate given that the focus of research is on the use of M&E with regard to its learning role.

Literature on organisational learning is covered by a variety of disciplinary perspectives. Easterby-Smith (1997) underscores six perspectives,<sup>22</sup> each of them offering a different ontology on the social phenomena that are at the centre of

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<sup>22</sup> Easterby-Smith (1997) reviews the main academic perspectives that have provided significant insights on organisational learning. Those, drawn from different disciplines, are: psychology and organisational development; management science; strategy; production management; sociology and organisational theory; and cultural anthropology.

organisational learning. In particular, the learning perspectives drawn from management sciences, sociology and organisation theory offer relevant contributions and ideas to this study. While the former is chiefly concerned with “*the gathering and processing of information in, and about, the organisation,*” (Easterby-Smith, 1997:1090) the later is focusing on “*the social systems and organisational structures where learning may be embedded, and which may effect organisational learning.*” (Easterby-Smith, 1997:1093) Similarly important is a new tradition on literature on the learning organisation, “*concerned with implementation and the characteristics of organisations which are able to effectively share and use knowledge to achieve organisational goals*” (Pasteur, 2004:7). This perspective is aspirational, attempting to describe the organisational ideal by which maximisation of learning is attained (Pasteur, 2004). This perspective, although less analytic, provides interesting insights on implementation issues.

To sum up, and following the discussion here introduced, the application of organisational theory for the analysis of Results-based M&E proves to be very relevant. In particular, the use of all theories (rational, political, institutional and learning organisation) in combination rather than exclusively, certainly sets a comprehensive and holistic framework of assessment. The exploration of all perspectives and their views on organisational reality and on the role of Results-based M&E shall allow to assemble, relate and interplay them in a solid framework, albeit disparity in theoretical reasoning.<sup>23</sup> A specific perspective might be more relevant at uncovering specific aspects of Results-based M&E. In addition, the analysis of a specific element of M&E processes through a particular perspective might suggest an interpretation, which might be complemented with a different interpretation drawn from another perspective.

In essence, applying all theories shall let us arrive at an enlarged and enlightened understanding of the organisational phenomena at study, as well as the paradigms employed. The Analysis Section will strive to juxtapose and relate paradigm interpretations, and the Conclusion Section will finally round off with a brief debate on the explanatory power of the different perspectives.

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<sup>23</sup> A more detailed discussion upon the different organisational theory perspectives, their relation, applicability and limitations, is undertaken in Chapter 4 Theoretical Framework: A Model to Grasp Development Aid Organisations.

Finally, the point of departure for the review of the different perspectives is the articles suggested in this chapter. Therefore, the theoretical review<sup>24</sup> is to be based on the work of Albaek (1996, 1998), Dahler-Larsen (1998), Schaumburg-Müller (2005), Scott (1987, 2004), and Easterby-Smith (1997), amongst others.

## 2.3 Research Design

This paper is a *case study* of how Results-based M&E is used at UNDP in relation to project and programme interventions, and how different variables drawn from a variety of organisational theories uncover the use of these frameworks. Case studies, utilised in a wide range of social science disciplines, are defined by researcher Robert K. Yin as an empirical inquiry that examines in-depth a contemporary phenomenon within its “real-life” context (Yin, 2003). The case is then a single specific phenomenon that is bounded by time, place and event or activity (Creswell, 1998).

One of the major strengths of a case study methodology is that it allows for the use of multiple data collection methods<sup>25</sup> to explore the case (Creswell, 1998). The choice of these methods relates to the nature of the case and the research question. Both the nature of the case and the research question (containing ‘How’ and ‘Why’) demand an *explanatory* type of research. Analytic or explanatory research aims at understanding phenomena by uncovering causal relations among them. It explains how Results-based M&E is used in UNDP in particular at the project and programme level, and why these frameworks fail to significantly enhance effectiveness. This is based on an understanding of organisational behaviour through different theoretical lens. Yet, the process of study has on the whole involved other types of research. In particular *descriptive* research has been used to identify and gather information on the characteristics of the phenomena. This has in turn allowed to identify UNDP as a **critical case** that can assist to answer the Research Question and generalise from UNDP’s experience to international development agencies. The argumentation behind UNDP’s selection to build the case study has to do with the fact that the agency has been immersed on an on-going process of rigorous reform to RBM for more than ten years. Throughout these years, mainstreaming results through the

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<sup>24</sup> Section 4 Theoretical Framework: A Model to Grasp Development Aid Organisations.

<sup>25</sup> Methods refer to research instruments, procedures or techniques employed to collect and analyse data (Crotty, 1998).

agency and its programmes/projects has been a key priority as well as the implementation of tools and systems, development of guidelines, etc. geared towards RBM. Additionally, a number of evaluations have been undertaken to assess the progress on implementation and make recommendations in view of enhancing the approach. Herein, UNDP can be considered a critical case in the sense that if RBM and related M&E mechanisms are not satisfactorily implemented in UNDP, they will not be in any other international development agency as it is UNDP the agency that has given the highest priority to RBM.<sup>26</sup>

## **2.4 Empirical Data**

The methods to generate empirical data related to this type of research are mostly of *qualitative* nature, allowing for direct experience of the phenomenon. *Secondary data*, on the one hand, consists of *written documents*. The majority of these documents have been directly downloaded from the official websites of international development organisations (UN, UNDP, European Commission - EuropeAid, CIDA, SIDA, DANIDA, etc), international finance institutions (the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, etc.) and other institutions (OECD/DAC, private consultancies, evaluation websites, etc.). These documents include project documents, reviews and evaluations, annual reports, minutes from meetings and workshops, strategic plans, etc. Other documentation has been directly obtained through the interviewees. Finally, a variety of reliable websites providing free access to information on international development issues (e.g. Eldis and Development Gateway) has been accessed. This data is mainly of qualitative nature and seldomly contains quantitative information.

*Primary data*, on the other hand, has been generated through multiple qualitative methods to help develop understanding of the case. These are *participant observations* and *interviews*.

The interviews conducted were semi-structured with an open-ended character: the questionnaire served as a guide for the discussion, leaving room to elaborate on whatever matters the interviewee felt appropriate. The interviewees were, firstly, identified thanks to my personal and professional contact to certain UNDP staff and, secondly, approached via email to agree on a date and time for the interview. A document containing background information on the Thesis was always enclosed to

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<sup>26</sup> See as well chapter 2.5.2 on Validity.

the email. The interviews lasted in between 25 and 40 minutes and were undertaken through online telecommunication software such as Skype.

The following table (Table 1) lists the interviewees, while summarising the relevance and outcome of the interviews.

**Table 1 Interviewees chart**

Name and position	Background	Relevance	Outcome	Reference
<b>John Patterson</b> Policy Advisor   Bureau for Development Policy   UNDP	Working in UNDP for 5 years in connection with Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures at UNDP. The last year and a half has provided consultancy for the development of national implementation capacities in a variety of countries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large experience with and active participant of the implementation of RBM in the UNDP</li> <li>Involved in the development of UNDP project and programme management procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>General information about the implementation of RBM at UNDP and the development industry in general</li> <li>Information on the use of M&amp;E systems for decision making and policy development at UNDP</li> <li>Another contact in UNDP (Arun Kashyap)</li> </ul>	Interview 1
<b>Andrew Russell</b> Deputy Director   Operations Support Group   Executive Office   UNDP	Working for many years for UNDP in a variety of country offices and its headquarters, and appointed Deputy Director of the Operations Support Group in March 2007. The Operations Support Group has had since 2000 the responsibility of coordinating the RBM process in UNDP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involved from the very beginning in the design and development of RBM in the UNDP</li> <li>Since 2000, the responsibility of coordinating the RBM process in UNDP has been assigned to the Operations Support Group, of which he is Deputy Director.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relevance on the importance of assessing M&amp;E systems at the project/programme level</li> <li>Information on specific interventions of UNDP and possible points of departure for analytical study.</li> <li>New contacts in UNDP</li> </ul>	Interview 2
<b>Arun Kashyap</b> Senior Policy Advisor   Private Sector Division   UNDP	Working as senior advisor for UNDP within the field of Private Sector Development since 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involved in Private Sector Development for many years and participating in the development of UNDP's interventions in this area</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Importance of undertaking M&amp;E so as to trigger changes at the policy level.</li> <li>Discussion upon main stakeholders of development interventions and, specifically, M&amp;E</li> </ul>	Interview 3
<b>Yee Woo Guo</b> Acting Head, Inspections and Evaluation Division   OIOS   UN	Working in UN for many years at the OIOS with Evaluation and with experience at UNDP as Assistant Resident Representative in Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluation specialist at UN</li> <li>Advisor to UNDP in Evaluation related work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-depth perspective of M&amp;E at the UN system</li> <li>Pitfalls of the RBM system at UN and UNDP</li> </ul>	Interview 4
<b>Karin Attstroem</b> Senior Consultant   International Consulting   Ramboll Management	Working as senior consultant for Ramboll Management for more than 6 years in the field of project and programme M&E and RBM (methodological supervisor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Has provided consultancy services for a variety of evaluations undertaken on behalf of SIDA, EC and DANIDA.</li> <li>Involved in a variety of performance measurement assignments undertaken for UNDP</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Documents of relevance for the study with regard to methodology issues and similar research</li> <li>New contacts (Susan Tout)</li> </ul>	Interview 5
<b>Jonas Kjaer</b> Consultant and	Worked for UNDP more than 10 years, as Aid Coordination Advisor at	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Having implemented a variety of projects, he holds large</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Critical view on the implementation and use of Results-based</li> </ul>	Interview 6

Owner at Kjaer Consult	the Maldives and as Resource Mobilization Specialist. Presently working as consultant at Capacitate A/S.	experience with M&E related activities at the operational level	M&E at the project and programme level. • New contacts	
<b>Susan Tout</b> Manager   Results Secretariat   Operations Policy and Country Services   The World Bank	Working in the Results Secretariat of the World Bank for many years.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has wide experience in reforms towards RBm, including at the agency level.</li> <li>• Consultant for International Organisations in RBM processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principles, practices and techniques of performance management</li> </ul>	Interview 7

A common strength of the interviews is the disposition of the interviewees to share information and collaborate providing supportive documentation. Another strength relates to the sharp focus on the case study topic, thus all interviews being rather targeted. Nevertheless, a major limitation is the inappropriateness of conducting interviews through on-line calls. That rendered impossible to capture body language and other valuable observations. In addition, conducting on-line calls via skype rendered impossible to record the interviews, which can be very helpful in terms of providing authentic statements. Recording, however, may make the interviewee suspicious and less trustful, thus less open at sharing information. The interviews were therefore annotated and immediately summarised, assuming the risk that some aspects may have been forgotten and notes could be misinterpreted. In general, with regard to objectivity, the interviews to the possible extent have not been altered, and are thus free from bias. Moreover, the views of the interviewees do not seem to be affected by any specific factor, though UNDP staff interviewed have in general offered rather optimistic opinions on the implementation and use of Results-based M&E at UNDP.

In addition, another important qualitative method used is participant observation, which allows for deep insights into contexts and behaviour.<sup>27</sup> Participant observation was undertaken through my internship at the UN Headquarters during fall 2005. During this internship, I had informal conversations and interaction with UN and UNDP staff in issues related to program and project Results-based M&E. These conversations and interactions were recorded by means of field notes. However, an important disadvantage of participant observation is that it is an inherently subjective exercise. Objectivity might be affected but to the extent possible the data has been filtered out of personal biases.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/> (February, 2008).



## 2.5 Limitations of the Methodology

The research methods as well as the empirical data determine variables such as reliability and validity.

### 2.5.1 Reliability

The reliability<sup>28</sup> of this research is acceptable for a variety of reasons. Regarding secondary sources, availability of the documentation is in general not problematic, since most of it publicly available. Having used multiple sources of data in a triangulating fashion,<sup>29</sup> increases the reliability of the data collected. In turn, triangulation of data has served to corroborate the data gathered from other sources, proving that consistency is high.

Regarding primary data, one major shortcoming as stated before has been the impossibility to tape interviews. Transcription has thus not been done, failing to document interviews in a proper way, which in turn hampers repeatability. Acknowledging other weaknesses of interviewing such as response bias and incomplete recollection, interviews have been to the possible extent verified and supported by means of secondary data.

### 2.5.2 Validity

The use of multiple sources of data is a way to guarantee construct validity,<sup>30</sup> as Yin suggests (2003). The current study uses multiple sources of evidence (interviews, documents, participant observations, etc.), reinforcing validity. In this regard, a wide range of experts have been interviewed, and the comparison of their statements determines consistency. A great bulk of data is also of secondary nature, involving a risk of reporting bias. It has been sought to minimise this risk through the use of a large number of sources, securing validity of the data.

Albeit the positive influence of adopting a multiple-case study design on external validity, the study is based on a **single-case study**, thus focusing solely on UNDP' s experience in implementing and using Results-based M&E. This single focus can be mainly explained by limitations in resources and time, in particular for exploring and thoroughly understanding the dynamics of several international development

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<sup>28</sup> Reliability refers to the quality of measurement, understood as the "consistency" or "repeatability" of the measures used. <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/reliabl.php> (February, 2008).

<sup>29</sup> In this light, triangulation is understood as *data source triangulation*, i.e. when the looks up for data in different sources to remain the same. <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/reliabl.php> (February, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Validity refers to the best available approximation to the truth of a given proposition, inference or conclusion. <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/reliabl.php> (February, 2008) .

organisations. The dependence on a unique study generally limits the possibilities of providing a generalising conclusion applicable to different contexts. However, it has been previously argued that the selection of UNDP as the case-study for this research is strategic and critical. As Flyvbjerg (2006) maintains, *“in social science, too, the strategic choice of case may greatly add to the generalisability of a case study”* (2006:226). The selection is strategic and critical for a variety of reasons.

Firstly, the adoption of RBM in UNDP goes back to the mid 1990s and is seen as a logical continuation of earlier initiatives. Thus, the history of RBM in UNDP is long enough to draw solid conclusions upon the use of this management framework. Secondly, the organisation has invested heavily in the development of new RBM systems since 1998, the year that reforms formally started. That is a sign of strong commitment to RBM, having positioned UNDP as one of the most advanced of all international development agencies as regards the implementation of this paradigm. Thirdly, the multilateral nature of the organisation puts in evidence the confluence of multiple political actors with manifold interests affecting the outcome of Results-based M&E of interventions in connection with Private Sector Development, Good Governance, etc. On the other hand, the prevailing institutional environment, imbued by expectations on results and demands for accountability, shapes and determines how Results-based M&E is structured, organised and used.

It is then interesting to note the emphasis that has been given to the adoption of the RBM approach in UNDP, becoming in fact one key strategic area on the organisation's efforts to achieve the MDGs. Recurrent fads within the development community have led UNDP to reorganise around results its way of working<sup>31</sup>, despite continuous signs of relatively poor performance and developmental impact. Hence, it appears very relevant to understand how UNDP is monitoring and evaluating around results. Herein, although the research is based on a single-case study, the critical value of UNDP renders it possible to go for Yin's analytical generalisation, i.e. moving understanding beyond UNDP to multilateral development organisations.

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<sup>31</sup> Interview 2 - Andrew Russell.

### 3 UNCONVERGING THE USE OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION IN DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION

After having defined the methodological path for this research, this section reviews existing literature on the emergence of the RBM paradigm, firstly in the public sector and secondly in the development aid industry. The final chapters of the section will additionally provide a common understanding of what is Results-based M&E and what purposes or usages they serve, focusing in the development context.

#### 3.1 *The Raise of a Paradigm*

The emergence of RBM comes as result of an evolution in the thought and management approach to public sector performance measurement after a new rise of public concern and change on policy rhetoric (Meier, 2003). It is, however, necessary to look into more detail at the evolution of modern public sector management in order to gain a greater understanding.

At the outset, performance measurement, defined as the effects of organisation action that are measurable, is a field characterised by undergoing change in which methodological debates and contradictory criticisms are a constant (Hailey and Sorgenfrei, 2004; Paton, 2003). Accordingly, performance systems tend to be constantly revised across the public, the private and non-profit sector.

Additionally, measurement of performance in the public sector (as well as non-profit organisations) is far more complicated than in the private sector. According to Kanter and Summers (1994: 220), *“these organisations have defined themselves not around their financial results but around their missions or the services they offer.”* The quality of these services is differently judged by stakeholders, and subsequently, “doing well” or not becomes a matter of societal values, complicating measurement even more (Kanter and Summers, 1994; Paton, 2003). The complexity of the issue and the fact that public and non-profit organisations currently operate in an environment imbued by expectations of measurement has led to an increasing interest in how best design and apply new and alternative performance measurement frameworks (Hailey and Sorgenfrei, 2004).

Traditionally, performance measurement in the public sector has focused its attention on the provision of inputs through human, technical and financial resources (Meier, 2003). Nonetheless, in recent decades the public sector has finally shifted its focus towards a results-orientation, shift that has been mostly driven by an influential private sector.

### **3.1.1 The emergence of Results-oriented Public Sector Management**

There is a significant evolution of the strategies in performance measurement from the 1960s until the emergence of the Results-based paradigm. In the late 1960s, the emphasis was on input management with approaches such as Planning, Programming and Budgeting Systems (PPBS), which focused mainly on financial planning and accounting (Meier, 2003). During the 1970s and 1980s, the most prominent approach was the Programme Management By Activity (PMBA), which combined several tools and techniques derived from construction engineering and systems management, due to donors' high involvement in physical infrastructure and industrial development projects (Meier, 2003). However, already in the late 1960s, some attempts were made by Western governments at using target-linked performance indicators, in connection with approaches such as Management-by-Objectives (MBO) (Hailey and Sorgenfrei, 2004; Meier, 2003). MBO was first popularised by Peter Drucker<sup>32</sup> and its most common application became the Logical Framework (LFA).<sup>33</sup> The LFA has its origins in 1960s in military and space programme planning (Hailey and Sorgenfrei, 2004) and was first adopted in the development sector by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Since its conception there have been multiple variations and adaptations. Nevertheless, the fundamental structure remains unchanged and it is still the preferred management tool of many bilateral and multilateral development agencies. (Crawford and Bryce, 2003; Poate, 1997) An alternative version to LFA is the Objectives-Oriented Planning Project (ZOPP), which includes standard procedures for participatory analysis, problem solving and setting of goals.<sup>34</sup> (Meier, 2003; Hailey and Sorgenfrei, 2004)

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<sup>32</sup> A recommended lecture on the origins of the LFA is: Nichols, P. (1999) *An introduction to the logframe approach: course workbook and materials*, Melbourne: IDSS.

<sup>33</sup> The Logical Framework is often referred to as the Logical Framework Analysis or LFA, and logframe. Hereafter will be referred as LFA. The LFA is a planning and management tool that involves identifying inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts, as well as their causal relationship, indicators, and the assumptions or risks that may influence success or failure. The tool can therefore facilitate planning, execution and evaluation of development interventions (OECD-DAC, 2002)

<sup>34</sup> For more detailed information see for instance GTZ (1997) *Objectives-oriented project planning (ZOPP). A Planning Guide for New and Ongoing Projects and Programmes*.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, growing demands for better and more responsive public services as well as greater efficiency – amongst other factors - induced the New Public Management (NPM) reforms in OECD countries. (Hailey and Sorgenfrei, 2004) The reforms introduced new management techniques and practices, which involved market-type mechanisms related to the private sector, aiming at further fostering a performance-oriented culture within the public sector. (Larbi, 1999) The components and characteristics of the NPM paradigm, labelled as well the “new managerialism”, have evolved over the years. For example, at the very beginning, a main concern was providing high-quality service delivery, which led to the introduction of tools and techniques such as Quality Control/Quality Assurance, ISO, Accreditation and Total Quality Management. (Meier, 2003) During the 1990s, public focus shifted on to issues of accountability and transparency and, in particular, evidence for demonstrable results. Simultaneously, greater demands for impact and effectiveness led to a renewed interest on performance indicators in an attempt to “demonstrate value for money” in public services. (Binnendijk, 2000; Meier, 2003; Hailey and Sorgenfrei, 2004) This additionally implied a gradual shift from inputs, activities and outputs to outcome achievement, eventually resulting in the development of RBM (Binnendijk, 2000; Meier, 2003; Hailey and Sorgenfrei, 2004). This approach is, therefore, closely linked to earlier attempts to manage by objectives, improve services, as well as increase accountability by politicians and public sector managers. Hence, the RBM paradigm was not a revolution in public sector management thought, neither emerged as a revelation for Western countries .

Nevertheless, it did come as a revelation for most of the developing countries, with unlike evolution of strategies within public sector management (Kusek et. al, 2005; Meier, 2003). For many countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia, NPM reforms took place in the context of structural adjustments, which were triggered by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) after experiencing large economic and fiscal crises (Larbi, 1999).

Today, the introduction of RBM strategies in developing countries is still at a very incipient stage and only became a policy priority issue with the setting of the MDGs in 2000 at the United Nations Millennium Summit. A previous effort at establishing global goals in development co-operation date from the late 1990s with the publication “*Shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Contribution of Development Cooperation.*” (OECD 1996 in Meier, 2003: 4) Managing for results did, however, not come to the forefront of the development agenda until the setting of today’s very

popular MDGs. (White, 2005) The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, in March 2005, has given a new impulse to the focus on managing for results, pledging to reduce by one-third “*the proportion of countries without transparent and monitorable performance assessment frameworks*”<sup>35</sup>, by the year 2010.

### **3.1.2 Results-based Management in the Development Aid Industry**

Within the RBM agenda, public managers are expected to focus attention on results achievement, defining expected results, measuring performance regularly and objectively, learning from performance information to ultimately improve efficiency and effectiveness. All of these are similarly expected from managers of development cooperation organisations. Yet, there is a variety of differences emerging when applying a RBM approach in the aid industry. These differences principally stem from the distinct nature of the environment in which development organisations work, hence posing additional challenges to overcome when implementing RBM frameworks.

Firstly, multilateral and bilateral development organisations work in a multiplicity of countries -with very varied contexts-, and across many sectors, in partnership with a variety of stakeholders that range from governments and ministries, private sector, NGOs and other development organisations. The particular nature of their work significantly complicates the establishment of effective RBM frameworks and systems. In the first place, it raises the issues of *aggregating* and *attributing* results. The problem of aggregating results across projects, sectors and country programmes is commonly faced when undertaking regular reporting and comparative analysis (Scott, 2004; Binnenjdik, 2000). Developing effective systems that permit the collection of information that can be meaningfully aggregated and compared remains a challenge for the majority of development organisations (Universalia, 2004). In relation to aggregation is the issue of *additionality*, referring to other effects resulting from the support to a developing country portfolio of interventions that add (or not) ‘value’ to the overall outcome. Seldom, this additional effects can be crucial for a particular project or programme’s implementation.

In a development sector where joint programmes and inter-agency collaboration are increasingly gaining importance, the major problem for the assessment of performance is attribution of results to a single development organisation; that is,

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<sup>35</sup> The Paris Declaration is available at many web sites, including:  
[http://www.oecd.org/document/18/0,2340,en\\_2649\\_3236398\\_35401554\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/18/0,2340,en_2649_3236398_35401554_1_1_1_1,00.html)

establishing a link between what the agency does and the outcomes it hopes to influence<sup>36</sup> (White, 2005). Attribution of final impacts and development (observable) effects is extremely complex since impacts and effects represent “*the collective performance of government, donors and others*” (Scott, 2004:4). These impacts and effects are, in addition, largely influenced by many external factors (Binnendijk, 2000). Consequently, attribution becomes problematic and its analysis requires more in-depth assessments and evaluations rather than simply undertaking performance monitoring. A common highlighted problem is as well this of alignment, which refers to whether project-level gathered data explains performance as measured against the agency’s strategic objectives (White, 2005). Finally, the nature of development work implies that organisations have to demonstrate accountability to foreign and numerous stakeholders, in addition to the usual responsibility to domestic stakeholders such as the parliament, their boards and the taxpayers who finance their activities (White, 2005; Binnendijk, 2000).

Secondly, development organisations less and less provide direct service delivery, increasingly focusing on areas such as institutional capacity development and policy reform and implementation, and frequently setting goals such as democracy and good governance, which implies a social transformation or human development. In these areas and for these goals, establishing appropriate strategies and tools (especially, defining relevant performance indicators) to measure progress is far more complicated and notionally complex (Crawford and Bryce, 2003; Binnendijk, 2000; UNDP, 2000). Moreover, the goals and development objectives set by these organisations are generally of a long-term nature, implying further problems with attribution.

Finally, the effectiveness of RBM tools, in particular those related to M&E, depends to a large extent on the use of such tools by their partner countries (Poate, 1997). Broad geographic and cultural separation, and uncertain socio-political and economic environments amongst many other factors, frequently render the use of these systems less appropriate in developing countries. Even when these tools are in place, the characteristically deficient institutional and technological capacities of their partners to collect performance information significantly hampers development agencies RBM frameworks (Binnendijk, 2000). The importance of a reliable system for data gathering and analysis is stressed by many (Kusek et al., 2005; Flint, 2003;

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<sup>36</sup> Attribution is defined by the OECD DAC (2002) as “*the ascription of a causal link between observed (or expected to observe) changes and a specific intervention*” and “*refers to that which is to be credited for . . . the results achieved.*”

Binnendijk, 2002; Poate, 1997). Therefore, development agencies confront the twin challenge of implementing effective internal RBM systems along with sustainable and solid systems in their partner countries (Poate, 1997).

Although the introduction of RBM in development organisations is especially challenging, the approach is nowadays widely used by the development community (Binnendijk, 2002). The reasons behind the emergence of the paradigm were similar to those of the public sector: during the 1980s, or the 'lost decade of development' as many would label later, increasing questions on the effectiveness of aid were asked, leading to a crisis of public confidence on development agencies; in addition, donor 'aid fatigue' became a growing problem among many OECD countries, hastening even stronger pressures on development agencies to show achievement of development results (Hailey and Sorgenfrei, 2004; Binnendijk, 2002).

It is interesting to note that in development cooperation, the definition of and agreement on the MDGs<sup>37</sup> gave as well unprecedented rise to the RBM paradigm because of its emphasis on results achievement (Kusek et. al, 2005). Measuring progress towards the achievement of the MDGs further implied the implementation and use of Results-based M&E systems by the entire development community so as to answer the question "*To what extent are agencies' interventions bringing about progress on MDG-related indicators?*" (White, 2005:1).

With the MDGs and its promise to attain development results by 2015, development agencies are facing even greater challenges as regards implementation of Results-based M&E. Until the MDGs, M&E had been traditionally situated at the individual project level. Today, M&E needs to demonstrate the contribution of aid at the country and agency level rather than on the direct reach of the intervention (Picciotto, 2007; Van den Berg, 2005).

### **3.1.3 Management Reforms in main International Development Organisations**

Overall, reforms towards a results-led approach to management in the context of development cooperation were triggered by external pressures. Very frequently, the reforms have been mandated by government legislation or executive orders requiring RBM approaches, as it is the case for USAID and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). For both USAID and CIDA, reforms came as a result of

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<sup>37</sup> This process started already in the mid 1990s with the publication "*Shaping the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Contribution of Development Cooperation*", which was the first attempt to define and agree on a set of common global development goals (OECD 1996 in Meier, 2003:4).



increasing political pressures to provide results-performance information to their respective governments and become more accountable to the public (Universalia, 2004; Binnendijk, 2002).<sup>38</sup> In any case, these organisations were pioneers concerning the development and use of an RBM system, with reforms commencing in 1993 and 1994, respectively.

The reforms have been generally gradual, with many of the development agencies still in the process of developing and implementing RBM systems and frameworks (Universalia, 2004; Binnendijk, 2002; Poate, 1997). At the project level, performance measurement tools, which are mostly based on the analytical structure of the logframe, have been, in general, easily and effectively instituted by all development organisations (Binnendijk, 2002; Poate, 1997). The reason why this is so has to do with the fact that the logframe has been in use in development cooperation for planning purposes since the late 1960s. With the advent of RBM, development agencies modified the LFA so as to make it more results-oriented, simply shifting the focus from rather short-term objectives to impact and outcome.

Hence, the real challenge of reform lies on higher organisational levels such as the country program level<sup>39</sup> and the agency-wide level (Binnendijk, 2002).<sup>40</sup> At the country program level, UNDP and USAID provide appealing examples on implementation of RBM systems (Universalia, 2004; Binnendijk, 2002). At the agency level, only CIDA has undertaken such wide-ranging reforms and, currently, USAID is attempting to implement an agency-wide strategic plan to reform (Universalia, 2004). The World Bank and UNDP, despite not having undertaken comprehensive reforms to that extent, produce more analytical reviews of development effectiveness than simple annual reports. The Annual Review of Development Effectiveness (ARDE), and the Multi-Year Funding Framework (MYFF) and Results-Oriented Annual Report (ROAR) respectively, represent attempts to summarise agency performance based on aggregation of results at project and programme level (White, 2005). Meta-evaluation is then used to offer a summary of portfolio performance.

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<sup>38</sup> More specifically, the reform in USAID came as a response to the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), a law enacted in 1993, which required that every government agency implemented a coordinated strategic planning, implementation and monitoring framework. (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/mgmt-gpra/gplaw2m.html>) CIDA, on the other hand, started reforms in 1994 following pressures from the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) to demonstrate results.

<sup>39</sup> At the country level, the unit of analysis is a wide range of projects and other activities undertaken by different development agencies and other partner organisations over a relatively long period. Consequently, Results-based systems at the country program level are much more comprehensive.

<sup>40</sup> The agency-wide, corporate or global level is the third and last level at which performance measurement systems can be established.

It is, however, important to note that even if these organisations have embraced reforms towards a Results-led approach to management, the effective use of the system is dubious in the majority of the cases. For instance, according to Universalialia (2004), CIDA and USAID, both organisations holding some ten years of experimentation with the implementation of RBM systems, appear to face ownership problems of the system introduced, in particular with regard to the usefulness of performance information and its use for management improvement.<sup>41</sup>

Building upon lessons learnt from earlier implementers of the RBM system, UNDP's reform placed stress upon having an internally-driven and participatory approach to the development of the RBM model so as to address ownership issues (Universalialia, 2004). The RBM system was thereby embraced by its staff at all organisational levels from the beginning, even though reforms had been primarily triggered by external pressures as well<sup>42</sup>. Today, the example of UNDP is considered a relative success of implementation of a Results-led approach to management, holding one of the most comprehensive models amongst the development agencies, according to Universalialia (2004) and Flint (2003).

The World Bank, contrarily to UNDP, has not taken yet a major shift of emphasis on results, despite its endorsement of the MDGs and strong pressures for accountability, and continues to measure the quality of the outputs (Universalialia, 2004). More results-orientation in the Bank's performance framework has only been attained after the initiative for "Better Measuring, Monitoring, and Managing for Development Results" was launched in 2002.<sup>43</sup> Today, the World Bank's model consists of a corporate scorecard that attempts to assess, measure and report on agency-wide performance, that is, the organisation's progress towards poverty reduction (Universalialia, 2004; Binnendijk, 2002). The model has proven to be complex and cumbersome (since it

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<sup>41</sup> USAID's initial model of RBM reporting incorporated around 500 specific strategic objectives (SO) in 125 countries and was intended to report at both the country program and agency-wide level. Having recognised the complexity of the system, USAID undertook a reform in 2001 that aimed at simplifying the system, mainly by limiting the scope of performance reporting. Amongst the major changes undertaken, reporting on SO was limited to whether each SO was outreached, met or, not met. Indicators were, in addition, reduced to only those that could be summed up into global statements about agency-wide achievements. (Universalialia, 2004) Therefore, with the new system, the amount of annual performance information generated is less.

<sup>42</sup> In the late 1990s, budgets were cut off by 30%. At the same time, UNDP was under pressure to downsize the number of programmes being implemented by the agency. (Universalialia, 2004; UNDP, 2000) Under these circumstances, UNDP commenced the formalisation of a RBM approach following the Administrator's call for the establishment of "an overall planning and results management system in UNDP". (Annual Report of the Administrator, 1997)

<sup>43</sup> As part of the initiative, the World Bank convened an International Roundtable in its headquarters in 2002. At this two-day roundtable, development practitioners had been invited to discuss upon current efforts and related practical issues confronted by developing countries and development agencies. The roundtable further included discussion upon the approaches of the agencies to develop results-based corporate cultures and incentives. A Second Roundtable was organised in 2004 and brought together representatives from development agencies and partner countries to discuss the challenges of managing for development results at the country level. A common set of principles was endorsed at the end of this roundtable. See more information at: <http://www.mfdr.org/>

generates a drastic amount of performance information), and too much focused on reporting rather than performance measurement. Indeed, the models developed by the development agencies have, generally, given excessive importance to the need of establishing regular reporting, imposing in many cases excessive burden for the agency staff (Universalia, 2004; Poate, 1997).

Overall, the way reforms have been undertaken by the different development agencies is diverse, yet common lessons are underlined. Additionally, changes are still underway for the majority of agencies, which keep renewing and transforming their RBM systems. Different levels of commitment to and mainstreaming of the RBM approach are, in addition, appreciated. Furthermore, the models, despite sharing similarities, present different levels of complexity and varied strategic approaches to planning, implementing, and measuring performance. These approaches are, in turn, based upon the concepts of individual projects, broader country programs or agency level.

### ***3.2 The use of Results-based Monitoring and Evaluation***

As stated earlier, many international development organisations were challenged to demonstrate accountability and achievement of development results. The organisations response has been to implement performance-based systems, which emphasised on continuous performance monitoring and regular evaluation as well as reporting on results. In fact, it is agreed that Results-based M&E is to be at the centre of the framework if, by means of RBM, the aim is to eventually improve performance (Binnendijk, 2002; UNDP 2001, 2002).

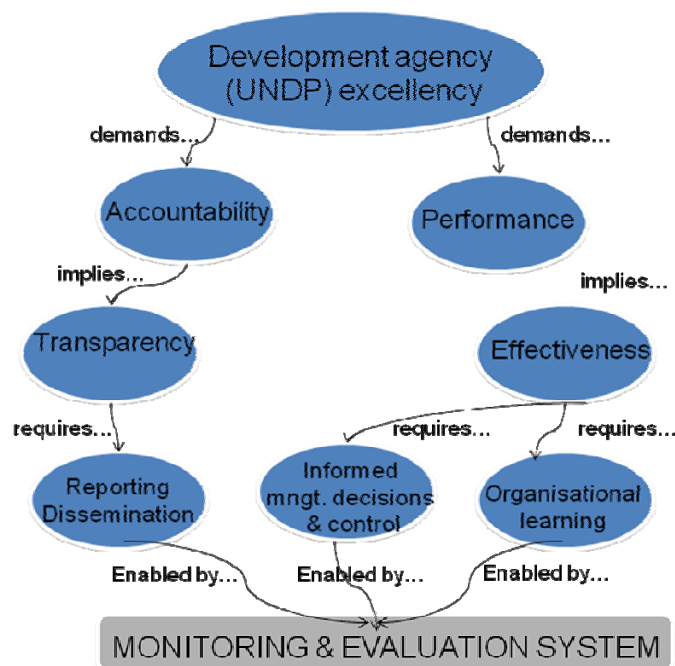
According to Cracknell (1996), until the 1970s evaluation was very much centred on the delivery of aid (or output in RBM terms) and its related processes. Following the rise on importance of performance measurement, monitoring progressively covered this task, releasing resources for the conduction of performance evaluations and impact studies. With the emergence of RBM, the focus of monitoring has further shifted from output to outcome indicators (Van den Berg, 2005). On the other hand, Van den Berg (2005) notes that evaluation in the light of RBM has moved from the study of input and output, as well as their related processes of causality, to the assessment of outcome, impact and/or long-term results.

Therefore, the essential difference between traditional M&E systems and Results-based M&E is the focus on results, i.e. outcomes and outputs. Their functions, though complementary, are distinct in nature. Whereas monitoring implies the “*systematic assessment of performance and progress of interventions towards the achievement of outcomes*”, (UNDP, 2001:5) evaluation is a systematic assessment of an on-going or completed intervention, its design, implementation and results (OECD, 2002). Hence, monitoring provides descriptive information on *where* an intervention is at any given time in relation to targets and outcomes. On the other hand, evaluation provides an analytical view, giving evidence of *how* and *why* targets and outcomes are or are not being achieved (Kusek and Rist, 2004). The role of monitoring is, thus, indispensable in providing information and data for the evaluation, which value is very much dependent (UNDP, 2001).

### **3.2.1 The purpose of Monitoring and Evaluation in a context of Results: Accountability versus *Learning***

Herein, the introduction of systems of RBM appears to have been motivated by two principal purposes: performance reporting or accountability, and performance improvement in terms of effectiveness and efficiency (Binnendijk, 2002; Meier, 2003; Universalia, 2004). Given their role in producing performance information, Results-based M&E frameworks are essential applications serving such purposes. As Kusek and Rist (2004) assert, Results-Based M&E is a powerful tool that can be used to “*help policy-makers and decision-makers track progress*”, while at the same time, “*demonstrate the impact of a given project, program or policy,*” therefore enabling accountability (2004: 1).

**Figure 3: Accountability & Effectiveness through M&E Systems**



Source: Crawford, P., and Bryce, P. (2003)

Through the first purpose, often referred as **accountability-for-results**, organisations gain transparency and can eventually be held accountable by means of evaluations focusing on the assessment of effectiveness and the achievement of specific planned results (Binnendijk, 2002; Meier, 2003). Regarding the second purpose, the emphasis is on conducting evaluations geared towards enhancing organisational learning by focus on the implementation and evolution of the intervention. Accomplishment of results is not assessed as such but in view of attributing results to factors which can be changed in order to enhance effectiveness. This is in turn enhanced through regular feedback of performance information and consolidation of lessons learned into decision making and management (i.e. strategic planning, policy formulation, oversight services, program management, financial and budget management, and human resource management). When RBM aims at improving performance, the tool is widely referred as **managing-for-results** (Binnendijk, 2002; Scott, 2004).

Results-based M&E systems, when implemented effectively, can be an institutionalised form of learning around results (Kusek and Rist, 2003; UNDP, 2002), given its great potential to generate knowledge, guide action and identify best practice. Nevertheless, Hailey and Sorgenfrei (2004) maintain that performance

information is too commonly seen as an instrument to ensure a level of accountability, rather than a basis for learning. Additionally, the incorporation of lessons to improve performance and management decisions has been uneven (Forss, Rebien and Carlsson, 2002; Van der Meer and Edelenbos; 2006). In most of the cases, performance reporting and accountability has been given priority over lesson learning. UN agencies and the European Commission, face an undeniable need to satisfy demands for accountability from their respective member states (Cracknell, 1996). Some agencies, like UNDP and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), have attempted to progressively give greater emphasis on organisational learning through RBM.

### **3.2.2 Results-based Monitoring and Evaluation and Development Effectiveness**

A results orientation is at the heart of development and organisational effectiveness.(Meier, 2003; UNDP, 2001bis, 2002). Thus, the institutional reforms to introduce a management approach based on results aim at enhancing the ability of development organisations to yield development effectiveness. By focusing on managing-for-results, international development agencies are eventually improving effectiveness. In that respect, RBM theory assumes that an effective organisation is one that uses performance information for management learning and decision-making processes. In addition, the organisation incorporates a results-orientation into all its organisational processes.

Hereby, as part of RBM, M&E with its focus on organisational learning is fundamental to enhance development performance (Meier, 2003). Evaluations are of special importance because they can help to determine causality between interventions and development processes and, on that account, provide evidence of how changes are coming about. This is crucial bearing in mind that development effectiveness is understood as the how of development, and is about the factors and conditions that help achieve results and ultimately greater impact on the lives of the poor (UNDP, 2003).

Evaluations need, however, to shift to a higher level of analysis, namely country or agency level, accordingly to the current debate on development. Broadening the scope of evaluations into results that matter for today's development practice is essential to provide a useful approximation of development effectiveness.

It is important to note, in addition, that organisational effectiveness go hand in hand with development effectiveness, yet only represents “*one side of the equation*” as phrased by UNDP (2001bis: 9). According to UNDP (2001bis), organisational effectiveness only aims at “*measuring progress toward the time-bound objectives that an organisation sets for itself,*” (2001bis: 9) whereas development effectiveness is a measure of development and progress towards common goals, i.e. MDGs.

All in all, results-oriented M&E can help to frame core discussions and challenges of development effectiveness and organisational change. This tool provides good evidence in the matter, as long as the informational use of M&E is stressed over the control aspects, “*that is its value for problem identification, process improvement, logistical coordination, mutual understanding and learning*” (Paton, 2003: 43).

## **4 A THEORETICAL MODEL TO GRASP DEVELOPMENT AID ORGANISATION'S BEHAVIOUR**

As seen in previous sections, a wide range of academics and practitioners agree on the role played by Results-based M&E in fostering organisational learning and effectiveness. M&E systems permit to track progress and implement corrective measures when needed, supporting changes that can help improve decisions and policy making. On the other hand, evaluations permit to draw lessons learned and identify best practices.

Nevertheless, evidence suggests that international development agencies do not systematically use evaluative evidence in order to learn to more effectively manage for results (Forss, Rebien and Carlsson, 2002; Schaumburg-Müller, 2005; Van der Meer and Edelenbos; 2006). In fact, findings suggest that the use of M&E systems for learning purposes in development organisations may be less meaningful than its use for accountability purposes (Cracknell, 1996; Forss, Rebien and Carlsson, 2002; Universalia, 2004; Van der Meer and Edelenbos; 2006). It is additionally suggested that information on performance and lessons only supports in part changes in decision and policy making.

Hence, RBM and its related M&E frameworks have been defined as rational and instrumental tools and introduced as means for organisational learning in development organisations (Schaumburg-Müller, 2005). Nonetheless, the use of Results-based M&E, and the behaviour of development aid institutions in general, cannot be fully explained neither from a rational and/or instrumental point of view or simply using learning theory (Dahler-Larsen, 1998; Schaumburg-Müller, 2005). In consequence, other perspectives shall be applied in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the organisation's behaviour. These are the institutional and political perspectives, which are both drawn from organisational theory.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Refer to the Methodology section, Chapter 2.2.2 Choice of Theory in order to get a detailed argumentation behind the choice of theories.



Therefore, the model hereby proposed to assess the behaviour of development aid organisations is a comprehensive one that entails a set of perspectives drawn from organisational theory (rational or instrumental, political and institutional) as well as learning organisation theory. To a different extent, each of them contributes to an understanding of how organisations use M&E in development cooperation. The different perspectives of this model are presented in the following chapters.

## **4.1 Organisational Theory**

Results-based M&E is imbued but not permeated with a conventional rational aura. A less conventional but more realistic view on M&E systems is provided by political and institutional approaches. These perspectives, which are registered in organisational literature to different degrees, are subsequently introduced.

### **4.1.1 The Rational Perspective**

The rational perspective is a scientific paradigm, which emerged alongside the modern's society belief that *"an empiricism akin to that used in physics was the best device for learning political truths"* (Goodin and Klingemann, 1996, in Everett, 2003:66). The perception of M&E through a rational lens by academic researchers has for many years dominated the debate on evaluation research, since its beginnings by the half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Everett, 2003).

From a rational perspective, *"the organisation is seen as an actor fulfilling its goals on a rational way"* (Schaumburg-Müller, 2005). That means, after assessment of all possible alternatives and its consequences, a rational organisation chooses optimal decisions, securing high, efficient and effective goal achievement (Albaek, 1996). Similarly, organisational change and reforming is simply geared towards enhancing performance (Boyne et al., 2005).

In accordance with such perspective, performance information obtained from a Results-Based M&E system will permit the organisation to arrive at the optimal management decisions, undertaking the necessary changes to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Seen from a rational view, M&E is therefore understood as an 'instrument' for the collection of objective evidence, serving a variety of purposes for the international development agency, namely learning and development of knowledge, and accountability (Carlsson, 2000; Carlsson et al., 1999). Dahler-Larsen further notes that M&E is *"instrumental in the sense that it presumably improves*

*decision-making*" (1998:66) and is in principle integrated into a rational sequence of design, planning, and implementation, the so-called program cycle. The instrumental utilisation of M&E is even compared to an engineering mechanism by which *"operations are tried and tested and where the results of such a testing are fed back into the planning and implementation of operations"* (Carlsson et al., 1999:14). In such a setting, the role of evaluation is understood as an instrument for enhancing rationality in policy and decision making (Albaek, 1996; Everett, 2003).

Although this perspective and its related typology of use is widely registered in literature, it does not provide a realistic picture regarding the utilisation of M&E results. As Dahler-Larsen points out, *"very often evaluations are not found to have any noticeable impact on subsequent decision-making"* (1998:65), to the extent that *"the insistence of the information collection procedure is often more conspicuous than is the relevance of the information for decision making"* (1998:65). Others even note that too frequently information on results obtained from M&E is merely not used for management purposes, mainly, because stakeholders do not find an interest on using it (Carlsson et al., 1999) or because it is serving other type of uses (Dahler-Larsen, 1998).

In this light, the rational model of organisational theory is perceived as both outdated and empirically unrealistic (Albaek, 1996, 1998; Dahler-Larsen, 1998; Schaumburg-Müller, 2005). Nevertheless, it is still important to take into consideration this organisational model since most fundamental analytical tools for the assessment of development cooperation are build upon a rational approach (Albaek, 1996, 1998; Schaumburg-Müller, 2005). This is the case of the LFA, a widely used tool for M&E based upon results that shall help practitioners smooth the analysis of a complex development setting and to infuse rigour into the process. To that end, its generic structure is based upon a causal-effect chain grounded in the rational idea that every input should lead to a foreseen and measurable outcome (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Logical Chain for Results**



Source: Own

In this vein, M&E can be approached via the traditions of rationalism. Yet, its *universalist* understanding of organisations, which yields to a descriptive as well as prescriptive model, only uncovers partially organisational reality (Albaek, 1996). In a critique of the rational instrumental view on evaluation, Gubba and Lincoln (1989, in Taylor and Balloch, 2005:2) state “*to approach evaluation scientifically is to miss completely its fundamental social, political and value-oriented character*”.

As a complement to the conventional rational approach or instrumental utilisation of M&E, many authors embrace the political and institutional models in order to provide a more realistic and comprehensive explanation concerning the utilisation of M&E (Albaek, 1996, 1998; Carlsson et al., 1999; Dahler-Larsen, 1998; Rowe and Taylor, 2005; Schaumburg-Müller, 2005).

Albaek (1996), for instance, suggests that the rational perspective only accounts for the more stable and formal elements of human behaviour, ignoring its non-rational facet. He then concludes that “*by making rationality the overriding value and not a partial logic that functions only under certain conditions, the rational perspective does not address such phenomena as power and conflict, except as indicators of failure*” (1996:12). In Albaek’s view, an additional perspective that brings into focus such issues as power and conflict, namely the political perspective, will add to our understanding of organisational reality.

On the other hand, Albaek (1996) also underscores that both the rational and political perspective operate in a setting “*in which utility-optimising actors are located in a*

*relatively predictable, stable and controllable universe*" (1996:20). By looking at organisations through the lenses of institutionalism, the setting significantly differs by turning into a "*uncertain, chaotic and anarchistic world*" (ibid.) in which social actors are concerned with producing norms and meaning. This perspective thus adds a completely different understanding of organisational reality.

#### 4.1.2 The Political Perspective

According to Alkin (1990, in Rowe and Taylor, 2005:51), "*every evaluation is a political act, political in the sense that there is a continuing competition for stakes among the clients of an evaluation*". Therefore, essential to understanding Results-based M&E is the political organisational perspective (Rowe and Taylor, 2005).

In this regard, the political organisational perspective views "*organisations as political arenas where a complex multiplicity of individual and group interests come into play*" (Albaek, 1996:13). Hence, a key variable determining the organisation's behaviour is the power of actors and organisational members (hereafter referred as stakeholders)<sup>45</sup> who have different and often conflicting interests (Dahler-Larsen, 1998; Schaumburg-Müller, 2005). In this context, decision making processes do not follow a rational pattern; instead, decisions are the outcome of power struggles, conflict, alliances and coalitions, negotiations and bargains, and compromises (Albaek, 1996; Dahler-Larsen, 1998; Schaumburg-Müller, 2005).

Since interests are key variables determining the organisation's behaviour, M&E can only be instrumental in terms of i.e. learning, if the knowledge generated serves the interests and needs of many stakeholders (Carlsson, 2000). Unless that happens, advocates of the political model argue for a strategic or *legitimising* utilisation of M&E (Carlsson, 2000; Carlsson et al., 1999), instead of the rational instrumental purpose. This typology of utilisation can be seen as illegitimate from a rational point of view, as Vedung (1997, in Forss, Rebien and Carlsson, 2002:31) writes, since they serve very different purposes than those of learning and knowledge development.

One key use of M&E in connection with the political perspective on organisations is, therefore, politically legitimising (or de-legitimising) a program or project by providing information regarding its performance and results. In this light, the purpose is to use M&E results in efforts to demonstrate utility of a project or program (Albaek, 1996) or

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<sup>45</sup> The notion of stakeholder hereby embraced is that used by Carlsson, by which "*stakeholders are groups of people or individuals who are somehow affected by an evaluation.*" (Carlsson et al., 1999:9) Usual categories of stakeholders found in development cooperation are: policy and decision makers; program or project sponsors; evaluation sponsors; target participants or beneficiaries; program managers; evaluators; program or project competitors; and contextual stakeholders. (Carlsson et al, 1999)

even persuade the authorising environment<sup>46</sup> and the public at large that the project or program should continue or be dropped (Feinstein, 2002). The purpose of M&E is further perceived as legitimising decisions that have already been taken (Carlsson, 2000; Carlsson et al., 1999).

In addition, Albaek (1996) maintains that a change in the demand for evaluation methodologies or techniques can also be explained through the political model. Accordingly, the methodology or technique that can help maximising an individual and/or group goal achievement and knowledge interests will be chosen over another. For instance, outcome evaluations can well serve to evidence utility of a program, legitimising a specific individual and/or group view. Yet, there is still no perfect match between evaluation methods and stakeholders' interests (Albaek, 1996).

Many academic researchers, however, argue that the political view offers as well a far from complete interpretation and understanding of organisations. A fundamental problem, according to Dahler-Larsen (1998), is that the political approach, likewise the rational paradigm, focus exclusively on the purposeful behaviour of organisations. Both perspectives fall into what March and Olsen (1984, in Dahler-Larsen:67) call a "*logic of consequentiality*". Under this logic, whatever the role and purpose of evaluations is, they are understood as the outcome of the needs and interests of actors. One of the major pitfalls is thus its exclusive emphasis on conscientious intentions, failing to address in any case unintended consequences of evaluations.

Another important limitation, according to Albaek (1996), is that the political approach seems to uncover organisational reality only under certain circumstances, like those of scarce resources and a high level of political conflict. In any case, Dahler-Larsen (1998) argues that barely a reduced number of evaluations could be explained with reference to dominant political actors protecting their favoured projects or programs.

At last but not least, the political organisation is understood as a closed system, instead of an open system (Boyne, 2005).<sup>47</sup> In consequence, one important flaw is that external power factors fail to be considered, and solely internal political struggle seems to influence organisational behaviour. Under the aegis of institutionalism,

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<sup>46</sup> Feinstein defines the authorising environment (AE) as "*those principals that make fundamental decisions concerning the approval and cancellation of programs.*" (2002:434)

<sup>47</sup> In accordance with the open system views of organisations, Scott (2002:25) defined organisations as "*systems of independent activities linking shifting coalitions of participants embedded in the environments in which they operate.*" These environments "*shape, support and infiltrate organisations.*" (Scott, 2002:25)

organisations are viewed as open systems, offering thus an alternative to the rational and political perspectives (Boyne, 2005).

### 4.1.3 The Institutional Perspective

Institutional theory, which is recognised as a development of the open systems view on organisations, has become a prominent lens through which organisational reality is analysed. Today, many academics regard evaluation as having, rather than a political nature, the virtues of an “*institutionalised phenomenon*”, and thus view the institutional perspective as crucial to understand M&E and its related processes (Dahler-Larsen, 1998).

When analysing an organisation through the lens of institutionalism, emphasis moves away from interests to focus on symbolic aspects of the organisation and its environment: norms, myths, and cultural elements (such as symbols, cognitive systems, and normative beliefs), as well as the sources of such elements (Scott, 1987). These symbols, as Albaek (1996) explains, are created collectively by social actors seeking to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity, while increasing predictability in a world otherwise reigned by chaos and instability.

The role played by interests, seen differently from rational and political perspectives, is a controversial issue in institutionalism. On the one hand, DiMaggio (1988, in Scott, 1987:508), one of the most prominent institutional theorists, believes the majority of institutional arguments deny the “*reality of interest-driven*” behaviour of both organisations and their actors. On the other hand, both Dahler-Larsen (1998) and Scott (1987, 2004) recognise, as the political perspective does, that actors attempt to pursue their interests. Nevertheless, the political and institutional perspectives differ with regard to where actors and interests come from. In Scott’s words, “*actors are institutionally constructed*” (2004:12), meaning that norms and rules of environments constitute specific types of actors, as well as further define and shape their interests. Accordingly, organisational behaviour is not an outcome of interests and choices of specific actors, as the political perspective promulgates. Rather, institutional features of the environment determine the organisation’s behaviour -its goals and means to achieve them-.

The model, hereby, reflects a growing attention to the environment, in which all organisations *breathe*, according to institutional theorists. This environment is “*characterised by the elaboration of rules and requirements to which individual*

*organisations must conform if they are to receive support and legitimacy*" (Scott and Meyer, 1983, in Scott, 1987:498).<sup>48</sup> This in addition advances that such symbolic elements are key variables determining organisational behaviour (Schaumburg-Müller, 2005).

The model not only focuses on symbolic aspects of the organisation and its environment but also directs attention to the analysis of particular organisational practices (Dahler-Larsen, 1998). In this respect, Schaumburg-Müller (2005) adds that an institutional approach is particularly relevant in an organisational setting where, for instance, guidelines for M&E are developed following international standards. The adoption of such practices may not serve instrumental functions (Albaek, 1996), but may help to indicate adherence to prevailing norms and values in society (i.e. accountability and transparency rules) and further prove legitimacy towards certain environmental agents (Dahler-Larsen, 1998). This is, from the point of view of Meyer and Scott (1992, in Albaek, 1996:21), *"a ceremonial façade whose real function is to protect the organisation from the demands and expectations of its surroundings."* In turn, adoption of elements deemed legitimate by the society may further increase the flow of resources as well as the chances of survival (Zucker, 1987).

This convergent process of organisations towards prevailing society's norms was labelled by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) as institutional isomorphism.<sup>49</sup> According to the authors, isomorphous adaptation of organisations to the institutional environment can be driven by mimetic, or imitative, pressures to adopt others' successful elements under conditions of uncertainty about alternatives. On the other hand, many organisations adopt certain practices because they have been imposed by controlling authorities or powerful agents, as Scott (1987) maintains. In this respect, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) emphasize the prominent role of the state and professionalized bodies in exercising coercive and/or normative pressures.<sup>50</sup> A common response to this type of pressures in order to protect the organisations' technical activities is decoupling organisational elements from other activities and from each other, affecting negatively organisational efficiency (Scott and Meyer, 1983, in Zucker:446).

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<sup>48</sup> Scott and Meyer (1983) employ such definition when referring to what they call an institutional environment, which they like to distinguish from a technical environment. The later is defined as *"those within which a product or service is exchanged in a market such that organisations are rewarded for effective and efficient control of the work process."* (in Scott, 1987:498)

<sup>49</sup> The concept of institutional isomorphism describes a homogenisation process within an organisational field by which organisational elements are adopted to conform to environmental characteristics deemed as legitimate.

<sup>50</sup> DiMaggio and Powell argue that these have become *"the great rationalisers of the second half of the twentieth century."* (1983:147) From the point of view of Zucker (1987), other organisations are also important sources of institutional elements because of the important role they play in diffusing administrative and technological innovations.

Seen from an institutional perspective, M&E thus relates to and forms part of the norms and values of the organisation and its environment (Schaumburg-Müller, 2005). Following Scott's (2004) premises, Results-based M&E shall be recognised as a rational tool build to represent a legitimate method to pursue specific aims, thus embedded itself in a cultural system.

Its function, as Albaek (1996) asserts, may not primarily be to facilitate conscious improvement of management and decision-making. Instead, its function may serve to symbolise proper management and legitimacy towards particular actors, demonstrate that the organisation is competent, responsible and serious, and avoid critiques while upholding social values (Albaek, 1996; Dahler-Larsen, 1998). Implementing proper M&E systems may eventually contribute to increase "*recognisability, acceptability and reputation*" of the organisation (Scott, 2004:19). This function of M&E, which has little to do with instrumental purposes, is known as *ritual* use, and its primary objective is to achieve formal legitimacy (Carlsson et al., 1999; Vedung, 1997, in Forss, Rebien and Carlsson, 2002:31).

From an institutional perspective, the aim behind the implementation of M&E systems is, therefore, symbolising desired qualities of management. This, in turn, leads to high fixation over procedures for collection and analysis of performance information, while the actual use of M&E results looses meaning (Dahler-Larsen, 1998; Schaumburg-Müller, 2005). Therefore, in accordance with institutionalism M&E must be analysed in terms of what it symbolises, instead of what it attains.

Institutional theory, however, has as well been criticised for not providing a complete picture of how organisations perform and use M&E. In particular, it fails to understand M&E as an action tool. Schaumburg-Müller (2005) says "*from this perspective, evaluation must be viewed more as a construct than an objective truth*" (2005:213). In this light, the researcher still defends the use of rational perspectives because of their explanatory power with reference to the design, development and implementation of M&E systems.

## **4.2 The Learning Organisation**

The rational, political and institutional organisational perspectives provide relevant insight to understand how and why M&E is undertaken, but fail to capture all



functions of evaluation. Conceptual utilisation, widely reflected in empirical research concerning the use of evaluation, does not fit inside any of the organisational perspectives above discussed. Albaek (1996) then suggests that “*we must supplement our theoretical and empirical analyses of evaluation utilisation with other perspectives of organisational theory,*” (1996:28) and Schaumburg-Müller (2005) proposes to include a learning perspective.

It appears natural to explore M&E from a learning perspective, given that Evaluation is an explicit tool for organisational learning (Suhrke, 2000). Evaluation is viewed as a mechanism to draw lessons from experience that can be then consolidated into theories of action (Argyris and Schon, 1978). The literature on organisational learning is vast, with multiple perspectives emerging from a range of academic disciplines. The management science perspective, and sociology and organisational theory offer key insights to understand learning in organisations and, in particular, learning through M&E.

At the outset, a “behavioural” definition drawn from management science by which “*an entity learns if, through its processing of information, the range of its potential behaviours is changed...*” (Huber, 1991:89). Such internal processing or flow of information without hindrance is thus fundamental to influence organisational behaviour. However, political conflicts and non-rational behaviour difficult the implementation of organisational learning. For instance, Huber (1991) asserts that learning is troubled by actors with conflicting interests, non-rational behaviour leading to distortion and suppression of information. In this respect, Argyris and Schon (1978, in Easterby-Smith:1092) demonstrate how people filter and distort information flows, i.e. avoiding to pass on negative information to higher hierarchies. Most importantly, information is selectively employed in decision making processes to legitimate decisions reached on ‘other grounds’ (Easterby-Smith, 1997).

An essential contribution of the management science perspective is in relation to learning attained through feedback on the consequences of organisations’ actions. This entails that errors on performance are detected and corrected. The concepts of single and double-loop learning, introduced by Argyris and Schon (1978), made this idea very popular. Single-loop learning occurs when errors are detected and corrected, but without altering critical assumptions governing action (ibid.). Thus, when single-loop learning occurs, corrective measures are taken but without altering the established policy or questioning the dominant paradigm. On the other hand, double-loop learning occurs if errors are detected and corrected by changing the

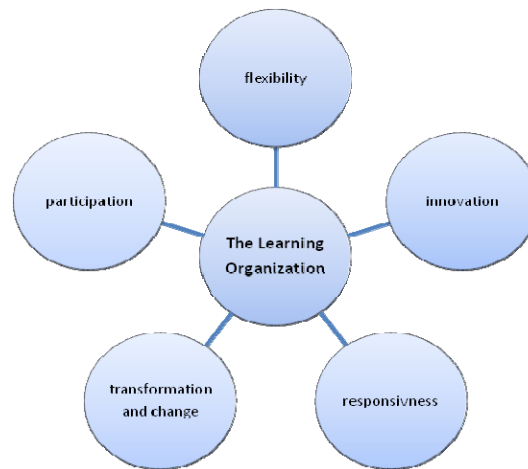
governing assumptions and subsequently the actions. Double-loop learning therefore implies questioning of the dominant paradigm and subsequent modification of the established policy.

In this regard, Argyris and Schon maintain that a major impediment to organisational learning is that organisations learn through single rather than double-loop learning. Furthermore, he adds that performance measurement systems, such as monitoring based on results, promote single-loop learning, leaving little room for double-loop learning (2002, in Hovland, 2003:4). On the other hand, evaluation can play a crucial role in promoting double loop learning by changing the way organisations act.

The perspective on learning drawn from sociology and organisation theory is less prominent than the management science perspective, but its contribution is interesting to note. Issues of power and conflict are, like in the management science perspective, recognised. However, from this perspective, these issues are perceived as normal aspects of organisational life, especially, since organisations are perceived as social systems. A management science stream, on the other hand, considers issues of power and conflict as unacceptable non-rational behaviour that should be minimised (Easterby-Smith, 1997). In a sociological perspective, these issues cannot be avoided, even if information systems are implemented. Interests thus become an essential issue to understand organisational learning, determining the use of learning and the process of construction underpinning it.

The literature on the learning organisation offers a different angle since it has a strong functionalist orientation, focussing on practical implementation and action research. Senge (1990, in Pasteur, 2004:11), one of the most prominent researchers in this field, defines the learning organisation as *“organisations where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.”* In general, definitions of the learning organisation stress the importance of adopting a learning culture in order that learning becomes a continuous process rather than a sporadic episode.

**Figure 5: Principles of a Learning Organization**



Source: Own

It is further noteworthy that most definitions of the learning organisations emphasise organisational features such as flexibility, responsiveness and transformation, innovation and participation. All these features correspond to the notion of modern organisation, in contrast to the traditional bureaucratic, hierarchical and centralised organisation (Pasteur, 2004; Schaumburg-Müller, 2005). Learning organisations are further characterised by their impetus on creating *knowledge for action*, not knowledge for its own sake (Roper and Pettit, 2002).

Preskill (1994) additionally notes that many researchers suggest that the learning organisation is hungry for information and continually measures performance to hold the organisation accountable. Indeed, M&E is seen as an integrated part of the operations in a learning organisation, conceived as a crucial mechanism for learning and subsequent change. As Preskill and Torres (1999) write, evaluation for organisational learning and change is *“more than a means to an end... A significant consequence of evaluative inquiry is the fostering of relationships among organisation members and the diffusions of their learning throughout the organisation; it serves as a transfer-of-knowledge process. To that end, evaluative inquiry provides an avenue for individuals’ as well as the organisation’s ongoing growth and development”* (1999:18). Through the lens of this perspective, M&E is therefore seen to be driven by instrumentality in connection to the organisations’ ambition to learn and generate knowledge for change and improvement.

Very much reflected in the literature concerning utilisation of evaluation research is the conceptual use of evaluation, by which findings from evaluation are systematised in the form of new concepts and ideas, as well as new ways of doing (Carlsson et al., 1999). Conceptual use influences thinking, but does not alter decision making in principle, in contrast to the instrumental use of evaluation. Examples of conceptual use are, for instance, when evaluation findings are used to generate lessons learned and best practice cases, or policy options (ibid.).

The learning organisation fails to uncover a range of issues as regards the use of M&E, which is rarely used for both instrumental and conceptual purposes despite of its evident potential for creating learning. Evaluations findings are seldom utilised and often failed to contribute new learning, pointing at the need to supplement the approach with the other perspectives on organisations above-discussed.

### **4.3 The Model**

The model for the analysis of the use of Results-based M&E in international development organisations is introduced in this chapter. The model brings together the different theories discussed in this section following the strategy of metratriangulation<sup>51</sup> in order to provide a comprehensive framework that allows us to observe Results-based M&E through different lens.

In essence, the paradigms operate with different images and understandings of organisations, therefore offering diverse variables to uncover organisational behaviour. Both the rational and political perspectives understand organisations as closed systems, which behaviour is driven by the choices of purposeful actors. Bracketing the rational theory makes explicit the assumption that only rational behaviour of organisations is admitted, whereas the political theory understands non-rational behaviour as a normal facet of organisational life. Thus, the political perspective brings into the analysis variables such as interests, and power differences and conflict. The learning perspective also draws attention to the impact of these issues in organisational learning processes, causing distortion and elimination of information. Bridging these theories is possible since they all operate under a 'logic of consequentiality', assuming that organisations' actions are conscious and purposeful.

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<sup>51</sup> Refer to Methodology chapter 2.2.1 Theory-building process.

In contrast, institutional theory views organisations as open systems, thus embedded in environments that define, shape and infiltrate the organisation. The institutional perspective contextualises the organisation in an environment characterised by the production of norms and meanings, which in turn are key variables determining the organisation behaviour. This behaviour is, in turn, interpreted under a 'logic of appropriateness' by which unconscious actions may be guided by symbolic meanings. Theoretical discrepancies with the rational and political theories and learning organisation are accentuated. Yet, bridging the political and institutional theories is also possible since a number of institutionalists admits the interest-driven behaviour of organisations albeit with nuances.

Each perspective therefore offers different assumptions and, despite holding premises at odds, their disparity and interplay results in a holistic view of organisational behaviour.<sup>52</sup> The encompassing framework shall be applied to understand how and why Results-based M&E is undertaken by development aid organisations. In order to offer a more solid and structured analysis, a set of factors shall be looked into detail when adopting each paradigm. These factors are: the wider context of development cooperation and the specific circumstances of UNDP as regards RBM; the users characteristics;<sup>53</sup> the objectives and relevance of undertaking M&E;<sup>54</sup> and who the evaluator is. Similarly important shall be the methodology and evaluation design applied (including timeliness of M&E), as well as means to follow-up on evaluations and disseminate the information.

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<sup>52</sup> The perspectives hold different explanatory power, aspect that has not been depicted in the figure but will be discussed as part of the Conclusions (chapter 7.2).

<sup>53</sup> There is a wide variety of users interested in and using performance information. The present study does not intend to assess all users characteristics but only those directly affected by evaluations.

<sup>54</sup> The relevance has to do with the extent to which monitoring and, most importantly, evaluations address issues that are deemed of significance by the stakeholders.

## 5 THE APPROACH OF UNDP TO RESULTS-BASED M&E OF INTERVENTIONS

Within the previous section, the key perspectives of organisational theory have been conceptualised to set the framework that will help thereafter to operationalise the case study. The structure of this section is determined by a number of aspects about UNDP's approach to RBM and its application to M&E,<sup>55</sup> which are considered of particular relevance for the analysis (as listed in the previous chapter).

### 5.1 *Context for RBM*

#### 5.1.1 Development and donor context for RBM

The wider development and donor context within which RBM approach has developed has had remarkable implications in the implementation of the model at UNDP.<sup>56</sup>

As explained in chapter 3.1 of the Literature Review, the RBM approach was adopted from the private sector during the 1990s into the public sector of some OECD countries (Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, etc.). Some bilateral development organisations, led by USAID, followed their example in an attempt to respond to declines in financing for development and growing demands from the government shareholders, parliaments and the public to demonstrate accountability.

Since the reforms started, the environment for development cooperation has significantly evolved. The Paris Declaration of 2005 has led to the emergence of new modalities of development aid interventions and joint country strategies of development assistance (partnerships). The Declaration has, additionally, driven a shift of demand from assessing aid effectiveness to assessing development effectiveness and from managing by results to managing for results. Simultaneously, knowledge-based aid has consolidated not only at the level of discourse but also in practice. Hence, the need to create learning and share knowledge has turned to be crucial in a shared vision of enhanced development effectiveness.

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<sup>55</sup> Even if programme and project M&E are the main focus of the present study, RBM at the agency level will be also referred to.

<sup>56</sup> Interview 2 – Andrew Russell.

Despite the changing environment, an audit-accountability mentality has taken precedence, accountability remaining a common and major concern to all organisations.<sup>57</sup> Some donor agencies, including UNDP, are tackling the challenge of creating the best mix between learning and accountability.

### **5.1.2 Context for RBM and Accountability at UNDP**

UNDP was amongst the earliest UN agencies to adopt RBM, having this approach become the organising principle at all levels in the agency. Global pressures from Member States and shrinking aid budgets in the late 1990s triggered the introduction of the approach within the UN system. At UNDP, management reforms took an urgent character especially when Member States started to demand the downsizing of its programmatic services (UNDP, 2007).

The management reform started in 1997 with the Administrator's Annual Report calling for "*the establishment of an overall planning and results management system in UNDP*" (UNDP, 1998). This was crystallised by the end of 1999 with the Administrator's Business Plans for 2000-2003, "The Way Forward" (which meant the development of the first MYFF), and the publication of the first ROAR.

Even if RBM is today mainstreamed throughout the agency, it is continuously evolving, both as a concept and a tool for accountability and effectiveness. In the past years, development effectiveness has become the core message of UNDP's appeal for RBM, while accountability is now presumed to be understood as encouraging a greater focus on results (Universalia, 2004). Today, the overarching aim is having an organisational culture driven by results and development effectiveness.

## **5.2 Users of performance information**

Multiple actors engage in complex relationships through Results-based M&E at UNDP: its officers, beneficiaries or partners overseas, governments from donor and recipient countries, NGOs, etc.<sup>58</sup> In uncovering the multiple users of performance information, it is important to distinguish whether information intends to demonstrate accountability or serve managerial (and learning) purposes.

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<sup>57</sup> Interview 1 – John Patterson.

<sup>58</sup> Interview 3 - Arun Kashyap.

With regard to accountability, the complexity lies on identifying who among the multiple actors and levels of accountability is responsible for what. According to One World Trust,<sup>59</sup> UNDP has strong accountability capabilities making the agency responsive to its stakeholders. In this regard, UNDP's accountability framework is premised on a hierarchy of three tiers of accountability, namely organisational, programmatic, and staff accountability.<sup>60</sup> As regards organisational accountability, the Executive Board of UNDP<sup>61</sup> is responsible for management direction and the achievement of results agreed at the Strategic Plan. The Executive Board, therefore, uses performance information (gathered in reports such as ROAR or MYFF Report) to hold UNDP accountable for the spent of its resources and contribution to development results. Demands for transparency and evidence upon results from the public are thus supposed to be satisfied.

Programmatic accountability entails joint responsibility of the government and UNDP for programme outcomes. Therefore, partner governments (Ministries of Finance, Economy, or Development) shall use evaluations to determine the effectiveness of UNDP's support in achieving results. On the other hand, UNDP (Country/Regional/Global Programme Advisers and Directors, M&E Focal Points from UNDP Country Offices, Desk Officers, etc.) use performance information to prove its contribution to the achievement of national development priorities. It is at this level where highly sensitive political issues of partnering governments are dealt with.<sup>62</sup> The main reporting instrument is the Country Programme Document (CPD).

Finally, staff accountability holds individuals responsible to the organisation. Hence information is useful to prove professional and ethical conduct as well as the realization of Individual Work Plans.

ROAR is primarily a reporting tool to headquarters and shall inform decision-making of the Executive Board and senior management. In this regard, the performance information of ROAR feeds planning instruments such as the Strategic Plan, drafted every four years. ROAR has, however, little operational value for staff at RBx and COs. Units managing programmes/projects, as well as partner governments shall

<sup>59</sup> One World Trust (visit: <http://www.oneworldtrust.org>) is an NGO working to make global governance more accountable. Yearly, the organisation reviews a set of international governmental organisations, transnational corporations, etc. and measures their performance in terms of transparency, engagement of stakeholders, evaluation capacity, and complaints and response to evaluations.

<sup>60</sup> <http://content.undp.org/go/userguide/results-management---accountability/?sessionid=aP6BbKbVpSg8?lang=en>

<sup>61</sup> The Executive Board is formed by representatives from 36 different countries, grouped in 5 regional groups, which aim is to oversee and support UNDP activities. For understanding the role of the Executive Board as regards evaluation, see **ANNEX 1 – Organisational chart and roles**

<sup>62</sup> Interview 3 – Arun Kashyap.



find more utility in CPD or Regional Programme documents (RPD) for management decision-making.

A fundamental question is whether this information is in fact valuable for effectively managing for results. As Karin Attstroem highlighted throughout her interview,<sup>63</sup> learning upon the users and the way they are using evaluation is crucial to obtain effective informative products. With regard to UNDP, although a participatory process was emphasised from the very beginning successfully ensuring ownership of the approach, development of M&E frames has been centrally driven and a prescriptive system such as the RBM approach has further undermined the value and utility of these products.

### **5.3 Relevance of Results-based M&E**

Frequently, it is said that M&E and reporting is only important to donors, because they are the fund givers and hence are interested to learn how funds are spent.<sup>64</sup> Through transparency and documentation, Results-based M&E has at best addressed demands from donors and, eventually, the public.

In UNDP, the use of results information beyond accountability reasons is usually seen as the main aim. The agency's reporting mechanisms have been designed so as to cover key issues of performance, seeking to better manage for results (UNDP, 2007). Yet, it is uncertain whether M&E and information on results is relevant at all times.

Traditionally, M&E has reported on outputs. Changes in RBM supporting mechanisms (e.g., the LFA turning into the Results-oriented LFA) have been an attempt to focus on measurement of outcomes or impacts.<sup>65</sup> In practice, as project managers have more control over the input-output level, assessments tend to focus upon delivery of outputs. In fact, managers will be held accountable to senior management in terms of outputs, and therefore there is a persistent lack of incentives to inform on how projects are contributing to program outcomes (UNDP, 2007). Consequently, although the agency intends and tailors its processes to manage for

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<sup>63</sup> Interview 5 – Karin Attstroem.

<sup>64</sup> Interview 2 - Andrew Russell.

<sup>65</sup> Interview 1 – John Patterson.

outcomes and results results, management for outputs prevails at the project and programme level.

On the other hand, only rarely is the intend of these enquiries learning rather than accountability. In this regard, the information obtained from Results-based Evaluations seldom provides answers to the “hows” and “whys” of development interventions because of its exclusive focus on accomplishment of objectives. In addition, these are normally bounded around expected positive results, with limited value in terms of learning and knowledge.<sup>66</sup>

Thus, Results M&E is relevant to stakeholders in terms of accountability, while it fails to attend issues deemed fundamental for managing development effectiveness, namely learning around results.

## **5.4 Evaluators' characteristics**

Another fundamental question determining relevance is who commissions M&E, and the different roles and responsibilities of the staff at all levels in connection with M&E.

In 2002, several compulsory monitoring tools and procedures were removed. Since, project monitoring has developed with mixed approaches subject to local initiatives. Around twenty-five ‘proactive’ COs<sup>67</sup> have appointed M&E specialists, and ten have established a M&E unit (UNDP, 2007). Presently, managers and staff at CO (e.g. M&E specialists) are responsible for the monitoring of projects, while RBx oversee compliance at the country level. New and mandatory project monitoring tools have been introduced, like the Atlas project tree. This tool for resource planning was introduced in 2004 and permits managers to collect quantitative information about projects, linking financial resources to results (but failing to provide a qualitative assessment on performance). In 2005, Prince2 was additionally introduced as a system for project management chiefly aimed at tracking risks and results. Even if these tools have presumably eased monitoring of results, there is a persistent deficiency in evaluation compliance (Joint statement, 2008).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Interview 6 – Jonas Kjaer.

<sup>67</sup> There are 166 UNDP offices worldwide.

<sup>68</sup> The joint statement, issued October 10, 2008, was made on behalf of Belgium, Canada, Germany, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, France, UK and Denmark. The statement covers the 2007 Annual Report on Evaluation and the Evaluation UNDG's contribution to the implementation of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness.

It is noteworthy that while monitoring at UNDP is premised on self-assessment, a great bulk of evaluations are conducted by external consultants. When external consultants are hired, the scope of work (or Terms of Reference of the Evaluation) is defined by CO management staff, and it goes through a competition process (commonly, different consultancy firms, institutions, etc. participate in a public bid where the best technical and financial offer is selected). Hiring consultants has benefits and drawbacks. Although external consultancy is rather impartial and objective, so as to justify their work (and their high fee), consultants may feel they ought to reveal issues and deficiencies. They further tend not to be familiar with the program neither the context of the intervention.

## **5.5 Methodology and design of Results-based M&E**

Deciding upon what to measure is a fundamental question in the development industry, since it implicitly defines the priorities of the intervention. The main focus of UNDP's results measurement is the amount of people lifted out of poverty in relation to the MDGs.<sup>69</sup> In this regard, ROAR measurement of outputs and outcomes is rated against four goals: *"poverty reduction and the MDGs; democratic governance, crisis prevention and recovery; environment and sustainable development"* (White, 2007: 22). Measuring the extent to which development activities are alleviating poverty (instead of e.g., fostering economic growth) is, methodologically speaking, more complex. However, it makes it easier for tax-payers to appreciate what is being attained as the 2015' MDG deadline approaches.

Keeping a focus on the reduction of poverty, evaluations at UNDP fall into two categories, namely decentralised or independent evaluations.<sup>70</sup> The former are conducted by external consultants and mostly refer to project and outcome evaluations. Outcome evaluations have a greater potential to influence policy and decision making and generate learning than project evaluations, and deal with sensible issues for partnering governments. Independent evaluations are, on the other hand, conducted by the Evaluation Office (EO)<sup>71</sup> and are important in terms of corporate strategy and development of global knowledge.

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<sup>69</sup> The unifying purpose of UNDP is to contribute to the eradication of extreme poverty and the substantial reduction of overall poverty.

<sup>70</sup> <http://content.undp.org/go/userguide/results/evaluation/?lang=en#top>

<sup>71</sup> The Evaluation Office is the independent evaluation body or unit of UNDP reporting to the Administrator and aiming at enhancing accountability and organisational learning (visit: <http://www.undp.org/eo/index.html> )

The definition of the purpose and role evaluations is undertaken by CO, RBx and/or Practice and Policy Bureaux for decentralised evaluations, and by the EO for independent evaluations. It is interesting to note that the format of the Terms of Reference are fixed by the EO, setting common procedures for the commission of evaluations as well as quality criteria for the reporting. On the other hand, it is further noteworthy that senior management are rarely engaged in decentralised evaluations, except for developing evaluation plans and thus decisions upon what to evaluate (i.e. pointing out at specific interventions that should be assessed) and when.

Senior management is also responsible for assuring the quality of evaluations by reviewing the definition of results, establishment of indicators, targets and baselines. Even with their supervision, quality tends to be at stake. The reason why this is so has to do with the fact that objectives of the evaluation are frequently inappropriate. Secondly, senior management tends to focus on financial accomplishment rather than on the achievement of lasting results and on intervention processes relevant for organisational learning. Moreover, evaluations are frequently limited to projects and programs creating positive impact, or those that UNDP is terminating.

Timing and financing for evaluations are also factors that determine the quality of reporting and the usefulness of evaluation.<sup>72</sup> Rarely, COs allocate a percentage of the budget of a project/program for evaluations. More commonly, a percentage of the annual office budget is allocated for M&E. In any case, it has been noticed that conducting evaluations requires more financing than what it is normally budgeted, especially complex evaluations that require a rich methodology (UNDP, 2007).

Not only evaluations are poorly funded, but the timing is not adequate. Evaluations take too long or either are undertaken too late to influence new planning (in particular, outcome and country-programme evaluations).<sup>73</sup> Late timing is normally justified because of the need to assess impacts, which might be evident after project execution and even termination.

The validation of evaluations is of special importance as well. At UNDP, validation takes place only through unfrequent audits. Credibility hence becomes a core problem. Additionally, credibility is undermined since presently there are no

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<sup>72</sup> Interview 4 – Yee Woo Guo.

<sup>73</sup> Interview 5 – Karin Attstroem.

benchmarks to compare the development work of UNDP to other international organisations that use RBM approaches.<sup>74</sup>

## **5.6 Feedback mechanisms**

So as to ensure the use of evaluation, in June 2006 the evaluation policy of UNDP was ammended through an Executive Board decission<sup>75</sup> to make mandatory follow-up and management response to evaluation. The introduction of the Evaluation Resource Centre (ERC)<sup>76</sup> means the development of the first comprehensive information management system at UNDP that comprises functions for planning and tracking of evaluation and management response, and dissemination of best practices. However, the Executive Board (2008) has manifested that management response has not been routinised yet, especially since submission to the ERC is still uneven.

## **5.7 Dissemination of performance information**

It is in addition important to uncover the means used to facilitate access to M&E reports. Of special significance is the UNDP Public Information and Document Disclosure Policy,<sup>77</sup> which is in accordance with good practice principles as regards information disclosure. According to the policy, information on performance shall be publicly disclosed and accessible through the ERC. This information management system, which has been in place since 2004 and was revamped in 2006, functions as a central evaluation database that provides access to evaluation plans, reports, best practices, etc. Finding this documentation at ERC can be a cumbersome practice. But what is more concerning is that many of these documents are not being systematically updated by COs and, herein, not always publicly available against the above-mentioned policy.

EvalNet, on the other hand, consists of an e-mail based public network to share lessons and good practices so as to build evaluative knowledge. Today, the newtwork has above 1,400 members and periodically develops evaluation briefs featuring a variety of evaluations undetaken. In addition, at the regional and global

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<sup>74</sup> Interview 6 – Jonas Kjaer.

<sup>75</sup> <http://www.undp.org/eo/documents/Evaluation-Policy.pdf>

<sup>76</sup> The management system can be accessed at: <http://erc.undp.org>

<sup>77</sup> <http://www.undp.org/idp/>

levels, knowledge networks have been established to foster knowledge dissemination among UNDP staff. Various mailing groups have been created based on different thematic areas.

Together with these knowledge networks, the so-called Regional Support Centre (RSC) was set up so as to facilitate UNDP's shift into a knowledge-based organisation. The centres provide technical advice on, for example, how to define indicators, but fail to provide evaluative evidence.

In addition to such networks, UNDP holds regional and global meetings build around the presentation of evaluative findings. Interested stakeholders are commonly invited to these forums to discuss the evaluation.

## **5.8 Summing up on UNDP's approach**

After UNDP's move towards a results-based approach to management, the development community has increasingly recognised the agency's achievement of excellency in its operational policies and procedures. According to the discourse of UNDP, there seems to be three main drivers for the use of evaluation: the demands for accountability, the focus on development effectiveness and MfDR, and organisational learning. Accountability appears to prevail especially since it has attracted the most attention from the development community, which has emphasised on UNDP's efforts to become more transparent and capable of demonstrating results. The achievement of UNDP as regards results mainstreaming through all strategic lines, programmes and projects is also remarkable. However, taking a closer look at M&E in UNDP's RBM system reveals that staff continues to manage by outputs and focus in financial attainment. Herein, evaluations are adding limited value in terms of learning and, in general, its use for informing policy and decision making is at stake because of its questionable relevance. Regardless of the use and quality of evaluations, there are a number of issues that have to be addressed. In particular, management responses to evaluations are uneven and the dissemination of evaluations not systematic.

## 6 ANALYSIS

The present section seeks to provide a thoroughful analysis by critically reflecting upon the data collected. Thereby, data is applied and reviewed through the theoretical model with the aim of finding an answer to the Research Question and Hypothesis that underline this paper.

### 6.1 *Rational lens*

Programme and operations procedures at UNDP are all premised upon a results-oriented approach, including M&E systems. In effect, RBM in UNDP is understood as a rational management paradigm that is considered to be objective and geared towards enhancing effectiveness.<sup>78</sup> **Annex 2** clearly illustrates that rationality is assumed throughout the RBM process at UNDP, from goal setting to programme orientation, all components following a strict serial leading to organisational and development effectiveness. In addition, as expressed in UNDP's *Handbook on Monitoring and Evaluation for Results* (2002), monitoring is to capture information and evaluation to provide independent assessment on outcomes and impacts. Thus, the discourse of the agency depicts the use of M&E tools as rational, recognising them as an instrument for organisational learning and management improvement.

In using Results-based M&E, logic and mechanical models have been adopted at UNDP. The LFA, in one form or another, has been widely used in the agency since the 1990s, when it was adopted at the project level. Most procedures, especially at this level, now use a variation of or are based on the LFA, like the Atlas project tree that is premised on a transformation process from input into activity into output. In addition, Results-based M&E is integrated into the programme/project cycle. UNDP further understands monitoring as being objective and evaluation as being independent. In this light, the tools are believed to offer informed judgements upon the agency performance that are to guide staff's decisions and interventions.

Therefore, the role of and procedures in place for conducting M&E in a context of RBM depict UNDP as rational in the instrumental use of these systems. However, there are significant reasons to believe other principles than those of rationality apply.

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<sup>78</sup> See UNDP's webpage on Results Management and Accountability: <http://content.undp.org/go/userguide/results-management---accountability/?sessionid=aP6BbKbVpSg8?lang=en> (last view October 2008)

First and foremost, the impact of Results-based M&E on decision-making is questionable. Presently, there is no sound evidence that information upon results is used in a systematic way to inform adjustments on interventions and operations (Joint Statement, 2008). Information structure is in place particularly by means of the ERC, but systematically producing appropriate knowledge for managerial purposes is an issue. In this regard, there is also a persistent lack of good and critical data since this is mostly limited to comments on the use of inputs and the delivery of outputs as seen so far. The data not only lacks of quality, but also fails to provide impartial answers upon results of interventions. In this regard, it has been observed that the development of indicators is contaminated, those being carefully chosen to measure results in the best possible light.<sup>79</sup>

The credibility of measurement and assurance of quality at UNDP is therefore at stake. Herein, monitoring of progress is proving not convincing because of managers' subjectivity and lack of good data. Evaluation is neither convincing as judgements seem to be influenced by subjective elements.

Secondly, accountability appears to be prioritised, though UNDP widely proclaims its efforts for advancing a culture of MfDR. Consistent procedures on accountability for results are in place at all levels by means of a comprehensive reporting framework, which has allowed UNDP to reach a top ranking among multilateral organisations in transparency and good governance. In contrast, feedback information mechanisms and/or management response systems for managerial purposes, like the mechanism provided by the ERC, are still weak. In this respect, merely two thirds of the independent evaluations issued in 2006 had a management response (Joint Statement, 2008). This is interesting especially bearing in mind that decentralised evaluations tend to entail even less management responses according to the Executive Board Annual Report on Evaluation of 2007. It is also important to note that even though the framework enables to timidly establish credibility with stakeholders, the absence of comparable information about the impact of other development agencies' interventions hinders reliability.

Overall, decision-making is doubtfully being influenced by performance information, thus M&E not serving an instrumental use but other uses that cannot be explained through the lens of traditional rationalism. Hence, the rational perspective just

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<sup>79</sup> Interview 6 - Jonas Kjaer.



partially uncovers the use of Results-based M&E in UNDP. In this regard, M&E is simply not feeding objective and independent evidence that shall enable to reach *optimal* management decisions, but it does offer a prescriptive model based in the analytical structure of the LFA. Rationalism can certainly explain the use of M&E as an action tool that has been integrated into the program cycle in an attempt of enhancing performance and effectiveness. In effect, the approach has an unquestionable managerial value since it enables UNDP staff to think through the logic of their interventions. As Susan Stout<sup>80</sup> explained, when managers are clear about their objectives and how they will track progress, they tend to perform more effectively than when they do not. Yet, M&E shall not be understood as the panacea for learning and effectiveness, making rationality the prevailing logic behind its use. Other values shall be incorporated into the understanding of M&E systems at UNDP in a context of RBM. In view of offering a comprehensive analysis of the use of results-oriented M&E at UNDP, the political and institutional perspectives shall bring in different variables of study.

## **6.2 Political lens**

As mentioned in the previous section, at UNDP Results-based M&E systems engage a variety of stakeholders in relationships where different agendas apply. The system is, thus, heavily influenced by political considerations, which in turn can determine decision and policy making far more successfully than learning.

In the wider context of development aid, different stakeholders participate and expose their concerns throughout the development process. With regard to UNDP, the network of stakeholders is large, especially bearing in mind that the UN is a global association of governments, closely working with civil society organisations and, hence, an organisation of multilateral nature. In consequence, UNDP is subject to strong influences, in particular with regard to what should be undertaken, and how and where it should be undertaken. Its development work then becomes a political debate crowded by stakeholders.

The multiplicity of actors has, on the one hand, influenced goal definition at UNDP. Even if UNDP's developmental goals have been reduced to four, these remain broad and multi-layered so as to satisfy as many stakeholders as possible. Moreover, the agency goals are defined according to the current panacea of development, the

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<sup>80</sup> Interview 8 - Susan Tout.

MDGs, which thanks to their high visibility, facilitate tax payers to understand how their money is being spent.

On the other hand, a multi-layered accountability framework indicates that different groups with different interests as regards evaluative evidence and information have been identified. The accountability framework for results has been therefore premised on a hierarchy of three tiers, namely organisational, programmatic and staff accountability.

In this respect, the Executive Board has been pursuing a corporate agenda of meeting demands from donors and governments for reporting and better financial administration (especially through the organisational tier). In general, RBM procedures have been centrally-driven and prioritise corporate requirements such as demonstrating accountability and financial soundness, hence leading to tensions between COs, RBx, and Headquarters.<sup>81</sup> The programmatic tier is therefore merely serving Executive Board and donors' interests for reporting and accountability, but failing to satisfy COs and RBs' needs. Meeting reporting commitments is paramount and has become more important than learning to better manage for results, contrarily to what UNDP proclaims as driving its organisational culture. All in all, the staff is more concerned about satisfying reporting requirements to the Executive Board rather than managing for results (UNDP, 2007).

Donors and governments have, on the other hand, a big say on what is being assessed at UNDP.<sup>82</sup> According to UNDP's evaluation policy introduced in 2006,<sup>83</sup> all interventions should be subject to M&E. Yet, a group of Member States (Joint Statement, 2008) regrets that COs fail to systematically M&E for results. In addition, a UNDP review (2007bis) of the M&E function at different COs denounces that evaluation has been chiefly driven by donors' demands and governments' motivation. This, in turn, shows the existence of power imbalances among donors and governments.

Because evaluations have been driven and paid by donors and governments, these have frequently focused in assessing the effectiveness of specific development interventions rather than broader development impacts at national, regional and global level (Joint Statement, 2008). If it is UNDP managers and/or beneficiary governments that decide upon evaluation priorities at the outset of the cycle, the

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<sup>81</sup> Interview 4 – Yee Woo Guo.

<sup>82</sup> (ibid.)

<sup>83</sup> The new corporate evaluation policy can be reviewed at: <http://www.undp.org/eo/documents/Evaluation-Policy.pdf>

trend is to focus on interventions with an expected positive impact or those about to terminate.<sup>84</sup> The selection of what is being evaluated hence gains a strategic character.

Secondly, political tensions interfere in the quality of M&E. The Joint Statement (2008) denounces that a great bulk of the evaluations conducted are rated as being “*highly unsatisfactory*” in terms of knowledge on the *hows* and *whys* of development interventions. Insufficient outcome monitoring and persistent focus on outputs is a first determinant on the quality of outcome evaluations.

During my internship, I noted through the reporting system that managers were frequently disregarding to compare results with targets and baselines and, most importantly, to comment on performance indicators. Starting with the planning phase of the project, very frequently baselines and benchmarks are poor or non-existent, and performance indicators are not specific neither measurable in quantitative terms.<sup>85</sup> Staff can thus avoid comparing results with targets and baselines and discussing quantified results in general, focusing simply on the report and description of activities, inputs and outputs.

Overall, it is noted that staff are neglecting to judge on whether results are in fact improving or not and to what extent (ibid.). For instance, reports from COs are characterised as broad and descriptive rather than critical upon the performance of projects and programs. It is interesting to note in this respect that neither senior management is taking corrective measures to improve the definition of indicators, setting of targets and benchmarks, etc. so as to ensure the quality of evaluations.

Therefore, political opposition to provide information on results is evident because of, for example, fear to be held accountable for not having achieved expected results. In this regard, senior managers from COs are overall accountable for the formulation, execution, and evaluation of Country programmes and projects. Consequently, managers only have incentives to commission evaluations of interventions performing well or those programmes and projects that UNDP management has decided to stop funding (e.g., because the development discourse has shifted attention towards other interventions, etc.). Even when external consultants are hired to conduct evaluations, the tendency is to maintain a consensual line with the

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<sup>84</sup> Interview 6 - Jonas Kjaer.

<sup>85</sup> Interview 4 – Yee Woo Guo

contracting authority.<sup>86</sup>

On the other hand, it might happen that CO staff focuses on what they are being held accountable for, namely output and financial achievements. Even further, managers might not perceive measurement of outcomes as something important they are accountable for. The interests that UNDP staff has on the use of Results-based M&E are closely related to the incentive and reward system currently in place (Joint Statement, 2008). The features of this system imply that managers and staff have higher incentives to focus on quantity and financial achievements rather than on ameliorating the quality of their interventions. It also implies aversion towards innovative and trial of new practices.

All in all, accountability appears as a main preoccupation for and interest of UNDP staff and managers. The drive for accountability explains why staff is assessing output delivery in UNDP and why they lack incentives to monitor outcomes and impact. In addition, it has a significant influence on how M&E is conducted and information upon achievement of results disclosed.

Therefore, political influences subdue performance information and prostrate evaluation findings, making them rather irrelevant for organisational learning even when a use is made for decision making. Herein, the use of Results-based M&E cannot be merely regarded as instrumental for management improvement and learning, but as a strategic tool that can support and even determine decisions upon an intervention, herewith the choice of evaluating or not becoming strategic. Decision processes can be related to continuation, termination, and enlargement of projects and programs. In this regard, the use of M&E is politically set so as to legitimise, defend, or strike a specific development intervention, as well as to drive the allocation of resources.

From the political perspective, results-oriented evaluations at UNDP can frequently be understood as holding a persuasive use, i.e. findings set the frame for a debate on a specific intervention. For example, the ROAR published in 2000 recorded as a key finding the rise of Human Rights as a chief focus in Governance support and assistance.<sup>87</sup> The findings of this report were used to persuade upon the potential of applying a Human Rights-based approach to development programming in view of

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<sup>86</sup> Interview 5 – Karin Attstroem.

<sup>87</sup> The Executive summary of the ROAR published in 2000 can be accessed at:  
<http://www.undp.org/execbrd/pdf/ROAR%20Executive%20summary.pdf>

enhancing operational strategies.<sup>88</sup> In this setting, the use of evaluation seems to be geared towards manipulating or persuading people's perception upon the significance or benefits of an intervention, or a development approach in this case.

In view of this, one could argue that Results-based M&E does not merely serve UNDP's official aim of strengthening learning and enhancing development effectiveness. Political aspects of organisational reality are indeed affecting the implementation and outcome of M&E at UNDP. While such political influences are clearly observed, it is difficult to find a number of evaluations where the interests of a political group are determining to the extent of influencing decisions upon the specific intervention under assessment. Donor influences in this vein only become apparent in countries that are sensible from a political stand as regards the flow (or cut) of aid. Therefore, other uses, in addition to those strategic and instrumental, might be valid at uncovering Results-based M&E at UNDP and at explaining the wide spread and salience of these tools.

### **6.3 Institutional lens**

As seen earlier, RBM emerged at a time of functional pressures in the development aid sector. The sector became widely associated to poor performance and lack of transparency, and awareness of the need for much more focused, efficient and effective development organisations increasingly raised. In particular, UNDP faced strong global pressures to streamline its programmatic activities and gain focus while addressing effectiveness. UNDP even suffered a diminution of its funding during the 1990s, which catalysed reforms towards adopting an effective RBM approach by the end of the decade. Therefore, member States manipulation of funds made UNDP to comply with emerging rules and standards for results-orientation in the public sector. Since, RBM has been a managerial priority for UNDP.

After succeeding in stabilising its resource base and regaining the confidence of the public, fear of a downsizing of its programmatic activities persists.<sup>89</sup> In effect, today's fierce competition for funds in the development industry means that securing financing is a major concern to UNDP (and all development organisations, in general).

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<sup>88</sup> Refer to the document issued by UNDP *A Human Rights-based approach to Development Programming in UNDP* – Adding the missing link, at: [http://www.undp.org/governance/docs/HR\\_Pub\\_Missinglink.pdf](http://www.undp.org/governance/docs/HR_Pub_Missinglink.pdf)

<sup>89</sup> Interview 2 – Andrew Russell.

In this setting, the agency remains aware of the need to exceed donor demands for financial accountability and demonstrate focus on performance measurement to increase its chances of survival and flow of resources. Today the development context, saturated with binding expectations for accountability and results, experiences the blossoming of new fates such as MfDR and knowledge aid. Having development effectiveness and learning become a recurring theme in the development discourse, UNDP's corporate response has been to adjust its results framework so as to portray an image of consent with the wider environment. In effect, since the reforms towards RBM started, the organisational tendency at UNPD has been to adjust the approach according to shifting donor priorities, while seeking routines and universal rules.

Major international development organisations (World Bank, UNCDF, UNIFEM, USAID, CIDA, Danida, Sida, etc.) have all adopted the RBM approach and embarked in this course to conform environmental elements deemed legitimate, namely accountability, transparency, focus on results, effectiveness, evaluation, learning, etc. Presently, it can be argued that the development aid sector is undergoing a process of homogenisation or institutional isomorphism. This process started as a result of functional pressures and today, mimetic and imitative forces seem to drive implementation of RBM, especially bearing in mind that most organisations have followed the same path of reform (common mistakes have been made, and same lessons have been drawn).

Undertaking M&E of results in this regard seems to be guided by UNDP's unconscious need to reflect the values and myths that shape the prevailing environment. The M&E system has in addition become widely institutionalised and results mainstreamed throughout the organisation in UNDP's quest for support and legitimacy. The enforcement of RBM by means of the Administrator's call in 1999 implies that M&E, as a core function of the approach, becomes an organisational element that is not being questioned within the agency, as it obeys prevailing norms of the institutional context.

On the other hand, procedures for Results-based M&E<sup>90</sup> are well defined through a variety of Handbooks (*RBM in UNDP: Overview and General Principles*, *Handbook on Monitoring and Evaluation for Results*), Guidelines (*Guidelines for Outcome Evaluations*, *User Guide on Programming for Results*, *TOR for Evaluations*, etc), and Toolkits amongst others. The absence of firm procedures is only taking place at the

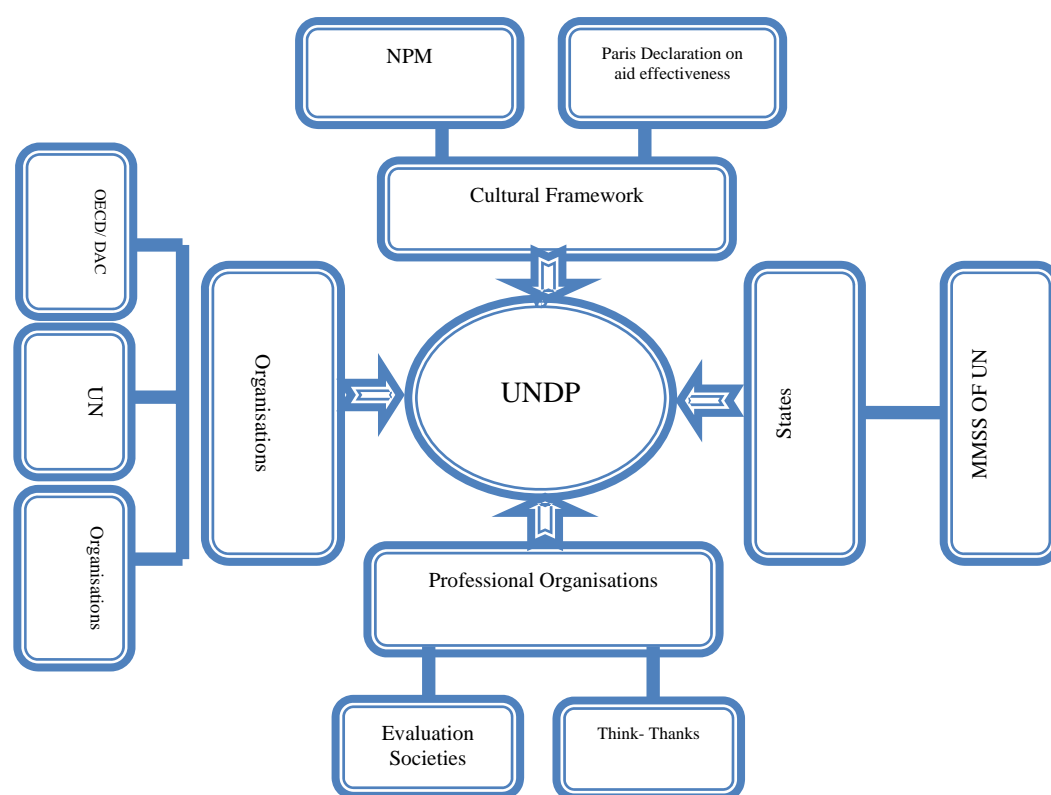
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<sup>90</sup> See for instance: <http://www.undp.org/eo/methodologies.htm> (October 2008)

CO level, where creativity has lead the development of particular M&E systems even if still abiding to general rules (recently, a guidance for planning and monitoring at the outcome level has been developed). Still, the insistence on procedures is obvious and shows adherence to prevailing values on accountability and results focus.

UNDP's procedures for Results-based M&E are additionally accord to international best practice and have been defined following rules dictated by the NPM, the Paris Declaration and other paradigms. The latter are main agents driving change in the institutional environment of development aid, in addition to Member States. It has been evidenced that Member States hold legitimised coercive power towards the adoption of specific practices by international development organisation because of, first, its definition as states and, second, its role as donors of aid. To some extent OECD also exerts coercive power on UNDP given its visibility and influence in the development industry. Finally, Evaluation societies from all over the world have influence in this specific institutional context. The figure below illustrates these "influencing" agents:

**Figure 6: Influencing Agents on UND and in the Development Industry**



Source: Own

Even if those international standards UNDP is obeying are deemed as best practice, the lack of credible and reliable measurement and the absence of critical information on results shed light upon the fact that UNDP's evaluations may not be valuable after all, but for accountability purposes.<sup>91</sup> It is interesting to note as well that one can observe that persistently the TOR for evaluations draw larger attention on procedural matters rather than on specifications for feedback into decision making and planning. This, in turn, points out that UNDP might be adopting a ritual facade of being a responsible, rational organisation holding proper administrative and managerial procedures, so as to guaranteeing social fitness rather than improving the quality of decision making and learning. The Results-based M&E framework in place is therefore used to symbolise best practice, while increasing reputation and inspiring confidence, thus reasserting social virtue.

Certainly, UNDP has the intent of creating learning, but values of a rational and learning organisation deemed paramount may not be guiding everyday's organisational life. In this respect, there is seldom a management response and significant changes in decision making after an evaluation is completed: for example, 10 out of 15 independent evaluations completed had a management response, while merely 20% of decentralised evaluations had a response.<sup>92</sup> This is hardly explicable from a rational project/program cycle perspective, and partly but not entirely from a political perspective. Strategic actors (i.e. country and programme units) are avoiding using at all decentralised evaluations, while independent evaluations, which are rather interest 'free' and tend to focus more on learning than in accountability, are more utilised to feed decisions of the Executive Board. The fact that, the majority of COs were compliant with evaluations plans and hence completed a number of evaluations that afterwards did not have any significance for management improvement, indicates a ritual flag waving use of evaluations.

It is of particular importance at this point to uncover the political value of evaluations through the institutional lens. The normative system encourages reflection and evaluation, having become a standard accepted and valued in society that further holds the power to exert influence on socially valid constructions. Talking with Arun Kashyap<sup>93</sup> of the great potential for development offered by Public and Private Partnerships (PPP), he expressed the urgency of developing appropriate

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<sup>91</sup> Interview 4 – Yee Woo Guo

<sup>92</sup> Comments from the Annual Session 2008, Item 11 of the Provisional agenda – Evaluation (Executive Board Annual Report of evaluation in UNDP in 2007)

<sup>93</sup> Interview 3 – Arun Kashyap.



mechanisms for M&E of results so as to demonstrate their effectiveness and judge legitimate the role the private sector can play in development. In this regard, the evaluation of such interventions could boost their importance by proving positive results and hence ensuring the society's respect. Socially constructed interests might, in this case, be driving UNDP's behaviour.

The importance of the social setting and environment on UNDP's use of Results-based M&E is indeed clear. Yet, understanding M&E only as a social construct implies that the ability of organisations to make their own choices and act independently is disregarded in the analysis. There is, in effect, some added-value in pretending to understand the behaviour of UNDP as rational and interest-driven (i.e. seeking to learn), and the use of evaluation as instrumental and enlightening.

#### **6.4 Learning organisation perspective**

The rhetoric of UNDP portrays the image of being a modern and learning organisation with managers from programme units using evaluations rationally to MfDR. The agency has put lots of efforts in adopting an organisational culture that holds learning as an overriding value and in mainstreaming results at all organisational levels. Efforts started already in 2001 when the new M&E framework emphasised on learning around results (UNDP, 2007). Since then, remarkable progress has been achieved in a number of fronts, like modelling M&E tools to better learn (provided that they are effective tools for learning) and setting comprehensive management information systems like the ERC to enable a fast and efficient flow of information. ERC has been further strengthened so as to offer a follow up mechanism on evaluations (management response). Other initiatives concern the promotion of partnerships with other development agencies in view of systematically sharing knowledge and learn from each other. Participation and decentralisation are indeed key values of a learning organisation that UNDP can presume to hold.

Albeit the efforts, learning reveals as problematic at UNDP. The discourse underlines the importance of results, but following processes and delivering outputs is what really matters to the Board. Hence, oversight of interventions and resources for accountability clearly emerges as a priority, rather than the development of substantive information for learning purposes.<sup>94</sup> The agency further underlines values

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<sup>94</sup> Interview 6 – Jonas Kjaer.

such as innovation and transformation, yet change is undergone only with great effort and triggered by external pressures as already seen.

A learning organisation, in addition, encourages challenge and questioning of governing assumptions. UNDP is in this regard failing to continuously generate substantive and dissenting knowledge that can question status-quo (UNDP, 2007). There are a variety of reasons that explain this paradox. First, evaluations are contributing very little in terms of critical knowledge because they are mostly donor driven and because, in general, organisations prefer to reflect an image of holding the right answers and doing well. Secondly, greater emphasis is given to performance measurement rather than management for better results, especially since staff has greater interests in being held accountable for output delivery and financial soundness as proved. In this case, management is at best improved if monitoring has succeed in detecting errors at the output level and effectively correcting them. Nevertheless, very frequently there is no further enquiry, which could move UNDP into a stage of double-loop learning, and thus opportunities for reflection and change are missed.

On the other hand, indicators are selectively defined and data on results filtered so as to pass on information on the best possible light. Even when joint country strategies for development and partnerships to learn are emphasised, the definition of indicators that cannot be compared undermines the possibilities to learn in common. Overall, although UNDP is eager to report upon results, the information is not critical neither reliable for decision making and development of knowledge. Furthermore, when conceptual use of evaluation is happening so that for instance best practices are published, reports fail to explore underlying variables for the success (or failure) of intervention.<sup>95</sup>

Additionally, it is noteworthy that, albeit the Executive Board and senior management recognise the need to learn, the staff has underlined that time or structured occasions to learn are not provided (UNDP, 2007). In this respect, a single transfer-of-knowledge process is being promoted through the ERC. Despite its obvious limitations, this system is increasingly enabling relationships and information exchange among UNDP staff spread all over the world, which is a first step towards the learning organisation.

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<sup>95</sup> Interview 6 – Jonas Kjaer.

The learning organisation perspective provides a prescriptive view on how M&E shall be used so as to create learning for change and improvement. However, it is clearly evidenced that it provides a limited and rather simple analysis of the use of M&E in UNDP, failing to address the influence of power and interests as well as the importance of external stakeholders and the environment in shaping organisational behaviour.

## **6.5 Rounding off**

In the previous subsections, the four organisational perspectives have been applied so as to reveal the rationale behind the use of Results-based M&E in UNDP. Although the mandate of UNDP depicts the organisation as a rational, functional and learning organisation, the reality is another and UNDP's behaviour appears to be influenced by political considerations and shaped by social structures. In essence, applying all perspectives has enabled to gain a profound understanding of the organisational phenomena at study.

Results-based M&E is premised on rational science and is unquestionably a powerful tool to learn for management change and improvement. Yet, Results-based M&E is not merely used to learn and inform decision making to reach optimal management decisions, as the study of UNDP has showed. It holds political power, which in turn determines organisational behaviour, and is socially constructed by prevailing symbols of the surrounding environment.

The diffusion of Results-based M&E systems in the development aid industry was accompanied by the consolidation in society of values such as transparency, accountability, value-for-money, results and effectiveness, giving birth to regnant expectations of appropriate organisational behaviour. Poor performing institutions that did not structure themselves around these values died, while those that managed to conform their organisational processes and practices to the institutional context survived. Triggered by these external, functional pressures to change, UNDP came late but successfully to the RBM process.

Today evaluation is itself an institutionalised phenomenon. Conducting M&E is taken for granted by international development organisations given that these are deemed professionalised tools for appropriate management of projects and programs. The functioning of M&E systems do not significantly vary from organisation to organisation as there is an universal approach being promulgated from OECD/DAC

by means of guidelines, handbooks and other materials. Indeed, lessons learnt from the implementation of RBM, and in particular for M&E systems, have been common among organisations.

In any case, Results-based M&E goes beyond learning and management purposes to gaining the recognition as an accountable, focused and reflexive organisation within the development industry. No matter how performance information is used after evaluations have been conducted, UNDP has managed to become a credible and legitimate organisation with greater changes of survival in the industry.

Results-based M&E is therefore institutionalised within procedural and administrative practices of the UNDP to the extent that there is no questioning about undertaking M&E. There is no questioning despite persistent problems as regards the strategic value of evaluations in terms of learning and management, which seems to be largely affected by political concerns undermining the quality and use of evaluations.

One should note that the quality and use of evaluations is firstly influenced by the approach of UNDP to RBM, which can be said to be centrally and donor driven. Particularly, the system is build around reporting needs of the Executive Board to ensure organisational accountability and, consequently, demands from Member States and donors have been influencing the implementation of RBM. Managing for outcomes does not seem a priority for the Board, despite attempts to prove the opposite, contributing to the finding that much more progress has been achieved with reporting for accountability than for managing for results. Therefore, the Executive Board holds greater interests in demonstrating results to the public than creating learning to MfDR.

Secondly, the quality and use of evaluations are further influenced by the political interests of Members States and donors, partnering governments, and country programme units. It is interesting to note that these strategic actors, especially Member States and donors, hold power enabling them to pressure decisions on what to evaluate. This can, in addition to a political stand, be understood from an institutional point of view, i.e. evaluations undertaken to communicate certain values and ideas with the aim of ensuring social respect and virtue of the chosen intervention. Moreover, M&E is inherently political and sensible to the interests of these actors. Because of their ability to prove the impact of a given intervention, programme units are reluctant to conduct outcome evaluations. The number of outcome evaluations is in effect less significant than this of project evaluations, also

because the latter permit units to prove what really matters to senior management, i.e. that the outputs have been delivered with a wise use of resources.

On the other hand, socially constructed interests seem to further contribute to the quality and use of evaluations. The insistence on complying with administrative procedures leads to disregarding the actual purpose of M&E, which is obtaining critical and valuable information to feed management decisions. Therefore, evaluation is not only subject to political resistances and/or pressures, but to social arrangements.

Decentralised evaluations then appear more problematic than independent evaluations. The measurement of results in effect brings together a larger number of stakeholders that are demanding higher levels of accountability and performance. The challenge is not only technical, but also has a political and institutional connotation. While independent evaluations are facing similar challenges, they hold greater ability to generate learning, which indicates real intentions on developing knowledge about the agency interventions. Learning is, notwithstanding limitations previously outlined, a core value within the organisational culture of UNDP. The agency further holds principles and characteristics that approach those of a learning organisation. Herein, there is no doubt about UNDP willingness to turn into a learning organisation, yet this should be again understood through the lenses of the political view of organisations and shifting values and norms in the environment.

## 7 CONCLUSIONS

The overall aim of the thesis was to explore the implementation of Results-based M&E systems in development aid organisations so as to further our understanding of their contribution to development effectiveness. In particular, the Research Question was: whether, how and why is M&E in RBM of international organisations operating in the development aid industry (not) contributing to improve organisational effectiveness. The following key findings were observed in relation to the question:

### 7.1 Main Findings

After ten years of reform towards an RBM approach, the implementation of Results-based M&E has disappointingly contributed to enhance the effectiveness of UNDP. Hypothesis 1 is hence confirmed and the idea that the organisation's behaviour is far from being rational corroborated. To a large extent frameworks are ready for effective RBM for performance improvement, yet the challenge is how these are being used so far.

In line with Hypothesis 2, one can conclude that the adoption of Results-based M&E systems has evidenced more attuned at insuring a level of accountability to Member States and donors (especially, through UNDP's tier of organisational accountability). In this regard, the agenda of these powerful actors has been chief at determining the formulation of RBM. Therefore, the approach undertaken by UNDP to RBM has obeyed to political considerations that, in turn, have had an impact on the usefulness of M&E systems. In effect, performance information is serving to report to donors and at best the general public, but it fails to contribute for managing to achieve greater outcome. Since accountability has emerged as a priority and is donor-driven, outputs and financial soundness are being rewarded contrarily to the achievement of outcome. M&E of outcomes is avoided or even not undertaken, because it does not meet the interests of program and country units, implying that essential opportunities for lesson learning are missed. Herein, UNDP is still managing for outputs, especially at the project level, indicating that the implementation of RBM has not reached the end and there is still some room for improvement and path towards a focus on results. In this respect, greater focus on results and the use of performance

information for learning purposes should be prioritised in order to fully take advantage of the potential of Results-oriented M&E to increase effectiveness.

Additionally, the introduction of M&E in a context of RBM in general has proved to be shaped by UNDP's quest for widespread legitimacy. The reform towards RBM started late but was successful as it developed in conformity with prevailing rules and values of the institutional environment, thus ensuring the survival of the agency at a time of strong global pressures on the industry. In this regard, the characteristics of the environment have modelled the approach of UNDP to the M&E of projects and programmes, having emphasised values such as accountability, focus on results and learning. Throughout these years, UNDP has wisely adopted emerging fates of development, thus constantly ensuring social fitness with the institutional environment. The usefulness of M&E for management purposes has been overwhelmed by the focus on procedures and guidelines aiming to symbolise professionalism and excellence in management.

The approach of UNDP, because of the outlined political and institutional reasoning, has had the effect of reinforcing performance reporting and creating obsession on administrative and operational procedures, rather than a culture of results and of a learning organisation. Paradoxically, focus on results and learning has dominated the discourse and attempts to permeate the culture of UNDP. Although UNDP may hold characteristics of a learning organisation (e.g. with values such as decentralisation and partnership), in reality M&E is failing to deliver credible information on results that is critical to decision and policy making. In this regard, it can be said that neither rational nor learning organisation' principles are driving UNDP's behaviour, undermining the ability of M&E systems to further organisational effectiveness.

To sum up, a central finding is that the value of M&E in RBM at UNDP is limited for management improvement and effectiveness enhancement. The reason why this is so has to do with the fact that M&E is presently serving multiple uses.

## **7.2 Theoretical Implications for Future Research**

The scientific or rational view of organisation is usually associated with the use of M&E systems. The RBM approach and its main tools (e.g., the LFA) are indeed premised in the rational perspective, by which the organisation is perceived as an actor accomplishing its objectives in a rational manner. Accordingly, performance

information obtained from a Results-Based M&E system will contribute to the appropriate choice of management decisions. Although this perspective has proved valuable in terms of uncovering technical and operational premises of the RBM approach at UNDP and how this could contribute to enhancing effectiveness, organisational reality is more complex. For instance, judgements resulting from M&E have evidenced permeated of subjective elements, deferring from instrumental uses of M&E to inform optimal decision making at UNDP. Therefore, the explanatory power of the rational perspective has proved to be very limited at uncovering UNDP's behaviour.

The learning perspective provides a similar picture to that of rational organisations since it understands M&E as instrumental, being an essential tool for learning and organisational change. UNDP holds indeed characteristics of a learning organisation especially since M&E appears to be integrated in all its operations through the project cycle. It also enables to partly explain UNDP's desire for performance measurement and information and uncovers conceptual uses of M&E, in particular independent evaluations, at the agency. Nevertheless, M&E at UNDP has evidenced as developing limited knowledge valid to change UNDP's behaviour. Evaluative findings, lessons learnt and best practices are in this regard failing to influence thinking and appear to be selectively employed to justify how the agency acts. Therefore, the learning organisation perspective only offers a functionalist and prescriptive approach to M&E but fails to account for other uses. Other learning perspectives, especially those drawn from social sciences, recognise phenomena such as power and conflict, holding larger explanatory power.

Thus, the learning organisation and rational perspectives partly uncover the rationale of M&E explaining a variety of its uses, in particular instrumental and conceptual purposes. Nevertheless, other uses of M&E seem to prevail at UNDP, thus leaving significant gaps in the explanation. Particularly, the perspectives do not recognise the political and social reality of organisations.

Evaluations have demonstrated inherently political at UNDP being situated in a setting of multiple stakeholders with diverging agendas. The political perspective has evidenced powerful at revealing why the quality and usefulness of performance information is undermined and, therefore, why the relevance of M&E for learning is limited in comparison to its relevance for accountability purposes. To a large extent, the use of evaluations at UNDP can be uncovered through the political perspective,



in particular with regard to performance information that is not being used (except for donor accountability) or is being selectively used based on strategic variables. Despite the irrelevance of producing M&E reports in terms of decision making and management improvement, Results-based M&E have been mainstreamed at all levels of UNDP and have widely spread in the development sector. This in turn highlights an ambiguity that cannot be appreciated from the political view on organisations.

In this regard, the institutional perspective adds valuable insights to the understanding of such phenomena because of its great emphasis on the institutional conditions of the environment. The spread of Results-based M&E frameworks, albeit its limited value for management, can be explained by means of increased expectations for results and measurement. In front of growing global pressures and demands for accountability and development impact, agencies have all adopted M&E mechanisms. M&E systems have to a limited extent spread because of their ability to enhance effectiveness but, most importantly, because these mechanisms are esteemed in today society and by implementing M&E frames, organisations can symbolise proper management and professionalism. The institutional view is thus contradicting the rational understanding of organisations, those being fundamentally social structures that are to a certain extent incompatible with planning and management methodologies such as the LFA.

The political and institutional perspectives hold greater explanatory power of the UNDP motivation for implementing Results-oriented M&E at all organisational levels. These perspectives reveal different uses of M&E, which are certainly more important than instrumental and conceptual purposes. In turn, the political and institutional view on organisations shed light on why evaluations are not contributing to notably enhance effectiveness, hence providing a response to the Research Question. At this point, it is crucial to note that only through the rational and learning organisation lens is possible to understand how M&E in RBM can foster organisational effectiveness.

The main findings drawn from UNDP's case study and the theoretical implications discussed through the research have provided the argumentation to answer the Research Question. To round off the answer, M&E systems in a RBM context at UNDP have failed to significantly enhance organisational effectiveness and this premise can be generalised to international development organisations. Organisational effectiveness might have relatively improved because results-

evaluations have permitted to assess goal attainment and accordingly align operations to the possible extent. Nevertheless, international development organisations have not managed to address essential political and institutional variables that influence and shape the adoption of M&E frameworks in RBM, hampering in turn their potential to enhance organisational effectiveness. The political play of Member States cannot be disregarded because of their power to influence M&E. Herein, their interests are enough to justify (or not) certain interventions and the flow of resources to international development organisations through M&E statements. The prevailing norms and values in the environment are similarly crucial in shaping the procedures and policies surrounding M&E and which, among the multiple uses of these frameworks, is being prioritised in international development organisations. Moreover, the clamour that learning creates in society entails that most international development organisations have adopted mechanisms for learning. However, it does not ensure that these mechanisms are effectively functioning as the case of UNDP has demonstrated, yet again because political and institutional variables have not been addressed. Overall, the number of issues that have been revealed throughout the research (e.g. insistence in outputs, low quality of M&E and consequently low credibility of assessments, dominance of accountability for reporting, inappropriate means for following-up on evaluations, etc.) highlight deficiencies in the implementation of M&E systems and RBM in general. In this regard, the approaching of MDG deadline and resulting increased pressures for demonstration of results puts a strain on the ability of development agencies to undertake M&E for learning and change.

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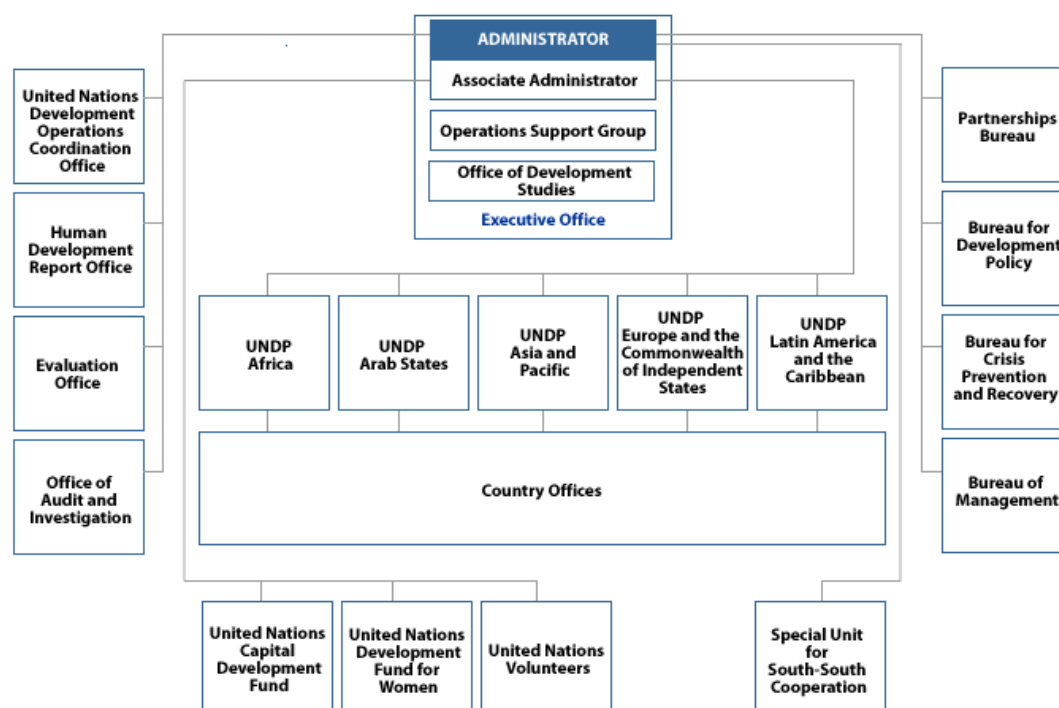
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## ANNEXES

### *Annex 1: Organisational Chart of UNDP and roles in evaluation*<sup>96</sup>



Source: UNDP's official webpage

At the highest level, the **Administrator** of UNDP is accountable for the achievement of results and ensures accountability across the organisation. The Administrator further defines resources for evaluations in the organisation.

The **Executive Board** guards the evaluation policy by: ensuring the independence of the evaluation function, demanding management response and follow-up on evaluation recommendations, etc. The Executive Board additionally fulfils an accountability role by using evaluations and reports to assess achievement of UNDP Strategic Plans.

The **Evaluation Office** (EO) guards the evaluation function and reports annually to the Executive Board on the function, on compliance and on quality of evaluation. The Office in addition sets the plan for independent evaluations according to the Strategic Plan and conducts them. Of special significance is the role of the EO in developing

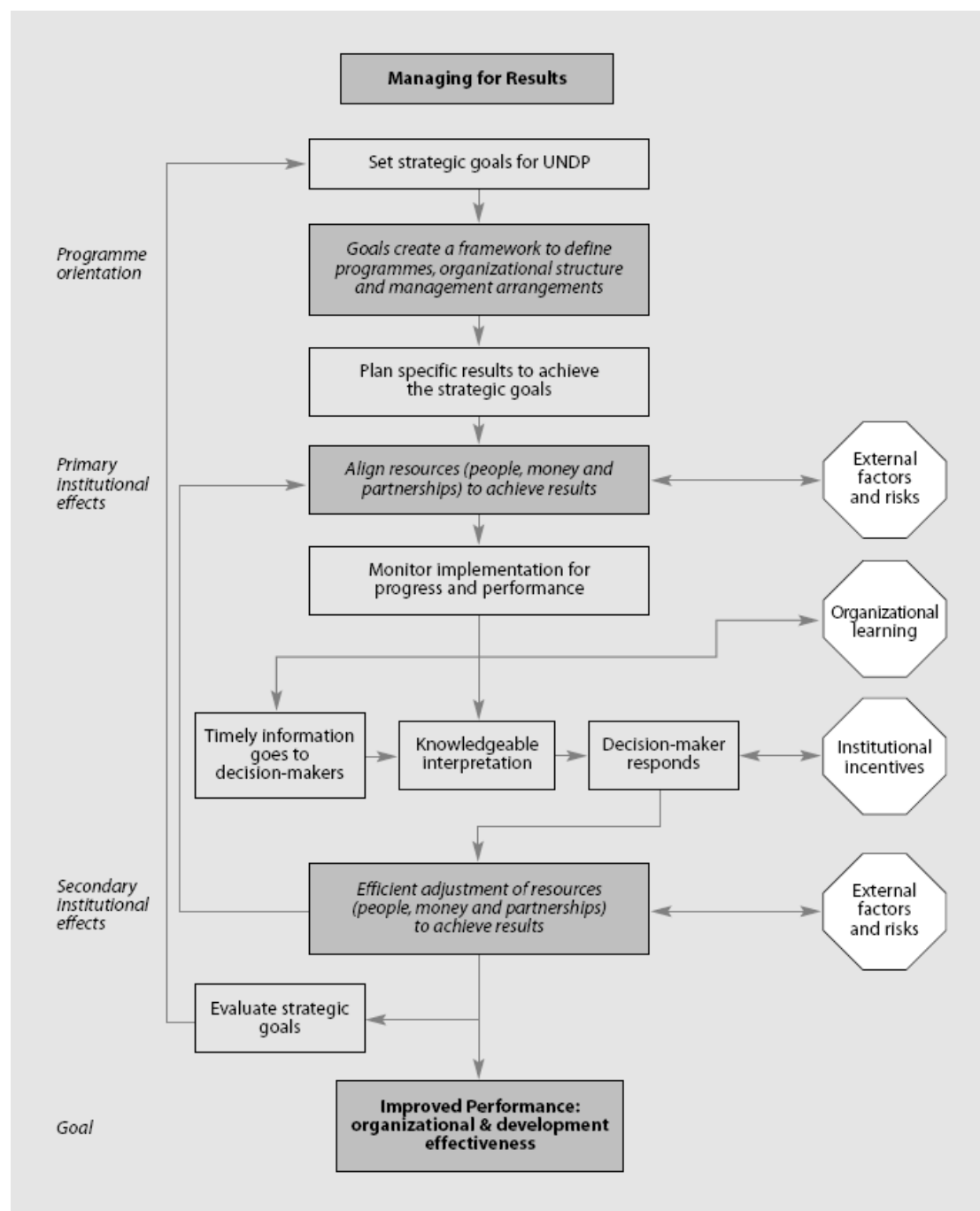
<sup>96</sup> This information has been obtained from UNDP's official webpage ([www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)) and its section on *Programme and Operations Policies and Procedures* (<http://content.undp.org/go/userguide/results/evaluation/?lang=en#top>)

standards and norms for planning, undertaking and using evaluations through Guidelines, Toolkits, Handbooks, etc. It is also responsible for ensuring dissemination of evaluations through common methods and maintaining the ERC.

As regards **senior management** of COs, RBs and Practice and Policy bureaux, their main roles and responsibilities are to ensure the evaluability of programmes (definition of clear results, identification of measurable indicators, establishment of targets and baselines, etc.), to guarantee timely and effective monitoring of programmes, to develop evaluation plans, and to prepare management responses to all evaluations, amongst other. Directors of RBs, in addition, must ensure compliance by COs with mandatory requirements of evaluation policy.



## Annex 2: Key Principles of Results-based Management at UNDP



Source: UNDP (2007)