

The London School of Economics and Political Science

**The Improbability of Accountability of Nongovernmental
Organisations to Their Intended Beneficiaries:
The Case of ActionAid**

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Abstract

This dissertation examines what happens when NGOs attempt to implement systems to improve their accountability to intended beneficiaries.

While NGO accountability is widely discussed in the literature, there has been very little work done on how accountability systems operate in practice. My dissertation aims to address this important gap by providing a detailed case study of one NGO's initiative in this area using qualitative empirical data.

The data relate to the 'best case' example of ActionAid, an NGO that has made substantial, high-profile efforts to improve its downward accountability since 2000 through its Accountability Learning and Planning System (ALPS). The case study reconstructs the evolution of ALPS and examines efforts to implement it, both at international level and within a single country setting: Uganda. The data reveal the obstacles which have hindered ActionAid in its attempts to strengthen its downward accountability.

Despite positive rhetoric around ALPS and downward accountability, my findings indicate a significant disjuncture between intentions and actual outcomes. Key factors causing this disjuncture include the benefits that the organisation can reap from an appearance of downward accountability, such as enhanced external legitimacy, even if this does not reflect reality. More broadly, my case study suggests that disjuncture between aims and actual practices is a necessary feature of how NGOs function in the aid sector, in terms of accountability and also in other areas.

What then can NGOs do to attempt to overcome the negative implications of disjuncture and improve their relationships with intended beneficiaries? My central recommendation is for NGOs to reflect and to recognise their tendencies to promote disjuncture, such as when they over-state achievements to donors. Frank assessments of the actual status of an NGO's relationships with communities and of the limitations caused by the NGO's funding structures are important steps to improving these relationships.

Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| <i>Abstract</i> | 3 |
| <i>List of Figures, Tables and Photographs</i> | 10 |
| <i>List of Acronyms</i> | 12 |
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> | 13 |
| <i>1. Framing the Dissertation</i> | 15 |
| 1.1 Introduction..... | 15 |
| 1.2 Structure of This Chapter | 20 |
| 1.3 Who Am I?..... | 20 |
| 1.4 Accountability: Popular yet Problematic..... | 21 |
| 1.5 Gaps in the Literature | 24 |
| 1.6 Research Question | 25 |
| 1.7 Methodology and Methods..... | 26 |
| 1.8 Case Selection | 27 |
| 1.9 Structure of Dissertation | 28 |
| <i>2. Methodology: A Qualitative Case Study of Accountability Practice</i> | 30 |
| 2.1 Introduction..... | 30 |
| 2.2 Structure of This Chapter | 31 |
| 2.3 Ontology and Epistemology: Anti-Foundationalism and Constructionism..... | 32 |
| 2.4 Interpretivism, the Actor-Oriented Approach and Qualitative Research | 33 |
| 2.5 An Ethnographic Approach to Qualitative Research..... | 35 |
| 2.6 A Single-Case Instrumental Case Study | 37 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| 2.7 Case Selection: Seeking an Accountability Initiative | 39 |
| 2.7.1 Dimensions of an Accountability Initiative | 40 |
| 2.8 Selected Case: ALPS | 41 |
| 2.9 Embedded Case Study Design..... | 43 |
| 2.9.1 Country Selection: Uganda..... | 45 |
| 2.10 My Role as Researcher | 46 |
| 2.11 Relationship with Host Organisation..... | 51 |
| 2.12 Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures..... | 54 |
| 2.12.1 Semi-Structured Interviews | 56 |
| 2.12.2 Document Analysis..... | 62 |
| 2.12.3 Participant Observation..... | 65 |
| 2.12.4 Survey..... | 67 |
| 2.12.5 Interaction of Methods..... | 67 |
| 2.13 Data Analysis | 69 |
| 2.14 Ethics..... | 71 |
| 2.15 Conclusion | 75 |
| 3. NGO Accountability: The Stories so Far | 77 |
| 3.1 Introduction..... | 77 |
| 3.2 Structure of This Chapter | 78 |
| 3.3 Definitions of Accountability..... | 79 |
| 3.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Accountability..... | 81 |
| 3.4.1 Structuralist Perspective | 81 |
| 3.4.2 Actor Oriented Perspective | 82 |
| 3.4.3 Institutional Perspectives | 83 |
| 3.4.4 Summary of Perspectives..... | 84 |
| 3.5 Scope of Literature Review | 85 |
| 3.6 Overview and Mapping of Literature on Accountability..... | 87 |
| 3.6.1 Social Science Literature on Accountability..... | 88 |
| 3.6.2 Third Sector Accountability Literature | 89 |
| 3.6.3 Development NGO Accountability Literature..... | 90 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| 3.7 What Are NGOs Aiming for? Models of NGO Accountability | 94 |
| 3.7.1 Principal-Agent Model | 95 |
| 3.7.2 Representative Model | 96 |
| 3.7.3 Social and Ethical Perspectives | 97 |
| 3.7.4 Lack of Viable Model of Accountability for NGOs | 100 |
| 3.8 Literature Gap: Weak Focus on Theory and Structural Barriers to NGO Accountability | 100 |
| 3.9 How Is Accountability Being Practiced? Empirical Studies | 102 |
| 3.10 Literature Gap: Lack of Empirical Studies of Practice..... | 104 |
| 3.11 To What Extent and Why Is There Disjuncture Between Aims and Practices?.... | 105 |
| 3.11.1 Conceptual Framework to Understand Disjuncture | 112 |
| 3.11.2 Why Does Disjuncture Persist? | 113 |
| 3.11.3 What Enables Disjuncture to Function?..... | 118 |
| 3.12 Conclusion | 122 |
| 4. ALPS at International Level: Best Practice? | 125 |
| 4.1 Introduction..... | 125 |
| 4.2 Structure of This Chapter | 126 |
| 4.3 A Note on Terminology | 127 |
| 4.4 ActionAid International: Major Shifts in the Late-1990s | 128 |
| 4.5 Introduction to ALPS | 132 |
| 4.6 Chronology of ALPS | 134 |
| 4.7 Discussion of ALPS in the Public Domain | 136 |
| 4.7.1 Internal Authors | 137 |
| 4.7.2 External Authors | 139 |
| 4.7.3 Gaps in the Literature | 141 |
| 4.8 Accountability in Crisis? | 142 |
| 4.9 What Happened with ALPS? | 145 |
| 4.10 Participatory Processes | 149 |
| 4.10.1 Social Audit in Nepal..... | 153 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 4.11 Transparency | 156 |
| 4.11.1 Transparency Boards in Kenya..... | 157 |
| 4.12 Accountability through Governance | 162 |
| 4.13 Key Issues Affecting ActionAid’s Downward Accountability | 163 |
| 4.13.1 Quantity of Staff Time Available..... | 164 |
| 4.13.2 Quality of Staff and Partners..... | 166 |
| 4.13.3 Prioritisation of Donor Requirements..... | 169 |
| 4.13.4 Leadership..... | 172 |
| 4.14 Conclusion | 174 |
| 5. ALPS in Action in Uganda | 176 |
| 5.1 Introduction | 176 |
| 5.2 Structure of This Chapter | 178 |
| 5.3 NGOs in Uganda | 178 |
| 5.4 NGO Relationships with the State | 179 |
| 5.5 ActionAid in Uganda: “Country Director Is King” | 182 |
| 5.6 Early Days of ActionAid in Uganda: The Pre-1998 Era | 183 |
| 5.7 Major Change in ActionAid Uganda: 1998-2003 | 184 |
| 5.7.1 Programming Shifts..... | 185 |
| 5.7.2 Organisational Shifts..... | 186 |
| 5.8 ActionAid Uganda Flounders: 2003-4 | 191 |
| 5.9 Troubled Times in ActionAid Uganda: 2004-7 | 193 |
| 5.10 Stabilisation and Strengthening of ActionAid Uganda: 2008-2012 | 195 |
| 5.11 Overview Findings on ActionAid Uganda and Accountability | 197 |
| 5.12 Participation in ActionAid Uganda | 200 |
| 5.12.1 Observation of PRRPs..... | 201 |
| 5.12.2 Perspectives on the Value of PRRPs..... | 213 |
| 5.13 Transparency | 216 |
| 5.14 ActionAid’s Accountability through Its Governance System | 223 |

| | |
|---|-------------------|
| 5.15 Key Issues Affecting ActionAid Uganda’s Downward Accountability | 226 |
| 5.15.1 Quantity of Staff Time Available..... | 227 |
| 5.15.2 Quality of Staff and Partners..... | 230 |
| 5.15.3 Prioritisation of Donor Requirements | 235 |
| 5.15.4 Leadership..... | 239 |
| 5.16 Conclusion | 240 |
| <i>6. NGO Accountability Obstacles: What Lies beneath?</i> | <i>242</i> |
| 6.1 Introduction..... | 242 |
| 6.2 Structure of This Chapter | 243 |
| 6.3 Framework of Obstacles to NGO Accountability to Intended Beneficiaries | 243 |
| 6.3.1 Power Dynamics at Community-Level..... | 245 |
| 6.3.2 NGO Tendency for Trend-Jumping..... | 251 |
| 6.3.3 Individual Staff Members’ Pressures and Interests..... | 261 |
| 6.3.4 NGOs’ Retention of Control..... | 268 |
| 6.4 Persistence of Disjuncture between Intentions and Practice..... | 276 |
| 6.5 Why Does Disjuncture Persist?..... | 278 |
| 6.5.1 External Legitimacy..... | 278 |
| 6.5.2 Internal Legitimacy..... | 280 |
| 6.6 What Enables Disjuncture to Function?..... | 283 |
| 6.6.1 Language..... | 284 |
| 6.6.2 Discontinuity..... | 285 |
| 6.6.3 Organisational Hierarchy..... | 287 |
| 6.7 Representations of NGO Work: More Important than Realities?..... | 290 |
| 6.8 Conclusion | 292 |
| <i>7. NGO Accountability: Where to from Here?</i> | <i>294</i> |
| 7.1 Introduction..... | 294 |
| 7.2 Structure of This Chapter | 294 |
| 7.3 What I Learnt and How I Learnt It..... | 295 |
| 7.4 Methodological and Theoretical Limitations..... | 298 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 7.5 Policy Implications and Recommendations for NGOs | 300 |
| 7.5.1 Seek Power Shifts, not Accountability | 300 |
| 7.5.2 Recognise the Inevitability of Disjuncture..... | 305 |
| 7.6 Future Research | 307 |
| 7.7 Contribution to Knowledge..... | 307 |
| 7.8 Conclusion: Back to ALPS | 310 |
| <i>Appendices</i> | 312 |
| Appendix 1: List of Interviewees | 313 |
| Appendix 2: Interview Questions..... | 322 |
| Appendix 3: Survey | 326 |
| Appendix 4: Interview Summary Sheet for Data Analysis | 330 |
| <i>References</i> | 330 |

List of Figures, Tables and Photographs

| | |
|---|-----|
| Figure 2.1: Illustration of Case Actors and their Accountability Interrelationships | 41 |
| Figure 2.2: Embedded Case Study Design of ActionAid..... | 45 |
| Figure 3.1: Scope of Literature Review on Accountability..... | 87 |
| Figure 3.2: Major Groupings of Accountability Literature..... | 88 |
| Figure 3.3: Causal and Enabling Factors of Disjuncture..... | 113 |
| Figure 4.1: Components of ALPS | 134 |
| Figure 4.2: Operational Obstacles to Downward Accountability | 164 |
| Figure 5.1: Operational Obstacles to Downward Accountability | 227 |
| Figure 6.1: Obstacles to NGO Accountability to Beneficiaries | 244 |
| Figure 6.2: Causal and Enabling Factors of Disjuncture Regarding Accountability | 277 |
| Figure 6.3: Obstacles to NGO Accountability to Beneficiaries (Complete)..... | 292 |
| | |
| Table 2.1: Internationally-Focussed Interviews by Type of Interviewee..... | 60 |
| Table 2.2: Uganda-Focussed Interviews by Type of Interviewee..... | 61 |
| Table 3.1: Authors from Structuralist to Actor Approaches | 85 |
| Table 3.2: Classification of Development NGO Accountability Literature..... | 92 |
| Table 4.1: Chronology of ALPS..... | 135 |
| Table 5.1: Focus Areas of ActionAid Uganda Country Directors | 182 |
| | |
| Photograph 4.1: ActionAid Usigu Transparency Board | 159 |
| Photograph 4.2: Barokwiri Abidha Magombe Achuodho Transparency Board | 160 |
| Photograph 5.1 : Participants at PRRP in Buseeta, Pallisa LRP. 14th July 2011. | 203 |
| Photograph 5.2: Participants at PRRP in Acanga, Katakwi LRP. 23rd July 2011..... | 204 |
| Photograph 5.3: Facilitators at PRRP in Kapujan, Katakwi LRP. 25th July 2011. | 205 |
| Photograph 5.4: Participants at PRRP in Kapujan, Katakwi LRP. 25th July 2011..... | 206 |
| Photograph 5.5: Facilitation at PRRP in Acanga, Ngariam. 23rd July 2011. | 207 |
| Photograph 5.6: Group work during PRRP in Gogonyo, Pallisa LRP. 13th July 2011. | 210 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Photograph 5.7: Presentation at PRRP in Gogonyo, Pallisa LRP. 13th July 2011. | 211 |
| Photograph 5.8: Presentation at PRRP in Gogonyo, Pallisa LRP. 25th July 2011. | 212 |
| Photograph 5.9: Transparency Board in Katakwi LRP. July 2011. | 217 |
| Photograph 5.10: Partner Transparency Board in Masindi LRP. April 2011. | 219 |
| Photograph 5.11: Partner Transparency Board in Gogonyo, Pallisa LRP. July 2011... | 220 |
| Photograph 5.12: Partner Transparency Board in Toroma, Katakwi LRP. July 2011. . | 221 |
| Photograph 5.13: Partner Transparency Board in Toroma, Katakwi LRP. July 2011. . | 222 |

List of Acronyms

| | |
|--------|--|
| AAI | ActionAid International |
| AAN | ActionAid Nepal |
| AAU | ActionAid Uganda |
| AAIU | ActionAid International Uganda |
| ALPS | Accountability Learning and Planning System |
| BOND | British Overseas NGOs for Development |
| CD | Country Director |
| CMT | Country Management Team |
| CSP | Country Strategy Paper |
| DA | Development Area |
| DANIDA | Danish International Development Agency |
| DENIVA | Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations |
| DfID | Department for International Development (UK) |
| GA | General Assembly |
| HAP | Humanitarian Accountability Partnership |
| HRBA | Human Rights-Based Approach |
| IASL | Impact Assessment and Shared Learning Unit |
| IDS | Institute of Development Studies |
| LRP | Local Rights Programme |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| NPM | New Public Management |
| MS | Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke |
| NGO | Nongovernmental Organisation |
| OD | Organisational Development |
| ODA | Overseas Development Agency |
| PO | Programme Officer |
| PRRP | Participatory Review and Reflection Process |

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1. Framing the Dissertation

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation takes a rare in-depth look at an attempt of a nongovernmental organisation (NGO) to be accountable to its intended beneficiaries. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to briefly illustrate why I selected this topic and to provide an overview of the dissertation, including its research question, main arguments and methodology.

While the NGO literature since the early 2000s is replete with expressions of the problem of insufficient accountability to beneficiaries¹, there are very few studies of potential solutions being tried. This study analyses the much-lauded ‘best case’ example of the Accountability Learning and Planning System (ALPS) of the international development NGO ActionAid. Drawing on ALPS practice internationally and in ActionAid Uganda² over a period of 15 years, I ask what obstacles exist to NGOs being accountable to their intended beneficiaries. To respond to this question, I analyse the differences that exist between the stated aims of NGO accountability efforts, and how they are practiced. In this analysis of both intentions and practices, Long’s (1977, 2001) actor-oriented approach is my central theoretical lens. This approach, which draws on sociological and anthropological approaches from the late 1960s and early 1970s, is first set out explicitly in Long’s 1977 book *An Introduction to the Sociology of Rural Development*, and is elaborated considerably in his 2001 book *Development Sociology, Actor Perspectives*. Starting with the notion that it is “theoretically unsatisfactory” to base analysis only on external determination as structural approaches do, Long (2001, p. 13) makes the case for actor-oriented analysis as:

¹ I use the term ‘intended beneficiary’ throughout this dissertation, rather than alternatives such as ‘rights-holder’, which ActionAid uses, or broader terms such as ‘community member’. This is because I am referring specifically to individuals to whom NGOs such as ActionAid are attempting to provide some benefit. These individuals may not benefit however, hence the qualifier ‘intended’.

² During the time period studied ActionAid in Uganda changed its name from ActionAid Uganda to ActionAid International Uganda. To avoid confusion, I use the term ActionAid Uganda and the abbreviation AAU (rather than AAIU) in this dissertation. I take the same approach for other ActionAid country programmes.

A more dynamic approach to the understanding of social change. . . which stresses the interplay and mutual determination of ‘internal’ and ‘external’ factors and relationships, and which recognises the central role played by human action and consciousness.

An actor-oriented approach thus rejects assumptions that development work can be understood only from its plans and its formal representations, and stresses the “room for manoeuvre” of individual practitioners during implementation of programmes (2001, p. 26). In his efforts to understand rural development, Long calls for a focus on the complexities and specificities of the actual practice of development interventions, rather than only on documents that purport to describe development:

we also need to get behind the myths, models and poses of development policy and institutions, as well as the reifications of local culture and knowledge, to uncover ‘the particulars of people’s “lived in worlds”.’ That is, we need to document the ways in which people steer or muddle their ways through difficult scenarios. (p. 14)

I first discovered Long’s approach while reading an ethnography of an NGO in the Philippines by Hilhorst. A student of Long’s, Hilhorst applied the actor-oriented approach to the study of NGOs. As I describe further in the literature review chapter, the main alternative theoretical lens for my study of accountability was a structural approach, along the lines of Weber. However, as Hilhorst (2003, p. 5) notes in her description of the actor-oriented approach: “An actor orientation recognizes that people operate within the limitations of structural constraints, but emphasizes that such constraints operate through people. Constraints only become effective through the mediation of interpreting actors.” Therefore, the actor-oriented perspective provided me with a tool to analyse the relationships between actors and structures in this dissertation, as well as informing how I analysed relationships between actors. More specifically, Hilhorst’s study demonstrated the value of the actor-oriented approach for the study of NGOs. I adopted the approach for my study as it made good sense analytically in relation to my data, and also because, as I discuss in later chapters, other theoretical approaches to studying NGOs, such as the resource dependency theory from organisational studies, offer less insight into my data than does the actor-oriented approach.

Long's actor-oriented approach fits within the interpretivist theoretical perspective, as opposed to the positivist perspective. Crotty's (1998) distinction is helpful here:

A positivist approach would follow the methods of natural sciences and, by way of allegedly value-free, detached observation, seek to identify universal features of humanhood, society and history that offer explanation and hence control and predictability. The interpretivist approach, to the contrary, *looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world.* (p. 67, emphasis in original)

This dissertation is thus framed by the actor-oriented approach within the interpretivist theoretical perspective, in its detailed study of both discussions and practices of NGO accountability within particular contexts.

While the original central focus of my study was the examination of accountability issues, my use of the actor-oriented approach and my methods - a combination of participant observation, interviews and document review as is discussed below - led to a shift in this central focus during the course of my study. Ultimately, my key findings relate to instances of 'disjuncture' between what is enacted and what is represented in relation to accountability, and how these instances of disjuncture emerge and function. Disjuncture, defined as "a separation or disconnection" (OED, 2013a), thus became one of the core concepts of my dissertation.

The relevance of the concept of disjuncture to development studies was first elaborated within an edited collection of journal articles by anthropologists of development (Lewis & Mosse, 2006a). These articles emerged from a 2004 conference on the same theme and were motivated by the observation that despite, or perhaps because of an increasing consensus on global policies for development in the early 21st century, actual practices were disappearing from view, making critical ethnography all the more necessary (pp. 1-2). As Rossi (p. 556) notes in her overview paper of the 2004 conference: "the apparent increasing order which characterises the expansion of developmental rationales conceals increasing disjuncture between normative expectations and the multiplicity of practices which take place within development arenas". In their paper introducing the edited collection, Lewis and Mosse (2006a, pp. 2-5) describe three frameworks of order and disjuncture which anthropologists of

development have used. Two of these frameworks are of particular relevance to my study. The first framework is within a technical and managerial perspective - a perspective which I detail further later in this chapter - and views disjuncture as the gap between ideal policy scenarios and social realities³. I use this framework of order and disjuncture throughout this dissertation. The other relevant framework is the third mentioned by Lewis and Mosse (pp. 3-4). Within this framework, anthropologists reject the notion that development has a claim to order:

Anthropologists are concerned with setting aside self-representations of bureaucratic rationality in order to uncover more of the inner workings of development agencies. Indeed, such accounts reveal the complex and autonomous agency of the diverse actors within government bureaucracies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or markets that ensure that the capacity to produce order is in practice very limited (Lewis et al., 2003).

This perspective on disjuncture resonates with my use of the actor-oriented approach as described above.

My findings about disjuncture in this dissertation add value to the original goal of my study to examine accountability issues, as they have implications not only for accountability, but also for understanding other areas of NGO practice. Specifically, in this research, I found a significant gap or disjuncture between the intentions of NGO accountability, as stated by ActionAid, and the actual practices. When I ask my research question on what obstacles exist to NGO accountability to beneficiaries or, in other words, what leads to this disjuncture between the NGO's aims and its practices, two levels of response emerge. The first level of disjuncture concerns the direct obstacles to NGO accountability and ALPS implementation. I find obstacles at the operational level of ActionAid International and ActionAid Uganda, such as issues around staffing and partnerships. I then analyse my data alongside the key theories and ideas from my literature review. This analysis helps to identify a set of more structural and

³ The second of the three frameworks described by Lewis and Mosse (pp. 2-3) is within critical deconstructionism. In this framework, the authors note that "anthropologists understand the techno-managerial discourse or "order" of development itself as an instrument of cognitive control, social regulation or exploitation. . . This form of order is also viewed as a rationalizing discourse that conceals development's real political relations". I do not use this framework in my study.

fundamental obstacles to NGO accountability, such as issues around power dynamics at community level and donor requirements.

While the combination of these obstacles ostensibly appears to answer my research question, the data raise another intriguing question: given that there is clear evidence of poor accountability practice, why is ALPS still spoken about so positively in terms of its achievement of downward accountability? I find that there is a powerful ‘myth of ALPS’ which is promulgated by ActionAid staff members, as well as by external stakeholders. A second core concept of my study, I define myth, as “an exaggerated or idealized conception of a person or thing”⁴ (OED, 2013c).

I find that the myth of ALPS feeds a second, less tangible, level of disjuncture between the policies and practices of NGO accountability. On this second level, drawing on the work of Lewis and Mosse (2006a) and Mosse (2003, 2005), I contend that a certain level of disjuncture between the policy and practice of NGO accountability is, in fact, inevitable and necessary. I propose a detailed framework to explain what causes this level of disjuncture and how it functions. In sum, this second level of disjuncture relates to the impossibility of reconciling the image NGOs wish to portray with the realities of NGO practice in the increasingly managerial development sector. At the level of appearances and at the level of practices, NGOs have to satisfy different stakeholders in different ways.

After demonstrating that this second level of disjuncture is inevitable, I argue that there are powerful legitimacy benefits that NGOs can reap for appearing to be accountable to intended beneficiaries, even if this does not reflect reality. I contend that this ‘image benefit’ comprises, in itself, an obstacle to NGO accountability; if NGOs can gain much legitimacy from appearing to be accountable, the incentive to actually improve accountability practice is diminished.

⁴ The other three definitions of myth in the Oxford English Dictionary are: “a traditional story, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining a natural or social phenomenon, and typically involving supernatural beings or events”, “a widely held but false belief or idea” and “a fictitious or imaginary person or thing”(OED, 2013c). Notably, the definition I use does not imply that the conception is necessarily false or fictitious in its entirety.

1.2 Structure of This Chapter

Having provided a summary of my main arguments, this chapter proceeds to a brief description of my background as the author of this dissertation. I then discuss the topic of accountability in more detail and some of the key themes surrounding it. This discussion concludes with a highlighting of gaps in the relevant literature on development NGO accountability, which feed into the derivation of my research question. I then list my research question and sub-questions, and describe my methodology and case selection. Finally, I outline the structure of this thesis.

1.3 Who Am I?

A ‘core premise’ of my theoretical perspective, interpretivism, is that “Researchers are inextricably part of the social reality being researched, i.e. they are not ‘detached’ from the subject they are studying” (Grix, 2004, p. 83). Thus, as a researcher, my professional background and current work role are relevant to this dissertation.

When I began this research in 2008, I was a development practitioner with ten years experience working with NGOs in the international development and human rights sectors. This included significant field experience in East Africa and South Asia with international and local NGOs (not including ActionAid). Within a few months of beginning this PhD, I joined a governmental donor agency, Irish Aid. I initially worked on NGO funding for Irish Aid, before moving to Freetown in 2011 to manage the Sierra Leone and Liberia programme.

In the next chapter on methodology, I explore in more detail the ways in which my background and my current job have had, or may have had an impact on my research. For the purposes of this chapter, it is relevant to note that my wider experience and knowledge of the development sector assisted me in selecting my research question, along with my analysis of the gaps in the literature which I detail below. In the next section, I provide an introduction to my topic, accountability of development NGOs, and some of the key themes that emerge in this dissertation.

1.4 Accountability: Popular yet Problematic

Accountability is a core concept in social policy. It is viewed as lying at the heart of attempts of public or private actors to provide services to client groups, and thus to put social policies into practice. However, over the past thirty years, accountability has come to be seen by many as something of a “magic wand”, a panacea for the achievement of justice, democracy, ethical governance, cost-effectiveness and efficient service delivery across public and private sectors (Ebrahim & Weisband, 2007, p. 1). Bankers and politicians are to be held ‘accountable’ for the financial crisis in Europe. Companies should be held ‘accountable’ for oil spillages in the US. The Catholic Church should be held ‘accountable’ for the sexual abuse of children by priests. In this section I discuss how, despite this apparent popularity of accountability, it is a contested concept whose mechanisms have been deeply controversial in recent years across sectors. I raise the central problem in the contemporary accountability literature: the negative impact of managerial accountability mechanisms in the public and third sectors.

The popularity of the concept of accountability has led to a fervent demand for accountability in policies and practices across public and private sectors (Behn 2001). In Western democracies, this demand has manifested itself in new or increased requirements of public sector organisations for record-keeping, reporting and information dissemination, as well as in the introduction of new procedures (Mulgan 2003). O’Neill (2002) explores this topic regarding health and education services in the UK:

In the last two decades, the quest for greater accountability has penetrated all our lives . . . For those of us in the public sector the new accountability takes the form of detailed control. An unending stream of new legislation and regulation, memoranda and instructions, guidance and advice floods into public sector institutions.

As O’Neill and other authors demonstrate, numerous complexities and problems can arise in the public sector when attempts are made to increase accountability, such as a large increase in bureaucracy, which can distract public servants from the services they aim to provide.

Similarly, in the third sector⁵, which consists of non-governmental and non-profit organisations, authors are critical of accountability requirements which increasingly result in heavy reporting burdens and the need for reducing complex long-term work into linear plans with quantifiable indicators of progress.

So why has the concept of accountability become so prominent? Definitions of accountability are discussed further in the literature review chapter. A standard definition in the academic literature is that of Mulgan who speaks of the “core sense” of accountability as “being called ‘to account’ to some authority for one's actions” (Jones, 1992, p. 73; Mulgan, 2000, p. 555). Traditionally, accountability has been a concept applied to governments. Yet the contemporary concept of accountability has expanded significantly since the 1980s, broadening in scope across public and private sectors, and also deepening in reach, as noted by O’Neill, to significantly affect the day-to-day functioning of organisations.

This increased prominence of accountability is often attributed to a shift known as New Public Management (NPM) which has spread from the corporate sector to the public and non-profit sector since the 1980s (Goetz & Jenkins, 2002, p. 80). NPM consists of changes in public administration using ideas borrowed from the private sector, including the notion of the improvement of accountability to customers through the use of performance indicators (Power, 1997, pp. 42-43). NPM is closely associated with the concept of ‘managerialism’ which, like NPM, has neo-liberal roots, and is also focussed on bringing private-sector methodologies into public administration⁶.

The attempt to deepen control is one of the key characteristics of the managerial turn in organisational life and has led to the large increase in bureaucratic requirements referred to above. The desire for control relates to another often-cited characteristic of managerialism: its “technical-rational” approach (Harding, 2013, p. 131). The technical-rational bias of managerialism is based on a strong faith in systems and processes, and

⁵ Anheier and Seibel (1990, p. 1) refer to the third sector as “non-profit organizations, private voluntary organizations, philanthropic and operating foundations – in short on those organizational forms located between the private for-profit world and the government.” Lewis (2007b, p. 7) refers to development NGOs as a subgroup of the third sector “that are engaged in development and poverty reduction work at local, national and global levels around the world.” I provide more detailed definitions in the literature review chapter.

⁶ While the terms NPM and managerialism can be used differently in different contexts, in the accountability literature which I review in this dissertation, they appear to be used inter-changeably.

neglects considerations of context and culture which can interfere with the all-encompassing need for control (Brett, 1993, 1999; Lewis, 2007a). Indeed, the generalised abstractions of managerialism are in direct contrast with the actor-oriented approach of Long (2001), as discussed above.

In the aid sector, it has been suggested that one of the key effects of managerial approaches is a growing disjuncture between policy and actual practice (Lewis & Mosse, 2006a; 2004, p. 556). As I demonstrate in detail in the literature review chapter, practitioners often ‘play along’ with managerial accountability requirements, while implementing quite differently in response to various conditions and incentives at operational level. This disjuncture, what I refer to as the ‘second level’ of disjuncture, is the key theme of Mosse’s long-term ethnography of a rural development project in India funded by the then Overseas Development Agency (ODA) - now the Department for International Development (DfID). Rather than making a case, as many authors writing about accountability do, for the reconciliation of policy and practice, Mosse (2005, p. 232) demonstrates that this disjuncture is inevitable and, indeed, essential. In the current managerial context for aid, policy-level objectives and field-level realities simply cannot be reconciled. To survive and grow, NGOs and other actors must satisfy the divergent interests of their different stakeholders, while giving an impression of coherence between what they say and what they do. Thus, representation becomes more important than practice, and is unlikely to reflect it. This centrality of representation leads to the creation and propagation of myths in the development sector.

Drawing on the work of Malinowski and Sorel, who point to the function of myth as enhancing the legitimacy of certain ideas, I argue that myth is a key mechanism used by NGOs to navigate the challenging terrain of accountability. A successful myth helps to sustain the second level of disjuncture between policy and practice by providing ‘stories’⁷ which meet the needs of external and internal stakeholders. Naturally, stories depend on language, and I found that a particular use of language in the development sector helps to propagate the myth of accountability. I coined the term ‘brochure talk’, during my study, to describe the way in which development practitioners work to create

⁷ Segal (2004, p. 4), in a book on theories of myths from different disciplines, notes that one common feature is the notion of a myth as a story.

an idealistic image of their work, regardless of whether or not this reflects reality. Brochure talk is a key element in the framework which I propose to explain the persistence of the second level of disjuncture. Another element that, I argue, facilitates disjuncture is discontinuity: the constant shifts in approaches that characterise the development sector. I now discuss gaps in the literature on the accountability of development NGOs.

1.5 Gaps in the Literature

Much of the literature on third sector accountability, as is reviewed in the third chapter of this dissertation, makes the point that these organisations should not overly focus on their responsibilities to donors at the expense of serving poor and marginalised people. This goal of ‘downward accountability’ is at the very core of third sector organisations’ *raison d’être*, as it raises the question of who they exist to serve. Over the past 10 to 15 years, there has been considerable discussion on how to make third sector organisations more accountable to their intended beneficiaries.

The international development and humanitarian NGO sector has been a particular locus of discussions and initiatives to achieve an accountability that is balanced between upward and downward. Voluntary codes of conduct, certification initiatives and other accountability mechanisms have abounded in the sector in recent years, and organisations have been established to support and promote accountability improvement (Jordan, 2005; Lloyd, Oatham, & Hammer, 2007; Omelicheva, 2004).

The recent commencement of many initiatives in the international NGO sector, with most having been established since the early 2000s, appears to suggest that accountability is a fairly new concern. In fact, the literature demonstrates that the perceived ‘clash of upward and downward accountabilities’, while the vocabulary used may have varied over time, has in fact plagued the sector for over twenty-five years, essentially since it became a sector of significant size in the 1980s (Edwards & Hulme, 1996). Numerous discussions have taken place and attempts have been initiated to resolve this clash, yet remarkably little literature exists in which NGOs claim success in balancing their accountabilities. The obvious question is: why? However, as the

literature review demonstrates, it does not appear that this question is being asked; the focus is more on launching new initiatives.

The tendency to focus on how to achieve balanced accountability has militated against improving understanding of why imbalances in accountability exist, and whether there are fundamental, structural blockages that are hindering improvements. Notably, most of the literature does not interrogate the fundamental accountability problem of the NGO sector: that its funds do not usually come from the people it aims to assist, and that the people it aims to assist lack formal power and authority to demand accountability. This would appear to make downward accountability improbable at best. Yet, the mood in much of the literature is optimistic and suggests that NGOs simply need to try harder to put policies and principles of downward accountability into practice. Ironically however, despite an apparent bias towards ‘practical’ literature rather than more theory-driven works, the literature is also very weak at describing actual attempts of NGOs trying to improve the balance of their accountabilities.

This research, therefore, uses an in-depth study of one NGO’s attempts to practice downward accountability to contribute to filling these gaps in the literature. In other words, this study, in addition to looking at practice, also explores the theoretical and structural limitations to NGOs’ accountability to intended beneficiaries. In the next section, I outline my research question, as derived from these gaps in the literature.

1.6 Research Question

The literature and its gaps, as briefly summarised above, and my knowledge and experience of the development NGO sector suggested that what was required was an empirical investigation of how attempts at improving downward accountability played out, informed by concepts and theories from wider literature on accountability, on organisations and on the aid sector. Within this frame, my research question is: What obstacles hinder development NGOs in their attempts to implement accountability systems that prioritise their accountability to intended beneficiaries?

Three sub-questions arise which help to answer my research question:

- what are NGOs aiming for in terms of their accountability to beneficiaries?
- how are these attempts at accountability to beneficiaries being practiced?

-to what extent, and why, is there a disjuncture between stated aims and practices?

I assume here that there will always tend to be a difference, to some extent, between how accountability is talked about and what actually happens on the ground. The interesting questions are how significant this difference is and, critically in terms of responding to my main research question on obstacles, why this difference exists.

It is important to note that I am not ‘judging’ the outcomes of accountability attempts against an abstract standard. As I discuss further in the literature review chapter, accountability is a complex and contested term which means different things to different people. In my study, I focus on observed differences between what a particular NGO sets out to do and what appears to be the actual practice on the ground. I then turn to the less easily observed second dimension of disjuncture, as referred to above. Having defined my research question and sub-questions, I now introduce the methodology of this research.

1.7 Methodology and Methods

As noted, a key gap in the literature on NGO accountability is the lack of empirical studies on ‘what actually happens’ when accountability initiatives are attempted at field level. Given my interpretivist theoretical perspective and my use of the actor-oriented approach which stresses the complexities and unpredictability of actual practice, a qualitative case study seemed the appropriate choice. A single case design was selected to enable an in-depth analysis of one NGO. In order for this case study to have scope to explore both the ‘theory’ and the practice of NGO accountability, it was designed as what Yin (2009) refers to as an ‘embedded’ case study which allowed me to study multiple units of analysis within a single case. My two units of analysis were: the international level of the NGO where most policies and systems are established and where diverse country experiences are collected, and the operational level in one country where ‘the rubber hits the road’.

Given that a key aspect of answering my research question involved exploring whether discussions on NGO accountability resembled practice, I knew early on in my study that I would have to ‘see for myself’ the practice of downward accountability at the community level in developing countries. I thus used an ethnographic approach in

my case study, alongside more mainstream sociological qualitative methods. Ethnography has been used in the development sector to get behind what is said and to expose the realities of frontline practitioners and intended beneficiaries. As Long (2001, p. 91) put it when advocating for the actor-oriented approach, “research practitioners must devise ways of entering the everyday lifeworlds of these actors (frontline personnel and locals) to learn how the latter deal with the complexities of implementer-client relationships”. In addition to the ethnographic method of participant observation, I used semi-structured interviews, document review and a survey as the methods in my case study. In my methodology chapter, I demonstrate how these methods interacted and built upon one another. In the next section, I detail my case selection and introduce my case.

1.8 Case Selection

I elected to conduct a study of an “extreme” rather than a typical case (Yin, 2009). This was to address the common theme in the literature that NGOs simply need to ‘try harder’ to practice quality downward accountability. My selected case is the Accountability, Learning and Planning System (ALPS) of the international development NGO ActionAid, an organisation which has tried harder than most to promote its accountability to intended beneficiaries.

ActionAid launched ALPS in 2000. ALPS is a system outlining the planning, review and reporting requirements of the organisation, among other elements. What was remarkable about ALPS when it was launched was its demonstration of ActionAid’s efforts to align its programming systems with its values, particularly around the prioritisation of downward accountability. ALPS is not limited to processes and requirements, but also details the attitudes and behaviours that will be necessary to promote accountability, learning and planning within these processes. This innovation has brought ActionAid great acclaim since its early years, as ALPS has been lauded by internal and external practitioners and academics.

My case selection criteria are described in detail in my methodology chapter but in brief, I selected ALPS because, in my view, it was the most significant downward accountability initiative in the development NGO sector. The system has been promoted

by ActionAid, and perceived by other authors as being at the cutting edge of NGO accountability practice (Guijt, 2007; Jordan, 2007). ActionAid is consistently the only NGO that is mentioned as leading in the area of downward accountability through its own endeavours. Significant efforts have been made to implement ALPS internationally and at the level of different ActionAid countries over the years. However, there are surprisingly few detailed case studies available that show how the system is actually working on the ground. Within ActionAid, I selected ActionAid in Uganda for particular focus, mainly due to its reputation as having been one of the country programmes that made serious efforts at ALPS in the early years. Having briefly described my case selection, I conclude this chapter with a description of the structure of my dissertation.

1.9 Structure of Dissertation

The next chapter describes my methodology and methods in detail, including my case study design and my case selection. This chapter also reflects on my position as a researcher, and the ethical considerations which I had to take into account in this qualitative research.

The third chapter reviews the relevant literature, starting with accountability literature and then narrowing down to third sector, and finally development NGO literature. Theories and models of accountability across sectors are explored for their potential relevance to NGOs. Broader literature on organisations and the aid sector is also reviewed, to bring out relevant themes, such as the influence of managerialism on accountability practices. The derivation of my research question from the gaps in the literature is detailed in this chapter.

The fourth and fifth chapters are my data chapters in which the preliminary findings from my field work are described and analysed. The fourth chapter is focussed on ActionAid International which, in part, lays the groundwork for the in-depth case study of ActionAid Uganda's downward accountability in the fifth chapter. There is considerable commonality in the findings at both levels, with a significant disjuncture between intentions and practices of downward accountability arising internationally and in Uganda. I outline the operational obstacles to ActionAid's accountability to

beneficiaries at international and Uganda levels. These chapters also bring out the 'myth' of ALPS, whereby positive representations exist independently of practice.

The sixth chapter, the discussion chapter, takes the findings and initial analysis from the data chapters and deepens it to discuss some of the underlying obstacles to ActionAid's accountability to its intended beneficiaries. The discussion chapter also returns to the notion of the second level of disjuncture between aims and practices, and explores what this means for my research question, finding that there is an important symbolic obstacle to NGO accountability to beneficiaries, in addition to the many direct obstacles presented. This symbolic obstacle concerns the benefits that can be reaped from the appearance of accountability, even if this does not reflect reality.

Finally, the seventh chapter provides a summary of my argument, followed by a discussion of the theoretical and methodological limitations of my study. I then move on to policy implications and recommendations for NGOs on how to act differently and, crucially, how to think differently about accountability. I conclude by describing my contribution to knowledge and opportunities for future research.

2. Methodology: A Qualitative Case Study of Accountability Practice

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I detail how I developed my research approach and plan and how my research plan played out in practice. Before I describe the specifics of my methodology, I begin with a short reflection on this research project and how it began and evolved.

For about ten years before beginning this study, while working in the development NGO sector, I was both fascinated and puzzled by the concept of NGO accountability. It appeared to me that NGOs had a very free rein in developing countries and could do, more or less, whatever they wanted without sanction, given weak regulatory environments and the vulnerability of their intended beneficiaries. As an NGO worker myself, I wanted to do something about this. I wanted to contribute to NGOs being held accountable for their performance.

I sought ways to work on this area within my own organisation at the time (Concern Worldwide) and by getting to know other initiatives on NGO accountability that were emerging in the sector. I read widely on the topic and attended conferences and meetings. But I still felt that there was much I did not understand, and no one initiative appeared to be moving in quite the right direction for me to want to fully 'get on board'. I eventually concluded, rather to my own surprise, that the best way to work on this issue would be to study it.

Never having had any plan or inclination to do a PhD, the past five years has been a long and difficult, but illuminating period. The benefits of my background, including knowing how to operate within the NGO sector and at the community level in Africa, were balanced by the need for me to take a step back from all that I knew and look at the topic in a completely different way. The early drafts of my literature review chapter were more like policy papers, complete with detailed recommendations! Moving out of the NGO sector early in my PhD and going to work for a donor agency (Irish Aid) for the past four and a half years may have helped to create a useful distance, but this shift brought its own risks which I detail below.

While there was no ‘eureka’ moment, I gradually learnt how to approach the topic of NGO accountability using a different lens, and got to know some of ‘tools’ of the research trade, which I detail in this chapter. Attending various training courses on methodology, seeking advice from other researchers, and reading widely, including PhD dissertations, was extremely helpful for me, not least because the majority of my time over the past five years was spent outside the university environment. In particular, reading research studies specifically on NGOs, such as ethnographies, was very useful and assisted me to avoid some of the pitfalls with which I would almost certainly otherwise have struggled, particularly around relationships with host organisations, which is further detailed below.

My greatest challenge in this process has been, fundamentally, learning how to do PhD research. But this is also where I feel I have gained the greatest benefit. The second greatest challenge has been balancing studies with a fairly intense full-time job, with all the ‘stopping and starting’ that this entails. The least challenging aspect was the field work, which, after the rigours of learning about theories, methodologies and so on, was like ‘coming home’!

Had someone told me five years ago that I would end up writing a dissertation which questioned the feasibility of downward accountability, I would have found this very difficult to believe. At that stage, like many writers on NGO accountability as mentioned in the last chapter, I was in ‘how to’ mode. The past five years, as well as being an academic journey, have also been a personal and professional journey in questioning my own beliefs and assumptions about the aid and development sector, in which I have worked for almost 15 years.

2.2 Structure of This Chapter

In this chapter, I first explain why I chose to answer my research question by conducting a qualitative single-case study with an ethnographic approach. I then turn to my case, describing why I selected ActionAid’s ALPS as the accountability initiative to study. I outline why my research question and my selection of ALPS led to the decision to use an embedded case study design which looks both at ALPS at the international level and in one selected country: Uganda. I follow this with a reflection on my role as a

researcher and my relationship with ActionAid as my host organisation. I then outline the methods used to study ALPS, how the methods interacted with one another, and how I went about analysing the data collected, before concluding the chapter with a discussion of ethical considerations. This chapter thus sets the scene for the literature review and data chapters to follow by setting out my research approach.

2.3 Ontology and Epistemology: Anti-Foundationalism and Constructionism

Every researcher makes assumptions and choices, sometimes unknowingly, about certain elements of the research process. It is important that we are explicit about these choices and assumptions, not least to ourselves, as they have implications for what we find out. Crotty (1998, p. 5), in a text on social research, provides a useful schema of the four inter-linked elements of any research process: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology and methods. In this chapter, I describe each of these with respect to my research beginning in this section with ontology and epistemology.

Ontology and epistemology can be viewed as the “core assumptions” that underlie research work and inform a researcher’s choices, such as the choice of research question and of methodology (Grix, 2004, p. 57). Ontology is generally described as the study of being or “what is”, whereas epistemology is described as the theory of knowledge or “what it means to know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 5).

Ontological positions can be divided into positions based on foundationalism and those based on anti-foundationalism which can be explained as follows:

Central to a foundationalist view is that reality is thought to exist independently of our knowledge of it. . . . On the other hand, anti-foundationalists do not believe that the world exists independently of our knowledge of it, but rather ‘reality’ is socially and discursively ‘constructed’ by human actors. (Grix, 2004, p. 61)

My ontological position is anti-foundationalist, in that I believe that we, as social actors, participate in creating our reality. Leading on from this, in terms of epistemology, my research naturally falls under ‘constructionism’, rather than the alternatives ‘objectivism’ or ‘subjectivism’. Similar to the ontological distinction above, the key difference between constructionism and objectivism is that objectivism is based on the

premise that there is an objective truth that can be discovered, whereas proponents of constructionism reject this and hold that:

truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities of the world . . . Meaning is not discovered, but constructed . . . In this view of things, subject and object emerge as partners in the generation of meaning. (Crotty, 1998, p. 9)

Subjectivists, on the other hand, believe that meaning is imposed on the object by the subject.

Having outlined my ontological and epistemological positioning, anti-foundationalist and constructionist, I proceed to discuss my theoretical perspective.

2.4 Interpretivism, the Actor-Oriented Approach and Qualitative Research

A theoretical perspective is the “philosophical stance lying behind a methodology” (Crotty, 1998, p. 66). Following on from an ontology and an epistemology which hold that meaning is constructed by people rather than ‘out there’ to be discovered, my theoretical perspective, as noted earlier, is an interpretivist approach, in contrast to a positivist approach. Grix (2004, pp. 83-84) outlines a number of ‘core premises’ of interpretivism, including its basis in anti-foundationalist ontology, and its assertion that “Researchers in this paradigm tend to place emphasis on meaning in the study of social life and emphasise the role language plays in constructing ‘reality’”. The role of language is a key theme of my dissertation and I return to it later in this chapter. Another core premise which is particularly relevant to my study is that “the world is socially constructed through the interaction of individuals”. As noted in the introductory chapter, within the interpretivist theoretical perspective, my research is framed by Long’s (2001) actor-oriented approach and the social construction of the world by individuals is central to this theoretical lens. Long’s approach recognises the importance of the influence of people’s environment but takes the view that all structural changes need to be mediated as they enter into people’s lives and, in this process, they will be transformed through struggles and negotiations.

My use of the interpretivist theoretical perspective and the actor-oriented approach, with their emphasis on the agency and different understandings of individuals, and on the important role of culture and context, leads naturally to qualitative research. The following definition by Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 3) summarises why qualitative research is appropriate in terms of my research question, “Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them.” As I illustrate further in the literature review chapter, accountability is a phenomenon that people view in very different ways. Thus, it is important to be explicit about meanings. In addition, a central tenet of my research is differentiating attempts of an NGO to be accountable by the quality of these attempts. The quality of accountability is not easily measurable and is very much dependant on the understanding and interpretations of the stakeholders in question. Therefore, qualitative research is appropriate, as this type of research does not attempt to seek out a universal truth or test a particular hypothesis, as quantitative research often does, but rather seeks representations from a particular context and the people therein to try to enhance understanding (p. 10).

Qualitative research embodies another feature which makes it appropriate to my study. It places emphasis on the researcher’s subjectivities and how these should be made explicit rather than denied, as in the case of some positivist research where objectivity is assumed (Carey, 1989, p. 104; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 8). Given my background working in the NGO sector, and my current position working in a donor agency, it is important for me to recognise the biases and preconceptions that I may bring to the study. This point is elaborated on below.

I undertook qualitative methods such as interviews and document analysis to learn about the perspectives of different actors. I also used the ethnographic method of participant observation to study what actors actually do. My methods are described in detail below, as is the significant interaction between my different methods.

There has been some scope in my research for aspects of quantitative research. For instance, I conducted 100 semi-structured interviews relating to my case study organisation, ActionAid Uganda. The vast majority of interviewees had a strong relationship with ActionAid Uganda over a certain time period. Thus, it has been

possible for me to draw some conclusions about the frequency of certain responses to questions which are common to interviews. This is illustrated in the data chapters. The same principle applies for events which I observed, such as community meetings; or objects, such as ‘transparency boards’ which display certain information about the NGO. Observing a number of similar events and viewing a certain number of objects enabled me to make certain quantitative observations. I conducted one survey which had the potential to enable quantitative conclusions. However, while the survey was useful to a certain extent, it had limitations as I elaborate below. Having described my theoretical position and why I chose to conduct primarily qualitative research, I now proceed to discuss my methodology in detail.

2.5 An Ethnographic Approach to Qualitative Research

Within my qualitative research methodology, I took an ethnographic approach to studying the NGO, along with more mainstream sociological qualitative methods. In this section, I describe why the aspect of ethnography in my study was particularly appropriate and useful.

Gottlieb (2006, pp. 47-48) characterises ethnography as offering:

an unparalleled set of methods for exploring and gaining insight into people’s values, beliefs and behaviours. Qualitative methods, of which ethnography is the quintessential exemplar . . . have the potential to explore ruptures between individuals’ stated opinions and beliefs . . . on the one hand, and their actual behaviours, on the other hand, since the latter may not always reflect the former.

My actor-oriented theoretical lens strongly suggested the need for an ethnographic approach. Long (2001, pp. 14-15) notes that the aim of the actor-oriented approach is reaching understanding of complex issues via “a systematic, ethnographic understanding of the ‘social life’ of development projects - from conception to realisation - as well as the responses and lived experiences of the variously located and affected social actors”.

One aspect of an ethnographic approach, which is of particular relevance to my research question, is that ethnography brings out how actual outcomes diverge from plans due to the ‘room for manoeuvre’ of individual actors. Hence ethnography assists in exploring the disjuncture between policy and practice, which I knew from my

experience to be a major issue in development NGOs. As noted in the previous chapter, a key gap in the literature on NGO accountability is the lack of empirical studies on ‘what actually happens’ when accountability initiatives are attempted at field level, as opposed to what NGOs may claim happens. Hilhorst (2003, p. 5) in her aforementioned actor-oriented ethnography, encourages this focus on the practices of organisations:

Organizations constitute multiple realities: they are many things at the same time (Morgan 1986). . . . This implies that students of NGOs must shift their attention away from organizational features, structures and reports to the everyday practices of the social actors in and around the organisations. Rather than taking organizations at face value, we have to ask and observe how the claims and performances of NGOs acquire meaning in practice.

My interest in using both the actor-oriented approach and an ethnographic approach originally emerged from reading ethnographies of NGOs, such as the study by Hilhorst, which succeeded in illuminating NGO practice and how it differs from ‘talk’. Another example is Mosse’s (2003, 2005) aforementioned ethnographic study of a rural development project in India. Mosse highlights the co-existence of different worlds within the same project: the ‘official’ world of policies, proposals, reports which are relayed to donors and other stakeholders, and the world of practice, or ‘what actually happens’. Crucially, these ethnographic studies within the development sector also expose some of the structural constraints of development organisations which, as mentioned in the previous chapter, are often not focussed on within the mainstream NGO accountability literature. For instance, Mosse (2005: 12) highlights some of the day-to-day institutional survival concerns of development actors and links this to the maintenance of the official world of ‘accounts’ to their donors. He speaks of development agencies which “operate within a nexus of evaluation and external funding which means that effective mechanisms for filtering and regulating the flow of information and stabilising representations are necessary for survival”. Ethnography and the actor-oriented approach help to look beyond these official representations.

In sum, an ethnographic approach using participant observation is particularly appropriate to my research question for two reasons. Firstly, it has the potential to distinguish talk from realities, even more so than other approaches, and secondly, it has

the scope to expose structural issues. For these reasons, I used an ethnographic approach as part of my qualitative research methodology. I now detail the mode of enquiry I selected for this qualitative and ethnographic study: an instrumental case study.

2.6 A Single-Case Instrumental Case Study

The mode of enquiry selected for my study of NGO accountability is the qualitative case study and this section illustrates why. Yin (2009, p. 16) defines a case study as:

an empirical inquiry that
 -investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context, especially when
 -the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident.

Three features of this definition illustrate why I selected the case study as appropriate to my research question. Firstly, the emphasis on an empirical study of practice, which gaps in the literature demonstrate is required in the area of NGO accountability. Secondly, the focus on depth is important for my study. Depth is also mentioned by Casley and Lury (1981, p. 62) as the key strength of a case study. Given my contention, which I expand on in the next chapter, that most literature has not delved deeply into either the concepts or the practice of NGO accountability, an in-depth study is required, which allows room for the complexity of the issues to be explored. Finally, Yin's emphasis on the importance of the context surrounding a case, a characteristic of case studies also raised by Stake (2005, p. 444), is highly relevant to my research question. For instance, considerations of power and authority of NGOs with respect to donors and beneficiaries are significant as is further discussed in the literature review chapter. The case study mode of enquiry allows me to delve into such issues which comprise part of the 'context' of a case. In his description of the actor-oriented approach, Long (2001, p. 155) provides a good summary of these points as he describes the importance of case studies for the study of complex social issues in practice: "Only detailed case studies can adequately identify and analyse the ways in which differences of value and interest are negotiated in the everyday practices of sustaining or transforming social networks."

The main criticism of case study research that it is not generalisable, in that one case is not necessarily representative of a larger set of cases. Much of the literature

acknowledges this and cautions that this is an inherent feature of case studies (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Gerring, 2004; Stake, 2005). However, Burawoy (1991, p. 271) looks at the issue of broader learning from a single case from a different angle. He contrasts “generic” and “genetic” explanations: generic explanations are abstract “invariant laws”, whereas genetic explanations are “explanations of particular outcomes” which are grounded in a specific history and context. Burawoy notes:

In the generic mode, we seek out what different social situations have in common, and generalization is based on the likelihood that all similar situations have similar attributes. Here significance refers to *statistical significance*, generalization from a sample to a population. In the genetic mode the significance of a case relates to what it tells us about the world in which it is embedded. What must be true about the social context or historical past for our case to have assumed the character we have observed? Here significance refers to *societal significance*. The importance of a single case lies in the importance of what it tells us about society as a whole rather than about the population of similar cases. (pp. 280-281, emphasis in original)

Burawoy’s view resonates with my use of the actor-oriented sociology approach which stresses the importance of understanding historical and contextual particularities. In line with this perspective, while I aim to draw out wider implications and learning from my specific case findings that have implications for NGOs, the aid sector and accountability theory more broadly, I do not claim that my case study is representative of NGO accountability initiatives.

My aim to draw broader learning from one particular case led me to conduct an ‘instrumental’ case study. Stake (1995, p. 3) introduces the concept of an instrumental case study to be used in a situation in which the researcher has “a research question, a puzzlement, a need for general understanding, and feel that [they] may get insight into the question by studying a particular case.” Hence the case here is ‘instrumental’ in understanding something.

As the next section demonstrates, I studied an extreme or atypical case. Whyte (1984, p. 285) recommends searching for an atypical case: “At best, further research on ‘standard organizations’ would yield only theoretical and practical implications regarding how marginal improvements in performance might be achieved”. Similarly, Stake (2005, p. 451) makes the point that using ‘typical’ cases can be over-rated, as far

more can be learnt from an atypical case. As is illustrated in the next section, a key criterion for my case selection is that an organisation should have made significant efforts to transform its accountability systems. Since most organisations do not seem to have done this, as evidenced by the dearth of empirical studies in the literature, there would simply be a lack of data if a typical organisation were selected. Thus my selected case, while by no means the only organisation to have made efforts, has made more efforts than any other organisation that I know of, in this sense I view it as extreme.

2.7 Case Selection: Seeking an Accountability Initiative

My research question, which focuses on identifying the obstacles to NGO accountability to intended beneficiaries, led me to seek a case which fit the following criteria:

- The case should enable me to empirically study accountability practice; specifically it should contain significant scope for the study of attempts by NGOs to prioritise accountability to intended beneficiaries.
- The case should enable me to conduct an in-depth study, which would allow consideration of theoretical and conceptual issues around NGO accountability.

Thus, in my case selection, I sought ‘accountability initiatives’, which are purposive attempts by NGOs to improve their practice of accountability to their different stakeholders.

My literature review, coupled with my knowledge of the development NGO sector, demonstrated that while a number of accountability initiatives exist, very few of them fit the above criteria. The first reason for this is that most accountability initiatives in the development sector are relatively new, having been established since 2000 (for instance, Humanitarian Accountability Partnership – HAP - in 2003, Keystone in 2006), and thus, at the time of beginning my study, there was little scope in such initiatives for an in-depth study of practice as their impact on organisations was only taking root.

Secondly, most accountability initiatives in the sector are external rather than internal, for instance, codes of conduct to which NGOs sign up. The literature review cites some examples, such as the code of conduct for Ethiopian NGOs, and the Organizational Self-Analysis tool for NGOs in India. In my experience, which is supported by the fact that there is a dearth of case studies of such external mechanisms

in the literature, external mechanisms can be fairly superficial. This is because NGOs sign up to these external mechanisms but may not make significant internal changes to rebalance their accountabilities as a result (although HAP may be one of the exceptions to this general picture as it requires detailed accountability frameworks to be formulated by member NGOs).

I felt that studying either a new or an external initiative within an organisation would militate against a detailed study of understandings and practices in that there would simply be a shortage of data. Thus, to ensure sufficient scope and data to respond to my research question, I sought an internal accountability mechanism, which had been running for a number of years and which had been significantly thought through, invested in and documented by the NGO in question. In the next section, I outline the parameters of my case in terms of people, place and time to give shape to what is meant by an accountability initiative.

2.7.1 Dimensions of an Accountability Initiative

One of the difficulties of case study research is clearly defining the scope and boundaries of the case or unit of analysis to be studied (Yin, 2003, p. 23). In this section, I set out the dimensions of my case/unit of analysis: an accountability initiative within an NGO.

Studying an accountability initiative within an organisation as a case is complex. It involves actors and functions within the organisation to different extents but, crucially, it also involves actors and spaces from outside the organisation which are engaged in accountability relationships with the organisation. An accountability initiative within an NGO is bounded by three dimensions:

- (i) *Actors and their inter-relationships*: Certain actors implement and/or are impacted by the accountability initiative. For an NGO accountability initiative, actors might include NGO staff and trustees, intended beneficiaries and partners, donors and the government officials who regulate the NGO.
- (ii) *Space*: Actors are located in certain organisational positions and geographical areas. An accountability initiative is multi-sited, in that actors implementing or impacted by the initiative may be located in different places, for instance,

the donor may be in Europe, while the intended beneficiary may be in a village in Africa.

- (iii) *Time*: The accountability initiative takes place within a certain temporal period.

Figure 2.1: Illustration of Case Actors and their Accountability Interrelationships

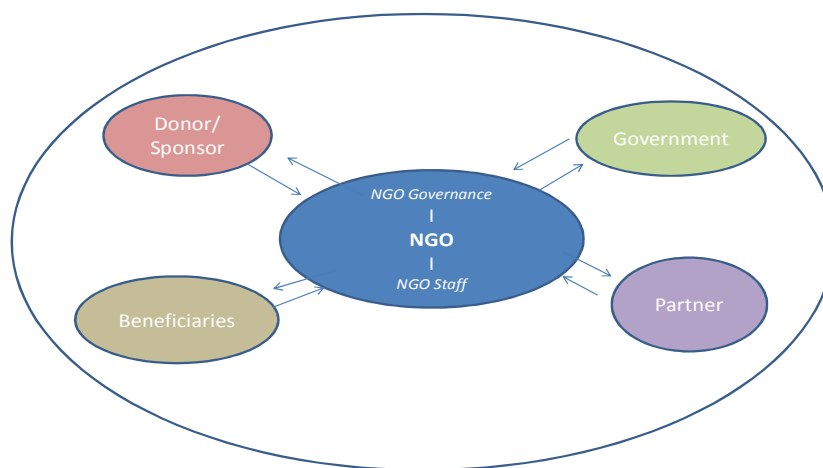


Figure 2.1 illustrates these actors and their inter-relationships.

The boundaries of the case thus outlined, I now describe my selected case: ActionAid's ALPS.

2.8 Selected Case: ALPS

Having established the dimensions of the case or unit of analysis to be sought, this section briefly describes my selected case and elaborates on why it was selected. The Accountability Learning and Planning System (ALPS) of the international NGO Action

Aid met the criteria set out above to a far greater extent than any other accountability initiative and is therefore my selected case.

ALPS was created in 2000. It was one of a number of internal reform processes within ActionAid under the strategy *Fighting Poverty Together* which was launched in 1999. ALPS was introduced with the goal of aligning ActionAid's programming systems with its principles. The system has three components. Firstly, policies and processes are the ways in which ActionAid's work with communities is planned and monitored. The second and third aspects, principles and consequent attitudes and behaviours, should infuse how such processes are conducted to ensure that intended beneficiaries are prioritised first and foremost in all of ActionAid's work (ActionAid, 2007). I provide a detailed description of ALPS in the data chapter on ActionAid International.

I noted above that, in order to facilitate an in-depth study of practice, I was seeking an accountability initiative which was internal to an organisation, which had been operating for some time and which had been significantly invested in by the organisation in question. Five points are worth highlighting in terms of why ALPS was judged to fit these criteria. The first four points illustrate why ALPS provides considerable scope for an empirical study of practice, which includes a focus on how ALPS was thought about and discussed, as well as practiced, and the fifth points relates to its overall significance.

Firstly, ALPS is implemented in all ActionAid country programmes, and has widespread implications within country programmes for programme planning, learning and monitoring. Secondly, its creation in 2000 makes ALPS a relatively old accountability mechanism by the standards of the sector. Thirdly, significant time and effort has gone into creating and strengthening the system since 2000, as evidenced by the fact that ALPS was reviewed in 2004 and 2007, and the fact that new versions of the system were created in 2006 and 2011. In addition, ActionAid staff members were assigned at international and country-level to support country programmes to implement ALPS. Thus, a lot of time was spent by ActionAid, and occasionally by outside reviewers, thinking about the system and how it might work better. This relates to the fourth point that, as illustrated in the literature review chapter, ALPS is the best-

documented NGO accountability initiative in the sector. All four of these points demonstrate that significant data exist on ALPS, which, to my knowledge, far exceeds data on any other development NGO downward accountability initiative.

Fifthly and finally, in my view, ALPS is currently the most significant NGO accountability initiative in the development sector. The system has been promoted by ActionAid, and perceived by other authors as being at the cutting edge of NGO accountability practice (Jordan, 2007). As is detailed in the literature review chapter, in the early days of ALPS implementation several papers were published in books and journals, and presented at conferences, referring to the promise of ALPS as an accountability and learning mechanism (for instance Chapman, David, & Mancini, 2003; David & Mancini, 2004; David, Mancini, & Gujit, 2006). ActionAid is consistently the only NGO that is mentioned as leading in the area of downward accountability through its own efforts. Hence, ALPS fits the criteria of being an extreme or atypical case.

However, significant gaps exist in the literature surrounding ALPS, particularly around the shortage of empirical examples of ALPS in practice, the dearth of independent studies of the system, and the lack of recent literature. These gaps are further detailed in the fourth chapter on ActionAid International. I now discuss how I designed my case study to try to address these gaps and to respond to my research question.

2.9 Embedded Case Study Design

In this section I outline how I designed my case study to respond to my research question. In order to explore the obstacles to downward accountability practice, I decided to first seek answers to my sub-questions:

- what are NGOs aiming for in terms of their accountability to beneficiaries?
- how are these attempts at accountability to beneficiaries being practiced?
- to what extent, and why, is there a disjuncture between stated aims and practices?

My research sub-questions thus refer to both the stated intentions, and the practice of, downward accountability. My experience in the sector and my literature review suggested that it was highly likely that the way that an organisation thinks and talks about accountability, and the way in which it is practiced would be different. Hence,

within the design of my single case study of an accountability initiative, I needed to capture both of these levels.

Another consideration, given that I selected the accountability initiative of an international NGO, was to explore the international dimension of the case, as well as the national and local dimensions where the interaction with intended beneficiaries occurs. This is an important aspect of the actor-oriented approach which “enables one to conceptualise how small-scale interactional settings or locales interlock with wider frameworks, resource fields and networks of relations, thus facilitating a re-thinking of key concepts” (Long, 2001, p. 49). I therefore sought a case study design that would allow for:

- the analysis of both the discussions on and practice of ALPS within ActionAid
- the analysis of international, national and local levels.

Consequently, I chose to conduct what Yin refers to as an ‘embedded’ case study design. Yin (2009, pp. 46-53) presents two possible case study designs within a single-case study: holistic or embedded. The holistic design comprises a single unit of analysis, whereas the embedded design allows for multiple units of analysis (two or more) within a single case⁸. Yin elaborates:

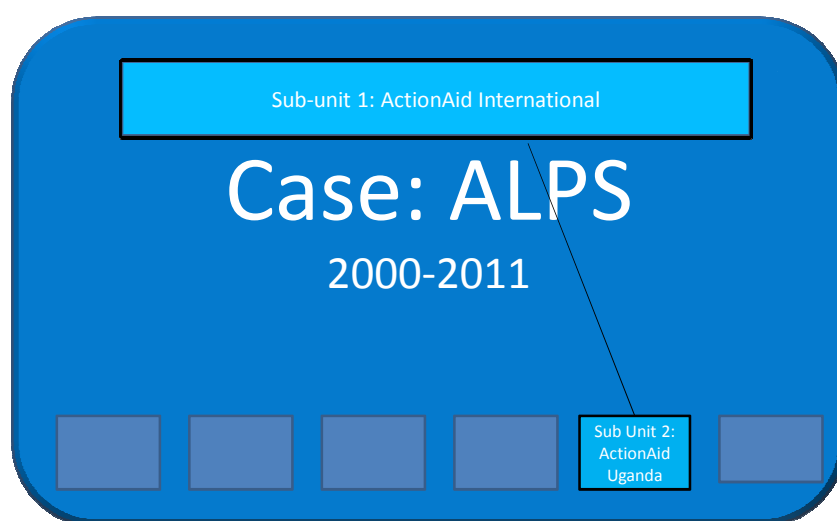
Within the single case may still be incorporated subunits of analyses, so that a more complex - or embedded - design is developed. The subunits can often add significant opportunities for extensive analysis, enhancing the insights into the single case. (pp. 52-53)

My two ‘sub-units of analysis’ are: ALPS at international level, and ALPS within one ActionAid national country programme. This design provided scope for an in-depth study of practice, particularly within the country programme case study, and also allowed this empirical study to be situated within the wider thinking and discussions around ALPS at the international level. The international level study also helps to avoid the danger Yin (p. 52) cites of an over-emphasis on sub-units at the expense of the larger whole of the case. The scope of time for both studies of ALPS was approximately 2000-11, although my study also covered broader organisational reforms in the late 1990s

⁸ This ties in with the possibility mentioned by Stake (2006) of studying ‘mini-cases’.

before ALPS was launched in 2000. The diagram below, Figure 2.2, illustrates the embedded case study design.

Figure 2.2: Embedded Case Study Design of ActionAid



Having presented my case study design of two complementary embedded studies within a single case, I now detail why I selected the ActionAid Uganda country programme for the empirical study of practice.

2.9.1 Country Selection: Uganda

With a view to studying the ‘coalface’ of ALPS being practiced, I chose to study the evolution of the ALPS system in one country from its introduction in 2000 to the present, to complement my study of ALPS at the international level. Although an organisation-wide system, exploratory interviews and reading demonstrated that the implementation of ALPS varies significantly across ActionAid’s country programmes. In this section, I detail five reasons why I selected ActionAid Uganda.

The first reason ties in with my overall desire for an extreme or atypical case study. ActionAid Uganda was seen within ActionAid globally as a model for ALPS practice in the early days, 2000-3 (Okwaare & Chapman, 2006). For instance, Uganda was said to have been the only ActionAid country programme which formulated a local version of ALPS. Given the apparently significant investment in ALPS in Uganda, the country programme seemed appropriate to become the country-level component of my extreme case study. This links with my second reason for the selection of Uganda which relates to the volume of available data. The investment in ALPS in Uganda leads to considerable data being available on ALPS practice, much more than would be available in a country which had given little attention to the system.

Thirdly, having initially been lauded as a ‘champion’ country for ALPS implementation, my exploratory interviews showed that the practice of ALPS appeared to decline significantly in the years 2003-2008, thus the variation in practice promised an interesting study.

A fourth reason for the selection of ActionAid Uganda is that Uganda is a good place to study NGO accountability for various contextual reasons, such as generally good security and widespread use of English. In addition, I had considerable work experience in the region, with NGOs and at community level, which assisted in the research process as is further elaborated below. Finally, Stake (2005) mentions that one of the key features in case selection is always hospitality. ActionAid was supportive of my intention to study ALPS in Uganda and this support was manifested at international, regional and national levels.

Having described my case, why I selected it and its design, I now discuss my own role as a researcher and the impact of the different identities which I brought to the research.

2.10 My Role as Researcher

Guba and Lincoln (1998, p. 210) define reflexivity as:

the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher . . . reflexivity forces us to come to terms not only with our choice of research problem and with those with whom we engage in the research process, but with our

selves and with the multiple identities that represent the fluid self in the research setting (Alcoff and Potter, 1993).

My two main identities for the majority of this research were as a former NGO worker, and a current employee of an aid donor government. I discuss below how these identities manifested themselves in my research and how I tried to mitigate any adverse impacts of my different identities.

At the outset of my research I had worked within NGOs, including at the field level in East Africa and South Asia, for about ten years. This gave me five advantages when starting my field work. Firstly, while I had no work experience with ActionAid directly, I had many contacts within the sector, including with ActionAid and former ActionAid staff members. This made it easier than it would have been otherwise to set up my research and get access to some of my international interviewees. Secondly, for the first two and a half years of my PhD, I had roles that included global travel which made it easier and more affordable to meet with some important interviewees. Thirdly, I had experience working within NGOs and specifically within NGOs in East Africa so I was familiar with the basic structures and operations of organisations like ActionAid and its partner agencies and broadly knew 'how to get around'. This was particularly important given how busy and under pressure ActionAid staff members were throughout the period of my research, a point I return to later. I was able to be largely self-sufficient and to fit in with ongoing activities. Fourthly, when I started my research, I had significant experience in using qualitative research methods in developing countries within NGOs and at community-level. This was mainly in a practitioner capacity but also included research for my masters' thesis with NGOs in India. This field experience was extremely useful in getting interviews organised and conducted without excessive formalities and in making participants feel at ease.

Finally, my experience in the NGO sector made it possible for me to 'cut to the chase' of an interview. In this sense my experience was precisely the opposite to that of Obrecht (2011, p. 315) who stated, referring to her data collection phase in Mongolia:

I found that entering the study without a solid background in the typical organizational structures of NGOs or actual accounting and planning processes was beneficial in so far as I had to rely entirely on the participants to explain these processes to me, meaning that my

understanding of logical frameworks, for example, was initially formed entirely through their perspectives. This lack of information also had a significant drawback, in that much time during the interviews was taken up by basic explanations of processes, and also in some cases seemed to cast me as more of an ‘outsider’ to NGO staff.

As Obrecht notes, there are pros and cons to both positions. I had to constantly challenge myself during my research to take a step back and question my assumptions and prior knowledge of the NGO and development worlds. I needed to guard against the over-familiarity that might have blinded me to some possible avenues of thought. Inevitably, how successful I was in this endeavour is hard for me to judge, but it was a continuous preoccupation. On the positive side, I believe that some categories of my interviewees, particularly national-level ActionAid staff and partners, often saw me as an insider and a peer after the first few minutes of an interview, which I think made them feel more at ease. We were able to get into the core issues of the interview quite quickly - although I often still asked interviewees to explain things that I ‘knew’ as their interpretations and perceptions were, in themselves, data.

In addition, and crucially, my background enabled me to detect at times when interviewees were speaking what I refer to in my research as ‘brochure talk’. I coined this phrase to describe times, particularly at the beginning of interviews, when participants automatically began to give the ‘official line’, presenting an image that how things should be, rather than as they are. This was perhaps the biggest advantage of being familiar with the NGO sector in general and in Uganda. I was able to, to the best of my knowledge, detect and eventually move beyond brochure talk by communicating to the interviewee, in some way, that I was aware that there were challenges to working in the sector and that it was acceptable for these to be acknowledged and for ‘other realities’ to be discussed. In other words, I was able to communicate that this interview was a ‘safe space’ for being critical. In one case, after the interview had started with some of the common idealist descriptions, and after I had alluded to the difficulties that I know usually exist given my own work with NGOs in the region, the interviewee stopped and said, “Oh. I didn’t realise you knew that stuff.” He then proceeded to give me a much more critical perspective. I discuss brochure talk further in the later chapters, specifically how it helps to maintain a disjuncture between the stated intentions of NGOs

and what actually happens at the field level by projecting a positive image, regardless of actual practice.

As an employee of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which provides funding to ActionAid International via its aid agency, Irish Aid, I had to carefully and continuously reflect on any implications that could arise from this identity. At the outset, I assumed that this role could constrain the frankness of interviewees. However, in retrospect, I do not think that there was any material impact of my work role on my research. My work status did not often arise and when it did, it did not seem to generate much interest. The key ActionAid staff with whom I worked knew the details of my work situation and it appeared to be fairly common knowledge in the Kampala office and within ActionAid programme staff within Uganda. I discussed my 'day-job' freely if it came up as relevant in a discussion or if I was asked about it, which was only very occasionally.

There are several possible reasons why so few of my interviewees demonstrated any great interest in who I was or what I did outside of the confines of my research project, and hence why I feel there was no significant impact of my work identity on my research. One reason may be that ActionAid staff tended to be extremely busy and under-pressure (as I expand on in the data chapters) which may have led to some self-absorption. Secondly, at the time of my research in Uganda, I had no connection to Irish Aid in Uganda – I was in the process of moving from headquarters in Ireland to Sierra Leone. Thirdly, Irish Aid is a relatively minor donor of ActionAid; Irish Aid funding made up 0.6% of ActionAid's global income in 2011, the year of my field work (ActionAid Uganda, 2012e). Fourthly, funds and communication from Irish Aid did not go either to ActionAid Uganda or to ActionAid headquarters but to the ActionAid Ireland office, thus none of my interviewees had a direct link to Irish Aid.

Thus, my professional background and my prior knowledge of the sector had several advantages in my research, and some of my concerns about disadvantages were not realised. The main disadvantage, mentioned above, is the fact that I may have been (and indeed may still be) carrying with me assumptions and preconceptions from my practitioner background that limit my thinking on certain issues. While I have certainly seen my thinking shift enormously from the beginning of my PhD, it is very difficult, if

not impossible, to know to what extent I have managed to shed preconceptions emerging from my background in order to look at the data in a 'fresh' manner, given that I have prior experience, broadly speaking, with many of the processes which I studied. The role of my supervisor and other advisors and peers in challenging my findings on an ongoing basis was very important here.

Apart from my professional background, another identity I carried with me throughout my research was that of a white Westerner. While some ActionAid staff and partners at the national level may have viewed me as a peer to some extent, this certainly would not have been the case at local level with community members, local government staff or partners. Despite my prior experience navigating interviews and participatory processes at community level in East Africa, my relatively limited time in individual communities for this research would have done little to diminish my 'foreignness'. This might have had implications for the extent to which people were frank and open with me in interviews at the local level. To some extent, this may have been mitigated by the fact that the subject matter of my interviews was not particularly contentious. However, it is also possible that any subject matter related to resources coming into a poor community is sensitive and that people may have been guarded as a result.

In addition to my foreignness, some local partner organisations and community members likely viewed me as closely linked to ActionAid, despite my continuous emphasis that I was an independent researcher. This view would have been supported by the fact that I sometimes arrived in villages with ActionAid staff members and in ActionAid vehicles, for instance if there was a PRRP to take place⁹. It is possible that this would have made community members reluctant to be as critical of ActionAid, as they may have wanted to be.

As it happens, there was a high degree of consonance within my findings, including my direct observation findings, which may suggest that the above limitations of my role as a researcher did not have a great impact on these findings. However, it is, of course, impossible to know and hence these potential limitations must be

⁹ At other times, I arrived alone or with a partner organisation on the back of a motorbike or in a rented taxi.

acknowledged. Having discussed my own role vis-à-vis my interviewees, I now reflect on my relationship with ActionAid as my host organisation.

2.11 Relationship with Host Organisation

In this section, I discuss my relationship with ActionAid internationally and in Uganda during the course of my research. Access to NGOs for academic research can be difficult, as NGOs tend to be protective and sensitive to criticism (Edwards, 1993; Lewis, 2005). However, as is illustrated further in the next chapter, there is a considerable need for academic research which brings theoretical and discursive perspectives into a field of literature which tends to be dominated by ‘gray’ literature, which can be normative and can lack conceptual and theoretical grounding.

ActionAid is an organisation remarkably disposed to reviews of its operations and programming, as highlighted in a recent global review (L. David Brown, 2010). With regard to my research, ActionAid leadership and staff at both global and Uganda levels were open from the outset. Some interviewees gave considerable amounts of time to my research with very busy schedules. I did have to ‘chase’ a lot of busy ActionAid staff, particularly in Kampala, to pin down times, but once we did that, the vast majority were generous with their time. Generally, full access was given to documentation, and there were no restrictions placed on my interviewing of staff or other stakeholders, or on my participation in field visits or meetings, even when the subject matter was sensitive and confidential¹⁰.

In addition to being accessible, I was struck from the beginning of my research with the high level of critical thinking within ActionAid. Newman (2011, p. 100) notes the same in her research study of ActionAid’s human rights-based work:

most of the people I interviewed showed high levels of reflection and critical thought. Perhaps this is a testament to the type of organisation ActionAid is, the culture it has which enables staff, at least those sitting at international levels, to speak out openly.

¹⁰ The only restriction to access was to attending an ActionAid Uganda board meeting, although several board members were interviewed individually and various documents related to the board were accessed.

In terms of how the process of gaining permission for my research evolved, an initial informal agreement was reached subsequent to a request I made to the then ActionAid Chief Executive in early 2009. I then visited the ActionAid international secretariat office in Johannesburg in November 2009 and negotiated a formal research agreement with the Chief Executive which set out my roles and responsibilities, as well as those of ActionAid. The East Africa Regional Director and Uganda Country Director at the time, signed off on this agreement. Since I knew from experience in NGOs that there can be gaps and lags in internal communication, I made a special effort to ensure that staff at each level, as well as the relevant technical staff in the Impact Assessment and Shared Learning Unit which oversaw ALPS, were aware of the progress of the agreement as it proceeded. I sought feedback from the different levels individually, as well as collectively. I subsequently paid a visit to ActionAid Uganda in Kampala in November 2010 to build rapport, confirm field work plans with the country team, conduct some exploratory interviews and obtain documentation. This ‘reconnaissance’ visit was extremely valuable. In my experience, it is far easier to work with NGOs in person and in situ on any kind of planning, rather than to rely on email. As in ActionAid Uganda, NGO staff members tend to be busy with many different activities and plans change fast. It is best to be on the ground to see how to fit in with plans and take advantage of opportunities, such as for instance, participating in review visits planned for another purpose. Another important aspect of my initial visit was providing reassurances to ActionAid that I would be self-sufficient in my research in areas such as finances and logistics - for instance, arranging and paying for my own accommodation and transport. While this was stated in the research agreement, it was a concern in the Kampala office nevertheless, and being able to reassure the management in person made a significant difference to how ActionAid Uganda viewed my proposed research and ‘cleared the way’ for more substantive discussions.

At that time, ActionAid Uganda assigned a focal point - the then head of the Impact Assessment and Shared Learning Unit - to assist with my research. This individual was extremely helpful and facilitative throughout my field work in Uganda, which took place in 2011. While I worked largely independently, the focal point was available to assist on request with advice and tracing of interviewees and documents,

while also providing rich information as an interviewee himself. The focal point was also useful in assisting me with some important formalities, for instance, making requests on my access to the internal file sharing system and intranet.

To complete the fulfilment of my obligations in the research agreement, after the field work in 2011 had concluded, I travelled to Uganda in February 2012 to give a presentation of my findings to ActionAid Uganda management. There had recently been a change in country directors and I was fortunate that both the incoming and outgoing country directors were participants in the session in which I gave my presentation. The presentation, while quite critical, was welcomed, and useful feedback was provided. There were two staff members present for the session from whom I sensed a level of defensiveness during the discussion. Interestingly, these were the only two staff members present who I had not managed to interview, despite repeated attempts, due to their busy schedules. This experience affirmed for me the importance of rapport building during the interview process, as is elaborated on below.

After the presentation, in July 2012, I produced a detailed report - along with a summarised version as was requested - for ActionAid Uganda, which was informed by the feedback from the presentation. This report was adapted to the expressed needs of ActionAid for both findings and recommendations for improvement of its accountability practice. At the time of writing the dissertation, there has not been any specific feedback provided on the report, which is probably due, at least in part, to the fact that the main findings in the report were similar to those presented in February 2012, and in part due to the constant busyness and overload of ActionAid staff members.

While I have taken feedback from ActionAid into account in my research throughout the process, be it formal feedback such as in the February 2012 session, or informal feedback from continuous discussions with staff, I have always reserved the right to publish what I see fit, learning from experiences of Whyte (1984) who once handicapped himself by offering respondents the right to veto publication. This right of mine to publish what I see fit has never been questioned by ActionAid.

While I provided “information, contacts and advice” to ActionAid on occasion, as per the research agreement, there were times during my field work when I had to go against my ‘practitioner-instincts’ and not offer advice or offer to assist with a certain

process. This was, in part, due to having a limited time available for my research, but mainly to try to maintain my position as an external researcher as much as possible.

In the context of my research, I built a rapport with a number of ActionAid staff members who I grew to greatly respect. As is detailed below, some staff members gave considerable amounts of time in interviews, a few on several occasions. I believe that staff members were generous with their time, in part because they felt strongly about the topics being discussed, given their own personal convictions. I also think they knew that even though my research was likely to be critical of the organisation's practices, that I was 'on the same team', in that I wanted the best for ActionAid and for development NGOs and thus, my findings would be in that spirit.

In sum, I had a strong and productive relationship with ActionAid throughout my research which was extremely useful. I now discuss the research methods and the procedures which I used to collect data.

2.12 Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

This section provides detail on how I conducted my research, including timing, location and methods of field work. In terms of timing, while my primary research of ALPS at international level was spread between 2008 and 2012, the majority of the field work in Uganda took place over four months in 2011¹¹ (March-April and July-August).

In terms of location, the study was multi-sited. Interviews took place predominantly in Uganda but also in New Delhi, London, Brighton, Limerick, Dublin, Boston, Accra, Johannesburg and Nairobi. I had a strong preference for face-to-face interviews. Thus, all but two interviews were in person, the exceptions being a phone interview with an interviewee in Tanzania and a Skype call with an interviewee in New Zealand. Observation was almost entirely in Uganda, except for three workshops in the UK and Ireland.

Within Uganda, in order to hone in on empirical practice in-depth in line with my actor-oriented approach, I selected two programming units within ActionAid Uganda's

¹¹ The particularities associated with 2011 included the fact that the new ActionAid international and national strategies were being formulated that year.

operational areas for particular focus: one for primary focus and the second operating, in part, as a reference point. ActionAid's programming units, generally centred in one geographical district but covering parts of other districts, are known as Local Rights Programmes or LRPs. ActionAid worked in ten LRPs in 2011. From these, two LRPs, Katakwi LRP, and to a lesser extent Pallisa LRP in Eastern Uganda were selected for particular focus in my study. These LRPs were selected as they were two of the oldest areas of operation of ActionAid Uganda; ActionAid began to work in Katakwi in 1996 and in Pallisa in 1999. Hence trends in accountability practice could be seen over time¹² and my interviewees at local level had a long knowledge of ActionAid. I also conducted briefer visits to Masindi, Kalangala, and Kumi LRPs, and to Apac and Bwaise - former operational areas in which ActionAid has been working with partners since the late 1990s - in order to gain a broader perspective on the country programme.

Casley and Lury (1981), in their book on data collection in developing countries, mention interviewing, observation and documentary research as possible methods to be used within a case study. I used all three of these methods. In doing so, I made an effort to address some of the limitations which I discovered in the research methodologies of other studies on NGO accountability. Agyemang, Anumbila, Unerman and O'Dwyer (2009, p. 12), in their case study on NGOs in Ghana which I describe further in the literature review chapter, highlight that while much literature on NGO accountability calls for mechanisms which involve NGO field workers and beneficiaries, "most research methods used to study NGO accountability do not prioritise direct engagements with beneficiaries and/or local NGO officers in the field". The danger here is that this leads to plans for forms of accountability which lack empirical support. However, while Agyemang et al. interviewed field workers and beneficiaries in Ghana as part of their research, they did not engage in observation, and therefore relied on second-hand descriptions of what NGOs do, which is a limitation in their own methodology. Similarly, direct observation of accountability mechanisms - for instance, participatory approaches - does not appear to have been a part of the research methods of the other

¹² Katakwi has been particularly affected by conflict and displacement during the time period studied. Pallisa, on the other hand, has been more stable.

empirical studies which I describe in the literature review chapter. Furthermore, the case studies that exist around accountability are static and produce a ‘snapshot’ of the situation, rather than being longitudinal studies which take a multi-year approach to events. In this sense the literature risks failing to learn from experiences in the past.

I tried to address these gaps by interviewing a range of stakeholders from the Chief Executive to village-level beneficiaries. Direct observation of accountability processes was a key ethnographic method within my case study. Furthermore, my document review and interviews with former staff and long-standing partners and beneficiaries helped to bring in a historical perspective. In terms of time spent on each method and volume of relevant data collected, my primary method was interviewing, my second was document review, my third was observation and my fourth was a survey. However, in terms of importance of data, participant observation becomes elevated, as this was my direct experience of ALPS implementation and was at the heart of my ethnographic approach. I now describe my use of each of these methods, and conclude this section by discussing the interaction of the different methods which was a critical aspect of my research process.

2.12.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviewing, a core method of qualitative sociological research, was my primary method of data collection. I conducted 122 stakeholder interviews in the course of my research within Uganda and internationally. In this section, I outline the particular value I gained from interview data, how I conducted interviews, how I selected and accessed interviewees, and finally who I interviewed.

In terms of what I gained from interview data, the combination of focus yet flexibility that the semi-structured interview method provides was very valuable (Grix 2004: 127). Within interviews, I explored what Whyte (1984, p. 171) calls “local theory”; how staff members, partners and other stakeholders of ActionAid make sense of accountability and of ALPS. This is important for the actor-oriented approach which encourages a strong focus on practitioners’ views of implementation rather than simply what policies and plans state will happen. Interviews provided me with historical information on ALPS, as well as the current views of stakeholders. Critically,

interviews also enabled me to learn about the way in which accountability practice was affected by other developments within the organisation that preoccupied staff at different times, particularly those which created stress or pressure, such as poor leadership of the country programme in the period 2004-7, which I expand on in the data chapter on ActionAid Uganda. In other words, interviews were the main method I used which gave me access to the 'emotional life' of ActionAid, which does not usually emerge in documents, as documents can tend to 'sanitise' these kinds of developments in an organisation and present what should, rather than what does happen. This theme of the emotional life of the organisation and the stresses and pressures on staff, which often militate against downward accountability, is discussed further in later chapters.

In the course of my research, I conducted 22 interviews focussed on ActionAid International and 100 interviews focussed on ActionAid Uganda (see Appendix 1 for the detailed interview record). Some of the early interviews were exploratory in nature and I used these to test the guiding questions and topics. I subsequently interviewed some of the early interviewees a second time if new topics had emerged to which I felt they could usefully speak.

While I used a standard set of guiding questions for interviews (see Appendix 2), these were a 'menu' of possible questions from which I selected before each interview. In reality, I began each interview with approximately 10 to 15 'prompt' words in a notebook, such as 'partnership' or 'transparency', and I aimed and almost always managed to explore these themes at some point over the course of the interview. However, I began each interview by asking the interviewee fairly open questions about their background with ActionAid and how they found working with or for the organisation. This was in order to enable interviewees to steer the discussion towards topics which were of more interest or of more concern to them, as this prioritisation, in itself, was interesting data. I explored new topics as they emerged, occasionally then adapting the guiding questions for subsequent interviews to reflect new avenues of enquiry.

I finished every interview with the same question: "What would you do if you woke up in the morning and found that you were Charles Businge (ActionAid Uganda Country Director)?" This question was extremely effective, particularly in gleaning

from more timid interviewees areas in which they felt ActionAid could do better. The question allowed for criticism, but in a non-confrontational manner. This was particularly useful at village level and with local-level partners who were less likely than ActionAid staff or national level partners to feel comfortable to criticise ActionAid directly. Some staff members and partners took the question so seriously that they asked for more time to think about it and sometimes came back with a written list. I sent the full, anonymised list of the responses to this question to Charles Businge (now working for ActionAid at regional level) and to his replacement country director, Arthur Larok.

The vast majority of interviews were individual interviews, the main exception being those with community members, which were predominantly group interviews. As noted, I made significant attempts to conduct face-to-face interviews whenever possible. This was due to the opportunities face-to-face interviews provided to establish rapport with the interviewee, particularly given that the subject matter required self-critical reflection from many of the stakeholders. The fairly significant length of my interviews, usually approximately one hour - but a minority of the individual interviews significantly longer, up to four hours in one sitting - also assisted in building the trust that is so vital for frank discussions and reflection. My presence in ActionAid Uganda offices and meetings over a four-month period, along with, as noted earlier, my background with NGOs in the region were also extremely helpful in building rapport and making my interviewees comfortable.

Translation from different local languages was generally required when interviewing community members in Katakwi and Pallisa, and this was provided either by partner staff members present, or by local volunteers for ActionAid, the latter whom I engaged separately and paid for their assistance. Most of my interviews with community members took place before or after already scheduled events with ActionAid and/or partners. However, in instances in which community members or partners came to a venue especially to meet me, I provided refreshments.

Detailed notes were taken of interviews and these notes were, in almost all cases, transcribed the same day to reduce the chance of memory loss if notes were unclear. I decided not to use a dictaphone in order to maximise the rapport with interviewees, particularly in rural areas where technology can be intimidating. Since I have

considerable experience with detailed note-taking in such settings I believe that I captured the key points in this way.

To select interviewees, purposive non-probabilistic sampling was used to seek out individuals, based primarily on the criteria of their degree and length of involvement with ActionAid and ALPS. Representatives were sought from all stakeholder groups, as illustrated in Figure 2.1 above, and from different levels, particularly with regards to ActionAid staff, i.e. to avoid undue bias toward management. A sample of interviewees from the different time periods of ALPS implementation between 2000 and 2011 was also sought, in addition to interviewees who were familiar with ActionAid pre-2000 and could therefore speak of changes brought about by the implementation of ALPS. As well as learning about prospective interviewees in documents, I used some 'snowball sampling' wherein interviewees were asked to suggest other interviewees, and often these leads were pursued when they fitted in with the above criteria (Jelen, 2009, p. 5).

I was able to trace most prospective interviewees through ActionAid staff, although I also made considerable use of the internet, particularly the website *Linked In*. Almost all of those approached were interviewed, with only two significant exceptions, one of whom never responded to requests (a former ActionAid Uganda country director) and one of whom agreed in principle but in practice, was not available on the occasions proposed (a former ActionAid Chief Executive). A breakdown of interviews conducted by type of interviewee is provided below. Throughout this dissertation, 'current staff', 'former staff', 'current partner' 'former partner' refers to the status of the interviewee at the time of interview. Thus, the individuals may have since left, or indeed, as is not uncommon in ActionAid, rejoined the organisation.

Table 2.1: Internationally-Focussed Interviews by Type of Interviewee

| Type of Interviewee | No. of Interviews | No. of Individuals |
|--|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| ActionAid International current staff (at time of interview) | 11 | 12 |
| ActionAid International former staff | 8 | 8 |
| Members of ActionAid International governance structure (current and former) | 2 | 2 |
| Other (former researcher on ActionAid) | 1 | 1 |
| Total | 22 | 23 |

Table 2.2: Uganda-Focussed Interviews by Type of Interviewee

| Type of Interviewee | No. of Interviews | No. of Individuals |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| ActionAid Uganda current staff | 30 | 30 |
| ActionAid Uganda former staff | 15 | 15 |
| Members of ActionAid governance structure (current and former) | 5 | 7 |
| ActionAid Uganda partners (current and former) | 26 | 30 (23 organisations) |
| Intended beneficiaries | 8 | 98 |
| National and local government representatives | 9 | 14 |
| Other stakeholders (CSO networks, donor representatives, former consultants to AAU) | 7 | 10 |
| Total | 100 | 204 |

Notes:

-All but four of these interviews took place within Uganda. All were with individuals with experience and knowledge of ActionAid Uganda, which comprised the majority of the interview focus. The individuals may also have given their views on ActionAid International.

Occasionally interviewees fit more than one category, e.g. two partner staff members interviewed were also former staff members of ActionAid. In these instances, I classified individuals according to their longevity in each role and the emphasis within the interview.

-‘Partner’ here is defined as an organisation funded by ActionAid¹³.

-‘Intended beneficiaries’ is the only category of interviewee where some ambiguity exists over numbers interviewed. While lists of names were taken of those interviewed, the nature of the interview setting in rural villages leads to some ‘coming and going’.

As can be noted, I conducted a large number of interviews. This was obviously very time-consuming in terms of arranging and conducting the interviews, as well as the subsequent need to analyse a large amount of data. There were, however, some advantages to conducting so many interviews. I mention three. Firstly, it became evident to me that ActionAid staff members were more interested in my research the more they learnt how widely I was interviewing, including tracing former staff members

¹³ With partners, differentiating between ‘current’ and ‘former’ is less straightforward than with staff, for instance, due to audit queries with some partners. Only one person interviewed in the research was from an ex-partner where the relationship with ActionAid had clearly ended.

in other countries. On several occasions I was present when one staff member would tell another “This lady is serious. She even found x and y” - referring to former staff who had left the organisation many years before and who had perhaps lost touch with ActionAid. Given the preponderance of reviews within the organisation, I got the impression that some of the busiest ActionAid staff members often try to ‘keep their heads down’ and avoid such interviews. However, I believe that, after a certain point, most of these staff members came to see my research as more than ‘just another review’ and then they did not want to be left out!

A second advantage of conducting many interviews, which I surmised as the research progressed, was that when interviewees, particularly staff and partners, learnt who else had been interviewed or would be interviewed, they were more likely to be critical, presumably guessing that I had already heard ‘the real story’ from some of their peers, or that I would do so. Finally, the guarantee of anonymity, which I detail below, means more in a context in which many staff and many partners are interviewed.

Having detailed my experience of interviewing, I now describe my method of document review and analysis.

2.12.2 Document Analysis

Document analysis was a major part of my study and the second most significant in terms of time spent and volume of relevant data collected. I estimate that I reviewed 618 documents on ActionAid Uganda and 1130 ActionAid International documents. These documents were produced between the mid-1990s to the end of 2012. In this section, I describe what particular value I gained from documents as a data source, how I accessed documents and which kinds of documents I studied.

Three points are worth mentioning in terms of the value I gained from documents. Firstly, documents were critical to my study in terms of the general contextual information about the organisation which they enabled me to access. As a concept with wide implications for NGOs, as is noted in the literature review chapter, accountability may, in some cases, have been an important theme in broader documents, even if the word ‘accountability’ itself was not mentioned, such as reviews of the governance system or of partners. In addition, it is vital to understand accountability-

related initiatives and requirements in the context of the wider organisation and its programming; NGO staff members do not look at accountability or accountability initiatives in a vacuum, but within the perspective of their daily work more broadly.

A second value added by the document review process was historical information. ALPS started in 2000 in ActionAid, but, as noted above, it is part of a wider change process which started in the late-1990s. I took the view of Whyte (1984, p. 161) when he notes:

Any study of an organization or a community must be built on a firm historical base. Historical data should be integrated into our analysis of current structural and social process data . . . without historical data, our theories of development and change are bound to be faulty.

I made attempts to interview long-standing ActionAid staff and partners to gain a historical perspective both internationally and in Uganda and documents played a critical role here. For instance, individual interviewees, even if they have worked for the organisation for many years, may not be able to accurately remember how their perspectives have changed over time; rather they will understandably tend to emphasise their current views on a matter. Documents were often extremely revealing in this regard.

Finally, documents provided valuable information, both historical and contemporary information, on issues that it never occurred to me to ask about in an interview, and in this way, documents suggested new questions and opened up new avenues of discussion for subsequent interviews.

The openness of ActionAid to allowing me to access documents, no matter how critical, was remarkable. Apart from providing me with copies of particular documents on request, I was given access to the intranet system of ActionAid international (the 'Hive'), which contains a large number of documents, mostly internal documents, on all aspects of ActionAid's work. I was also provided with an ActionAid email account and added to various relevant email lists. This was a useful way to keep abreast of day-to-day happenings, as well as to access certain new documents as they emerged. I accessed the Hive and the email account until the end of 2012. Finally, I had access to hundreds of hard copy documents within the ActionAid Uganda resource centre. This was

particularly useful to source documents from the 1990s which were not available on soft copy. Another important source of documents was the ActionAid International website.

In terms of the documents reviewed, the vast majority were written by internal authors. In addition to selecting documents clearly related to accountability, a wide range of organisational key documents were also reviewed, such as strategic plans, organisational annual reports and key policies. Documentation from global level to village level was consulted. An in-depth review was conducted of documentation within the Katakwi Local Rights Programme in order to 'drill down' into all levels of an LRP. Some examples of categories of documents consulted at both international and Uganda levels include:

- strategies and plans
- reports
- reviews, evaluations and learning papers
- policies and guidelines
- minutes of workshops and meetings and presentations given
- partner assessments
- reports of the board of governance and minutes of the General Assembly
- audit reports
- human resource reviews and staff surveys
- sponsorship correspondence
- newsletters and memos

Apart from written documentation, I viewed films of ALPS case studies from Bangladesh and Kenya.

The planning-related documents were important for my research sub-question on the aims of NGO accountability initiatives such as ALPS. As alluded to above, one striking feature of the documentation within ActionAid is the large number of reviews conducted of its programming and operations. Many of these are external reviews. The level of investment given to reviewing the organisation is remarkable and speaks of an organisation which is very open to self-criticism. For instance, at the international level, in preparation for the new organisational strategy for 2012-17, there was a process called *Taking Stock 3* which consisted of a set of detailed reviews by external consultants on

finance; governance, human resources and organisational development; policy and campaigns; fundraising and communications; women's rights, governance and social movements, and ActionAid's programming in Africa, Asia and America. To supplement these reviews, there were self-reviews conducted by every country programme and function within ActionAid, and an external stakeholder assessment was conducted with 420 respondents. These and other reviews were a rich source of data for my research, both at international and Uganda levels. Having given detail on my process of document review, I now describe my use of the method of participant observation.

2.12.3 Participant Observation

My third most significant method, in terms of time spent and volume of data, was the ethnographic method of participant observation. As noted earlier, the value of the data from participant observation was disproportionate to its volume. The vast majority of the participant observation within my case study took place over a four-month period in 2011 when I was based in the ActionAid office in Kampala, with significant time in ActionAid offices and with partners and communities in Katakwi, Pallisa, Masindi, Apac, Kalangala, Kumi and Bwaise. In this section, I elaborate on the value of participant observation to my study, and then outline what events and processes I observed.

Participant observation is based upon the rationale that, while interviews can be extremely informative on people's views, their words and actions are likely to differ, and thus it is also important to see what they actually do. This is core to the actor oriented approach which brings to the fore how people operate in practice, rather than what policies and plans state will happen. This distinction is central to my research sub-questions on accountability aims and practices and using participant observation combined with other qualitative sociological methods, such as interviews, has helped to draw out these different aspects. In particular, the quality of processes and relationships of downward accountability is important for my research question, as I aim to determine what the obstacles to accountability to beneficiaries are. Quality is difficult to assess in any way other than direct observation, not least because there can be tendencies in

documentation and interviews to give an overly positive impression, recalling the concept I term 'brochure talk'.

In terms of which events I observed, my time in ActionAid offices enabled a focus on internal ActionAid meetings and informal interactions in the office environment. I attended meetings of management and staff, focussed on areas such as programming, audit, and human resources. I participated in workshops for the new strategy formulation process at local and national levels and attended a programme staff retreat. I attended six local and one regional participatory review and reflection meeting (PRRP), a core process of ALPS. In terms of informal interactions, I spent much time in cars with staff on the way to field visits, shared meals and generally observed how staff interacted in the office and in the course of their field work. This was very useful to gain insights into the atmosphere within the organisation and the day-to-day issues that concern staff.

At the international level, the main 'observation event' in which I participated was the *Reimagining Accountability* workshop in Brighton in 2010. This workshop was extremely useful as it brought together the main advisors working on ALPS at the international and regional levels, along with some country programme ALPS focal points, to discuss accountability issues and challenges with academics such as Robert Chambers and Rosalind Eyben of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex. I also attended two workshops during which ALPS was presented: a learning forum in Dublin in 2007 for partners of Irish Aid, and a Quality Group meeting of the UK NGO network, British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND), in London in 2008.

As part of my observation I took photographs of events, with the advance permission of those present. Except where otherwise cited, all photographs included in this dissertation are my own. The photographs proved more valuable than I expected them to be, as they capture the atmosphere of the settings of participatory approaches and the detail of transparency boards, and thus provide an important complement to descriptions in words.

Having outlined my method of participant observation, I now describe my fourth and final method: a written survey.

2.12.4 Survey

I conducted a written survey of thirty ActionAid Uganda staff at a programme retreat I attended in August 2011 (see Appendix 3). In this section, I discuss both what benefit I hoped to gain from the survey, as well as its limitations in practice.

With respect to added value, this survey was intended to supplement interviews and observation by seeking similar information from a more quantitative angle, asking staff to rank and score the implementation of ALPS principles and processes. The survey had the advantage of including all programme staff, including those from LRPs which I had not visited. In addition, the survey was anonymous and hence participants could feel free to express themselves.

While some useful data were obtained, there were limitations to the survey instrument which I discovered after the fact, and which limited the usability of its data. This is despite the fact that I had developed and piloted the survey with two ActionAid Uganda staff. For instance, some people did not see that the survey was printed on both sides of paper and filled in only one side. The scoring and ranking that I used appeared to have been misunderstood by some participants, despite a key being given (0 = best, 10 = worst etc.). In retrospect, I should have made the scoring and ranking simpler by using the same scale for each question, instead of having one scoring question and one ranking question. I also should have piloted the survey with more people at different levels to be able to predict these misunderstandings.

Due to the uncertainty about whether the scales were interpreted correctly, I have had to dismiss the relevant questions as sources of quantitative data. Nonetheless, as a source of information to be triangulated with other data sources, the survey results are useful, particularly the comments that participants filled out.

Having discussed each of my individual methods, I now elaborate on how they interacted with one another.

2.12.5 Interaction of Methods

There was significant interaction between my methods and this was extremely useful in deepening my findings as I outline in this section.

Firstly, I found that participant observation enhanced my subsequent interviews; when interviewees knew that I had witnessed the ALPS processes already, I felt that they were far less likely to try to ‘talk them up’ and thus interviews appeared to move more quickly to the central issues. Secondly, participant observation sometimes changed my interpretation of prior interviews. Usually this occurred when interviewees had talked quite positively of ALPS processes which I later observed as less positive. This caused me to question the level of ‘brochure talk’ in the prior interview, although naturally it is also possible that the interviewee could have viewed the ALPS process quite differently to me, as I was also an ‘actor’ in my interpretation of what I observed and what I classified as brochure talk.

Thirdly, participant observation also provided me with new questions for subsequent interviews, as did the documentation which I reviewed. Similarly, interviews and documentation provided me with a continuously evolving set of expectations for the observation of the ALPS processes which meant that I had a framework within which to view the quality of what I was seeing.

Fourthly, and importantly, the combination of my methods facilitated a deepening of my understanding, particularly when it gave me multiple perspectives on the same event. For instance, for all the PRRPs which I observed, I interviewed some of the people who had participated, or who would participate, in the session. More broadly, the process of iteration and triangulation between documents, interviews and observation deepened my findings as each method gave me new insights to take into the other methods. Had I used one or two of these methods, I would have been missing an important piece of the puzzle. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 6 citing Flick 2002, p. 226-9) note while describing the rationale behind triangulation:

The use of multiple methods, or triangulation reflects an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. . . . Triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation but an alternative to validation. . . . The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any enquiry.

As noted above, each method I used provided particular insights, and when I reached my data analysis stage, which I elaborate on below, it was extremely useful to compare and contrast data arising from these different methods to gain a holistic perspective on an issue. Having described each of my methods of data collection and their interaction, I detail my analysis of the data in the next section.

2.13 Data Analysis

In this section I discuss my analysis of the data collected through the above methods, including the type of analysis carried out and the procedures used. Despite considering the use of Nvivo and Atlas-ti and receiving some training in their use, I decided to do manual analysis by emergent themes, as this was manageable, straightforward, flexible and kept me thoroughly engaged with the data throughout. Emergent, rather than pre-figured categories were appropriate, given that this is not a standardised research topic (Creswell, 2007, p. 152).

In terms of procedures, for initial data analysis I created a ‘face sheet’ to summarise and analyse each interview (adapted from Grbich, 2013, p. 22). This face sheet (included as Appendix 4) included a section on how the particular interview had contributed relevant information to answering my research question (if it had). Another important aspect of the facesheet was a section on “Issues for follow up” which often led to new interviewees and to new interview questions being asked. Thus, the face sheet contributed to the iterative process, referred to above, whereby some analysis of data collected led to more specific questions for further data collection which assisted in deepening of my understanding of the topic. I tried to complete face sheets for each interview on at least a weekly basis in order to try and monitor incoming data as it was emerging.

A month into the field research period, I began compiling a document on emerging findings, which I referred to as ‘The Big Picture’. I updated this document several times in the course of the research. Importantly, this document was not a detailed summary of data, as this would have taken too long and I would have run the risk of being ‘drowned’ in the detail. Rather, this document was a rough compilation of my impressions, including what was surprising and what, perhaps, suggested a change of

focus or a new area of enquiry. Over time, it expanded to contain the following sections:

- What am I trying to do?
- What am I managing to do?
- What might be some of the headline themes?
- What are the big issues coming out (by stakeholder group)?
- Links to Theory
- Questions/Challenges/Gaps

As with the face sheet, the process of updating the Big Picture document helped to refine my research as it was proceeding, including the adaptation of interview questions and the addition of prospective interviewees, particularly as I tried to figure out the 'Questions/Challenges/Gaps'. The document also generally helped me to reflect on the key issues emerging in a manageable way, as the total volume of my data was extremely large. Furthermore, it was extremely useful to share and discuss this document with my supervisor as it brought out the key themes of my research for debate and critique. For instance, at one point I sent a draft of the Big Picture document to my supervisor which included the observation that "Community members have consistently little to say about my questions about how ActionAid has changed over the years". My supervisor commented on this in his reply: "Interesting to think about why ... saturation is one possible reason, another is they don't really know/care, another is that they feel uneasy talking about ActionAid changes?". These questions gave me more to issues think about and explore. In this way, the Big Picture document was a useful vehicle to facilitate the iterative process of my qualitative research and deepen my findings. I put this document aside when I was doing my formal data analysis, but then came back to it afterwards and it was interesting to note that more or less the same key findings emerged from both the informal and formal processes.

While the two month break between my two periods of field work was enforced by work commitments, it proved to be very useful to catch up on the initial data analysis, carry out a quick review of the data, and hence make necessary adjustments for the second phase of field work. Nevertheless, as noted above, I feel as though I would have benefited from even more of this reflection time during the field work period. One

reason for this is that, in retrospect, I feel that I probably went beyond saturation point in interviews of certain stakeholders and review of certain types of document, but was unable to see this at the time, due to the pressure of maximising my limited field-time.

In terms of the substantive data analysis, this was carried out in two separate processes, one for international data and one for Uganda-focussed data. I took the key issues and findings from the interviews and grouped them by theme, as well as colour-coding within this by the category of who had made which point (as per the categories in Tables 2.1 and 2.2 above). The themes I selected, after some trial and error, were based on the stakeholder groups to which ActionAid aims to be accountable, as per Figure 2.1 above: donors, sponsors, governing bodies, national and local government, partners, intended beneficiaries, and staff. The idea for using these themes originally came from my Big Picture document as, while drafting this document without any pre-designed format, the stakeholder groups ended up seeming the natural way to separate out findings. I also added some categories such as monitoring and evaluation, and audit, two relevant themes which did not neatly fit into accountability to any one stakeholder group. I then focussed down on themes related to my main focus area: accountability to beneficiaries. In order not to be restricted by themes/codes and to remain open to the data as they emerged, I also kept an 'other' category where I put anything which did not fit neatly into the selected themes, but which could form part of a new theme over time. I underwent the same process for all the data from the document review, and also for the observation and the survey data. All of this provided the basis for writing the data chapters. As noted above, there was ultimately a good degree of consonance between findings from different sources and findings obtained using different methods.

Having described my research methodology and my case, I conclude this chapter by discussing some pertinent ethical considerations.

2.14 Ethics

It was my aim in this research to fairly represent what I heard, saw and read in a balanced manner, and to 'do no harm' with my research as much as possible. In this section, I outline the considerations and safeguards which I put in place in this regard.

The first action I took in terms of ethics was to provide a copy of the London School of Economics Research Ethics Policy to ActionAid at the beginning of the research, and to explicitly mention in the research agreement with ActionAid that I would abide by the terms of this policy, in order that they could hold me accountable.

With respect to protection of interviewees, this was important particularly due to the power differentials between ActionAid and partners, ActionAid and intended beneficiaries and between different levels of ActionAid staff. In a poor country such as Uganda, livelihood concerns are paramount (a theme which is further discussed in later chapters). Hence it is important to be sensitive at times when it may be perceived that participating in research could jeopardise livelihood possibilities, for instance, if a partner or beneficiary is overly critical of ActionAid. In practice, this did not appear to be a major concern of my interviewees, as relationships between ActionAid and stakeholders and within ActionAid itself appeared to be fairly relaxed and cordial. Nevertheless, from the outset of my research, I aimed to protect my research participants from any possible adverse consequences.

I took various steps to protect interviewees. Firstly, all interviewees were asked for their consent. The purpose and background of my study were explained to participants before the interview began. I encouraged questions concerning the research before the interview, and again at the end. Secondly, I do not link the names of interviewees to my findings, to protect privacy and so that the interview will not bring about any avoidable inconvenience to interviewees. To further preserve this anonymity, I took out detail from some quotes where possible, such as names of places which would give a hint to who the speaker was.

Given the specific nature of the case study, it is nevertheless possible that informed readers may guess in some cases which individuals, particularly which staff members, may have provided certain information. It is not expected that such attribution would be particularly problematic for those individuals, given, as I mentioned, the largely cordial relationships, the fact that the subject matter is not overly-sensitive and given ActionAid's commitment to transparency and continuous review. Indeed, the guarantee of anonymity that I gave did not seem of great interest to most interviewees,

particularly staff members¹⁴, probably due to the fact that they are very used to speaking to outsiders about their work. Other interviewees, particularly some partners, did appear to appreciate the guarantee. The third and final measure I put in place to protect interviewee was to keep my interview data securely, in both paper and soft copy form, so that only I could access it.

There are two key exceptions to the anonymity provided to participants within my case study. The first is that my use of observation data, particularly photographs, is not anonymised. This is because I judged that the act of anonymising the photographs would obscure the data being presented, and importantly, because being recognisable in photographs is not expected to be problematic for the people within the photographs. Permission was given for all photographs and participants in the observation sessions were aware that photographs and other data could be used in my research. In addition, ActionAid Uganda staff members attended almost all of the partner events referred to in the photographs and hence my photographs do not present any 'new' information of which the organisation is not, at some level, already aware. ActionAid Uganda has acknowledged the weaknesses in its participatory practice and that of its partners, which has also emerged in external reviews as is discussed in the data chapter on ActionAid Uganda. This acknowledgement is evidenced, for instance, by the organisation's decision to organise a participatory methodologies training for staff in early 2011. Hence, photographic evidence within my study that some of ActionAid staff and partners are not conducting high quality participatory processes will not, I believe, lead to any recrimination of the actors involved. The presentation I gave to ActionAid Uganda in February 2012 was a 'test run' for these kinds of dynamics, and this session affirmed my judgement on this. The examples of poor participatory practice which I illustrated were not greeted with surprise.

The second exception to the principle of anonymity was that I elected not to anonymise the name of the organisation to be studied, nor the key leaders in the organisation during the time of my study. There are four main reasons for this. Firstly, I have always felt from my own reading that learning from a case study is enhanced when

¹⁴ Similarly, Newman noted in her aforementioned study of ActionAid that "very few people minded about anonymity" (2011, p. 100).

the actual organisation in question is cited. This helps to provide context, and further learning may also be enabled by opening the door to prospective future researchers of the organisation. In terms of naming the leaders of the organisation, the data chapter illustrates that some detail on these individuals is necessary to explain certain issues. For instance, the fact that Salil Shetty and Meenu Vadera are of Indian nationality is relevant given the type of changes in programming which they oversaw in ActionAid – programming that was far more advanced in India than in Africa at that time. Secondly, given that transparency is such a key part of accountability for ActionAid, as is detailed further in the data chapter on ActionAid International, it seems appropriate in principle to use the organisation's name. Thirdly, and perhaps most significantly, there never appeared to be a strong reason to anonymise the case study, nor the leaders' names. For instance, ActionAid did not request at any time that there be any anonymity. Fourthly, anonymity would have been difficult as some of the characteristics within the case study are unique to ActionAid, for instance, its position as an international organisation which has shifted its headquarters to a developing country and which has a widely lauded accountability system. It would also have been quite easy to identify the individuals' names had they not been mentioned in the text.

In terms of ethical issues within the process of data interpretation and analysis, in the type of qualitative study which I have conducted, there are no clear 'correct answers', as might be evident at times in quantitative studies. Perceptions of stakeholders being interviewed, or those who author documents, are key and my interpretation as a researcher is central, as I am also an 'actor' within this research. In terms of fair and balanced representation, it has been my intention to present clear and adequate evidence for my findings which explains how I reached them, even if there may still be disagreement around my interpretation. I had ethical challenges at times when certain data suggested something which conflicted with my impression or overall conclusion on a topic. Particularly difficult have been data in which interviewees have been harshly critical of actors within ActionAid who I have come to greatly respect. However, I have had to ensure that I present any credible evidence regardless of my personal views, so that the reader can exercise their own judgement. For most of this

story of the past 15 years of ActionAid, I was not there and must rely on the memories and perceptions of my informants and present these in a balanced way.

Generally, it is my belief that my research has been conducted in an ethical manner. In my view, no major ethical issues arose, largely due to the fact that the subject matter, as noted, is not particularly sensitive and that relationships between ActionAid stakeholders appear to be cordial and open.

2.15 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described how I went about trying to find out the answers I sought to my research question. I have presented my chosen research design and the rationale for this. In line with my interpretivist theoretical perspective and actor-oriented approach, I conducted a qualitative case study. In order to get to the heart of accountability practice, I used an ethnographic approach, including participant observation, along with other sociological qualitative methods: interviews, document review, and a survey. Participant observation was particularly useful to explore whether there was disjuncture between intentions and practice. In line with principles of qualitative research, there was considerable iteration, for instance between findings of my observation and of interviews and my data analysis had a strong focus on triangulation.

Gaps in the literature, my own experience in the sector, and my research question led me to seek an accountability initiative within an NGO to study. I selected ActionAid's ALPS due to the relative abundance of data on the initiative and the 'extreme' nature of the case, being the most significant documented attempt by an NGO to improve its downward accountability. In order to take account of the interconnectedness between ALPS at international and national levels, and of the need to study accountability attempts in practice, I chose to conduct an 'embedded' case study, with the two sub-units of analysis being ALPS in ActionAid International and ALPS within ActionAid Uganda. Uganda was selected, again due to its 'extreme' nature among ActionAid country programmes implementing ALPS in the early days, and due to the relatively high availability of data within that country programme, as well as other contextual advantages.

Finally this chapter looked at issues around my role as a researcher, my relationship with ActionAid and ethical considerations. Having thus laid the groundwork, in this chapter and the last, by describing my research question, my methodology and my case, the next chapter reviews the literature.

3. NGO Accountability: The Stories so Far

3.1 Introduction

Having introduced my topic, NGO accountability to intended beneficiaries, in the introductory chapter, and having described my approach to the research in the previous chapter, this chapter reviews the relevant research literatures. This review serves three purposes for my dissertation. Firstly, it provides a base of relevant definitions, concepts and theories on development NGO accountability and related issues from which to view later findings. Secondly, it provides a mapping and a brief overview of the relevant accountability literature in order to position my study in the wider field of literature. Thirdly, and critically, it evaluates the literature on my topic both in order to explain how I derived my research question and to take forward the exploration of my question.

Three sets of literature are reviewed to inform my study of development NGO accountability. My primary focus is on social science literature on accountability, particularly third sector literature, but also literature spanning other sectors: public administration, national democracy, the corporate sector and global governance. In addition, I discovered as my study progressed that I needed to understand various aspects of organisational life and change in the aid sector in more depth, and hence I draw on both organisational literature, and aid sector literature in this chapter. In each of these three areas, in addition to academic literature, I review literature written or commissioned by practitioners and policy makers.

As noted, my research question centres on the obstacles to NGOs' accountability to its intended beneficiaries. I have set out three sub-questions to help me to answer this question and the evaluation of the literature in the second half of this chapter is based around these sub-questions. These are as follows:

- what are NGOs aiming for in terms of their accountability to beneficiaries?
- how are these attempts at accountability to beneficiaries being practiced?

-to what extent, and why, is there a disjuncture between stated aims and practices?

As is elaborated in the discussion chapter, my most significant findings were ultimately more about the issue of disjuncture than they were about my original main topic of accountability. The review of literature below responding to my third sub-question on the area of disjuncture provides a basis and a conceptual framework for these later findings.

3.2 Structure of This Chapter

This chapter is divided into three parts, corresponding to its three objectives as noted above. In the first part, I present definitions and some theoretical perspectives on accountability. In the second part, I outline the scope of my literature review, what literature on this topic exists and, in brief, what it says. These first two parts of the chapter provide orientations for the discussions which follow and help to situate my study within the wider field of literature.

Having thus laid the groundwork, I then proceed to the third part of the chapter which explores my research sub-questions. As per my first sub-question, I look at what NGOs can aim for in terms of accountability. I then look at the second sub-question: what the literature says about empirical practice. These two discussions bring out the two gaps in the literature around the poor theoretical grounding of the development NGO literature and the lack of examples of accountability practice. I then conclude the chapter by discussing the third sub-question around disjuncture. Given the aforementioned dearth of studies of NGO accountability practice in the literature, my discussion of disjuncture broadens out to the aid sector as a whole, and particularly the role of managerialism in creating disjuncture, and the important role of myth in sustaining disjuncture. To assist in answering my sub-question on disjuncture, I construct a framework on the second level of disjuncture in the aid sector. In the discussion chapter, I apply this framework to my data on ActionAid.

3.3 Definitions of Accountability

As discussed in the introductory chapter, accountability has become a very popular concept with wide implications on the public and third sectors in particular (Dubnick & Justice, 2004; Ebrahim & Weisband, 2007). It is thus important to review different perspectives on the term in order to specify how ‘accountability’ is being understood in this dissertation.

Historically, the concept of accountability has had two prongs: political and financial. Political accountability originated with democracy in Athens when a select portion of the population both directly elected their leaders and directly held them to account for their performance (Day & Klein, 1987, p. 5). Financial accountability was personified in the task of the state auditor, who was one of the original administrators in both Greek city states and Egyptian kingdoms (Behn, 2001; Day & Klein, 1987; Dubnick & Justice, 2004; Walker, 2002).

While there are different contemporary theoretical perspectives and models of accountability, as are discussed below, there is a reasonable degree of consensus in the literature on most aspects of the definition of the term. There is wide agreement that accountability concerns the obligation of one party to answer, or ‘give account’ of some actions to another party. The main point of divergence concerns who is entitled to this account. Unerman and O’Dwyer (2006, p. 356), in a study on accountability for NGO advocacy, set out the spectrum of possibilities in this regard:

organisations may be considered responsible and accountable either: solely to their owners; or to those stakeholders who have the most power to influence achievement of the organisation’s mission; or to all those who are potentially impacted by the organisation’s operations and actions.

Within literature written or commissioned by NGOs, the ‘broad’ conception of accountability to all those impacted by an organisation’s operations is often adopted. For instance, the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (2013), an initiative aimed at “making humanitarian action accountable to beneficiaries”, defines accountability as:

“the responsible use of power”. In a humanitarian context, this means that the power of agencies is exercised responsibly with regards to disaster-affected communities. When implemented effectively, accountability implies the fact that people affected by disasters or other crises can participate in decisions that affect their lives and can complain if they feel

the help they receive is not adequate, if a decision is made poorly or has unexpected and unwelcome consequences.

A similar definition is used in a paper written by Bonbright of Keystone, a UK organisation working on citizen sector accountability, along with an academic, Batliwala. The authors note that “accountability is the way those affected by power can hold power to account. It is a pre-condition for sustainable development” (2007, p. 4).

The narrower conception of accountability, far more common in academic writing requires a relationship of authority to exist before one party can hold the other party to account. A definition which captures elements that are widely agreed on within the academic literature is that of Mulgan. Mulgan (2000, p. 555), in one of a series of writings reviewing the concept of accountability across public and private sectors, defines the “core sense” of accountability as “being called ‘to account’ to some authority for one's actions” (citing Jones, 1992, p. 73). Mulgan infers three main features of accountability from this definition:

it is *external*, in that the account is given to some other person or body outside the person or body being held accountable; it involves *social interaction and exchange*, in that one side, that calling for the account, seeks answers and rectification while the other side, that being held accountable, responds and accepts sanctions; it implies *rights of authority*, in that those calling for an account are asserting rights of superior authority over those who are accountable, including the rights to demand answers and to impose sanctions. (p. 555, emphasis in original)

There is broad concurrence in the academic literature that the above definition of accountability with Mulgan's three main features is valid¹⁵ (Bryant, 2007; Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Fox & Brown, 1998; Fry, 1995; Goetz & Jenkins, 2002; Macdonald, 2007). This ‘narrow sense’ of accountability requires a hierarchical authority relationship within which an actor is held to account, which is in line with the historical perspectives mentioned above: the citizens in Athens gained their authority over their representatives through their vote and the state auditor was vested with the authority of the ruler. With these definitions outlined, I proceed to describe some theoretical perspectives on accountability.

¹⁵ The only aspect of Mulgan's three features which is controversial in the academic literature is whether accountability necessarily grants those in authority the right to impose sanctions.

3.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Accountability

In this section, I analyse three theoretical positions on understanding accountability to provide a basis for the ensuing literature review, as well as to situate my study within the wider social science domain. The theoretical positions are: structuralism, the actor-oriented approach and institutionalism. As noted earlier, the actor-oriented approach is my central theoretical lens and frames my dissertation as a whole.

3.4.1 Structuralist Perspective

The first perspective I describe is the structuralist view of accountability most closely associated with Max Weber. This is the ‘classic’ view of accountability against which other theorists often compare their perspectives. Accountability is seen as being attainable with the right structures and systems. In Weber’s study of bureaucracy, *Economy and Society*, he praises the virtues of the emerging government bureaucracies in modern capitalist societies which are hierarchical, based on “formal rationality”, and hence produce consistent outcomes and attain goals effectively (Morrison, 1995, p. 221). In the previous systems, individuals ruled without much accountability to people, whereas Weber expresses optimism that the new form of bureaucracy will guarantee citizens’ rights (pp. 227-230). A clear hierarchical system, according to Weber, offers the opportunity of appeal to a superior authority: “The individual bureaucrat cannot squirm out of the apparatus into which he has been harnessed” (Weber, 1978, pp. 987-988). In other words, this perspective guarantees that officials will be ‘called to account’ by an authority. Therefore, despite other concerns about modern bureaucracies¹⁶, Weber is confident that impartial accountability will be guaranteed to citizens.

Lewis (2007a, pp. 133-134), in a study of accountability in a Bangladeshi NGO, sees Weber’s theorising of bureaucracies as providing the basis for one way of thinking

¹⁶ Weber was concerned with the potential of such bureaucracies to stifle human creativity and follow purely instrumental ends rather than values. Weber also expressed concerns about the potential of the bureaucracy to expand and consolidate its own power (Mommsen, 1974; Weber, 1978, pp. 1000-1001, 1403).

about accountability which resonates in contemporary society and which consists primarily of:

rule-bound responses by organisations and individuals who must report to recognised authorities such as government agencies or donor organisations in order to ensure that the resources they receive are used properly and that the work they undertake is done effectively.

As Lewis notes, this perspective links to the way in which accountability is viewed under neo-liberal approaches, which are further discussed below in the section on disjuncture and managerialism. I now describe the actor-oriented theoretical perspective on accountability which focuses more on actors and less on structures.

3.4.2 Actor Oriented Perspective

In direct contrast to the structuralist approach on accountability is the ‘actor oriented’ perspective, as described in Hilhorst’s (2003) in-depth case study of an NGO in the Philippines. Hilhorst uses ethnographic methods, particularly participant observation, during her three years working with a Philippine NGO, which allow her to view what actually happens in the NGO on a day-to-day basis, rather than what policies and reports would imply.

This leads her to frame her analysis within Long’s actor-oriented sociology approach, which emphasises the central roles of individual actors in negotiating accountabilities, rather than focusing only on the accountability structures and mechanisms, such as reports to donors, that ostensibly provide ‘accounts’ of resources used by NGOs. Indeed, Hilhorst finds that, paradoxically, the local events and processes related to development projects which should be the core of the ‘accounts’ NGOs give to stakeholders, such as donors, have relatively little bearing on the accounts given: “The accounts [the NGOs] construct reflect more the NGOs’ attitudes and interest than their accomplishments in the project or the ideas of their clients” (p. 140). I return to Hilhorst’s exposition of disjuncture between the appearance and reality of accountability later in this chapter.

One of the key advantages of the actor-oriented perspectives for my study therefore is that they focus on what actually happens from the vantage points of different

actors, rather than only what was intended to happen. This is relevant because, as is illustrated in the literature review below, the goals and intentions of better balanced accountability by NGOs are not new. The key gap is an analysis of why this is constantly on the agenda and what actually happens when these attempts to institutionalise NGO accountability are made. As Long (2001, p. 30) notes:

It becomes important then to focus on intervention practices as they evolve and are shaped by the struggles between the various participants, rather than simply on intervention models, by which we mean the ideal-typical construction that planners, implementers or clients may have about the process.

Having described the two contrasting approaches of structuralism and actor-oriented approaches, I now describe a third theoretical perspective on accountability which draws on both of the above.

3.4.3 Institutional Perspectives

Between the two extremes of Weber and Long is a third theoretical perspective on accountability evident in the work of contemporary theorists Brett and Paul. Brett (1999), in an article on organisations and institutions across sectors, cites Weber's portrayal of bureaucrats as independent experts who objectively implement government policy without prejudice. However, the reality, as Brett sees it, is that many different interests exist and are acted upon within the bureaucracy: "More recently this centralized bureaucratic system has been strongly criticized for its hierarchical tendencies, its rigidity, its secrecy, its ability to hide errors and even encourage corruption" (p. 28).

Similarly, Paul (1991), in a paper for the World Bank on improving public service accountability in developing countries, takes a step away from both Weber and Long when he points out significant barriers that make it seem unlikely that citizens, as actors, will have the 'room for manoeuvre' to be able to call public servants to account, especially the barrier of rent-seeking by government officials. Both Brett and Paul highlight limitations in terms of information and education-levels of citizens, particularly acute in developing countries, which exacerbate power imbalances and hinder them from monitoring services and demanding improvements. These obstacles

related to the disadvantages of citizens in developing countries in demanding accountability are revisited in the discussion chapter.

In order to remedy this situation, Brett (p. 41) places central importance on the role of incentives, which he defines as “the rewards or sanctions which are used to induce good performance”. He posits a strong link between accountability and incentives: “Accountability works best when rewards depend directly on the quality of service provided.” However, Paul (pp. 5,13) does not want to rely on internal institutional incentives alone¹⁷, he also calls for the mobilisation of public opinion around the quality of public services, as well as attention to promoting mechanisms to increase the capacity of the population to use ‘exit’ and ‘voice’ with respect to government services, using Hirschman’s (1970) classic framework¹⁸. Brett (p. 48) takes another step away from Weber’s structuralist approach when he places a strong emphasis on the importance of context in determining accountability systems, recognising not only the political but also the cultural nature of accountability, which Weber saw only as a technical problem.

3.4.4 Summary of Perspectives

These theoretical perspectives provide useful starting points for thinking about accountability taking into account structures and actors, different contexts and cultures and power differentials, as well as considering what incentives and mechanisms may be necessary. Table 3.1 below summarises the theoretical perspectives.

¹⁷ While acknowledging its use in the private sector, Paul (1991, p. 6) is unsure of the potential of the New Institutional Economics approach of applying incentives to improve accountability in the public sector given the significant problems of governance and incentives in the public sector.

¹⁸ Hirschman’s work centres around the three options which consumers can use when confronted with the problem of performance deterioration of goods and services (Hirschman, 1970; Paul, 1991, p. 12). Generally, consumers of private companies, which are Hirschman’s main focus, can simply ‘exit’ and find another product or service in the market if they are unhappy. Clients of the public and voluntary sectors are more likely to use ‘voice’, attempting to participate in decision-making around the product or service, as per Mulgan’s definition of accountability presented above, or ‘loyalty’, accepting the situation and continuing to consume the product or service, at least in the short-term.

Table 3.1: Authors from Structuralist to Actor Approaches

| Author | Theoretical Standpoint | View on Accountability |
|---------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Weber | Structuralist | Structures and systems such as the modern bureaucracy can in themselves guarantee accountability. Variance within context is unmentioned. |
| Brett | Institutionalist | Structures are insufficient given power differentials etc.; incentives need to be created within organisations to promote accountability. Context is also important. |
| Paul | Institutionalist/Actor-Oriented | Incentives are helpful but insufficient; people's agency also needs to be promoted to obtain accountability. |
| Long | Actor-Oriented | Structures and systems are always mediated through actors' experiences and agency. Context is important, but individuals' experiences of, and attempts at, accountability even more so. |

Having provided this theoretical grounding, I now proceed to discuss the scope of the literature review.

3.5 Scope of Literature Review

In this section, I define the scope of the literature review which follows in terms of the categories from which I draw literature. The central point here is that development NGO literature does not provide a sufficient basis for the study of accountability due to various weaknesses as are outlined below, and thus I had to conduct a review of broader categories of literature.

Firstly, it is important to define what is meant in this dissertation by the key categories that are used, the 'third sector' and 'development NGO'. A well-known definition of the third sector, or the non-profit sector, is the 'structural-operational definition' of Salamon and Anheier (1997) which defines five characteristics of organisations within this sector (Morris, 2000). Organisations should be, to a "reasonable" degree: organised in a formal manner, private (i.e. non-governmental), non-profit distributing, self-governing and voluntary (Salamon & Anheier, 1997, p. 34). In his textbook on NGO management, Lewis (2007b, p. 7) points to the vast array of

activities which third sector organisations are involved in “from welfare services to leisure pursuits, from political pressure groups to arts and hobby groups”. Lewis then refers to development NGOs as a subgroup of the third sector “that are engaged in development and poverty reduction work at local, national and global levels around the world.”¹⁹

As illustrated in Figure 3.1 below, development NGO literature on accountability is the central focus of this review. However, there are significant weaknesses in the literature on development NGOs, which filter down to literature specifically on accountability. Much of the literature on NGOs in the development sector is ‘grey’ literature, which has been written by policy-makers or practitioners, or sometimes academics commissioned by these groups. There is a tendency for such literature to be analytically weak, as it aims to seek solutions, and furthermore to construct problems to fit with available solutions (Lewis & Mosse, 2006b; Lewis, Rodgers, & Woolcock, 2005). In addition, development NGO literature tends to be written by sympathetic insiders and to be normative, which is another factor that prevents a rigorous and critical analysis of the NGO sector (Hilhorst, 2003; Nauta, 2006; Tvedt, 1998). Other authors point to a lack of grounding in either in-depth research of practice or in critical theory, leading to a tendency towards myths being propagated in the literature (Opoku-Mensah, Lewis, & Tvedt, 2007, pp. 8-9).

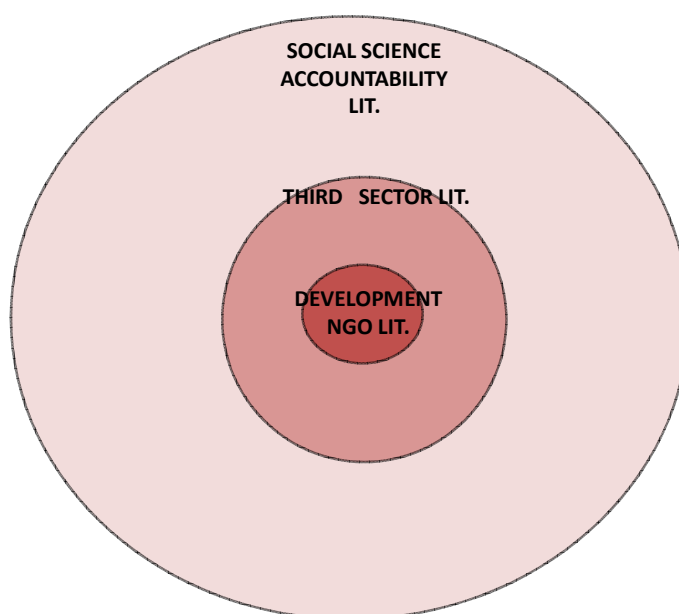
Given these weaknesses in the development NGO literature, it is necessary for this review to also draw upon firstly, the wider third sector literature on accountability, which shares many of the same preoccupations, and secondly, the broader social science literature, which provides a stronger conceptual and theoretical basis for analysis of accountability issues. Reference to the broader set of literature on accountability, from across sectors, enables a deeper understanding of the concept than would be possible if

¹⁹ The term ‘civil society’ is often used within the development sector. Civil society is “usually taken to mean a realm or space in which there exists a set of organizational actors which are not part of the household, the state or the market” (Lewis, 2007b, p. 54). Thus, there is considerable overlap with the concept of the third sector.

²⁰ While there can be considerable blurring of the boundaries in practice between NGOs, Community-based Organisations and social movements, my predominant focus is on NGOs, which are aiming to assist individuals outside their immediate membership. Community-based organisations and social movements tend to predominantly serve their members.

only the development NGO literature were discussed. Figure 3.1 illustrates this scope as described.

Figure 3.1: Scope of Literature Review on Accountability



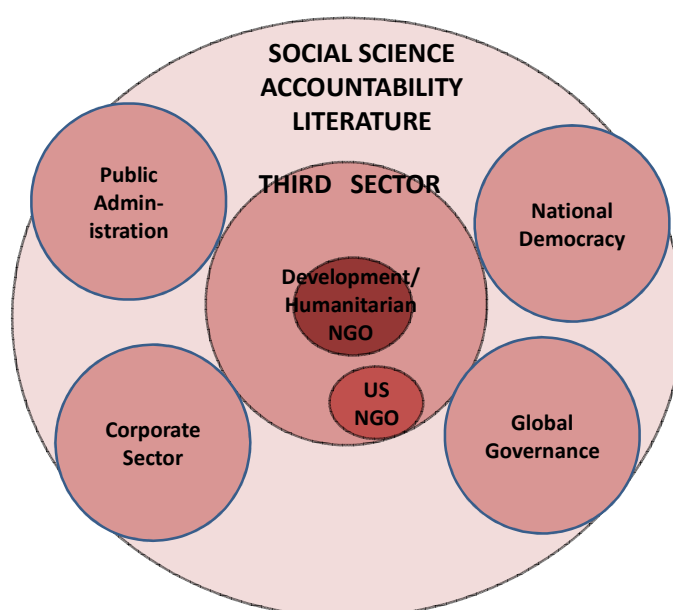
Having discussed the scope of the literature review, the next section provides a brief overview and a mapping of the literature on accountability.

3.6 Overview and Mapping of Literature on Accountability

Having defined the main terms, provided some theoretical grounding on accountability and discussed the scope of this literature review, this section provides an overview and mapping of the literature on accountability, starting with the social science literature and then focussing in on third sector literature and finally on development NGO literature. Figure 3.2 below provides an illustration of the major groupings present in the

accountability literature, while illustrating that the development NGO literature remains the central focus of this review.

Figure 3.2: Major Groupings of Accountability Literature



3.6.1 Social Science Literature on Accountability

The social science literature on accountability can be grouped into five categories. The largest grouping is the literature around accountability in public administration which originates mostly from the US, Western Europe and Australia. A dominant theme in this literature since the mid-1980s has been the imposition of increasingly restrictive accountability mechanisms within public bodies caused by shifts in government policies, often related to neo-liberalism. This theme is discussed further below in the section on disjuncture.

A second grouping is around accountability within national democratic systems, again predominantly within Western societies. A key theme here is the difficulty and

complexity of achieving accountability, even within democracies, and the need to think beyond elections in terms of accountability mechanisms (Day & Klein, 1987; Przeworski, Stokes, & Bernard, 1999).

A third, smaller grouping of literature, relates to accountability in the corporate sector. There have been high-profile cases of a seeming lack of corporate accountability in recent years, such as some financial institutions in the US and Europe which are said to have contributed significantly to the financial crisis, and some large petroleum companies held responsible for oil spills. Despite significant media attention, there appears to be less academic debate about accountability within this sector, perhaps because there is a clear profit objective for which companies can be held accountable, and a clear structure of shareholders to hold them to account (Walker, 2002; A. P. Williams & Taylor, 2013, p. 567). The focus of corporate accountability seems to be on companies staying within the law and making a profit for shareholders.

A fourth, and fast growing grouping of literature, concerns the accountability of global institutions, such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation. This literature explores the challenges of holding inter-governmental bodies to account outside of the domestic electoral system. Scholte's work, for example, explores the potential for civil society organisations to hold global governance institutions to account (2004a, 2004b).

The fifth grouping of literature, also growing quite rapidly, is the literature on the accountability of nongovernmental third sector organisations, which is discussed in more detail in the next section.

3.6.2 Third Sector Accountability Literature

The body of literature on accountability in the third sector had its beginnings around 1985, with most of the literature arising since 1995. The literature is unevenly spread between the different components of the third sector. The vast majority of the emphasis in the literature is specifically on NGOs, as opposed to other aspects of the third sector such as, for example, trade unions. With some notable exceptions, particularly from the Australian domestic NGO sector (Leat, 1990; C. McDonald, 1999; Mulgan, 2001), most of the literature regarding NGOs working in their domestic contexts is from the US.

One reason for this may be that particular scandals around NGOs have generated much attention in the US. For example, there was a wave of non-profit organisation scandals in the early 1990s, the best-known being the conviction of the president of United Way of America on multiple charges of fraud. The US-based journal *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* published a special issue on NGO accountability in 1995 which discussed the various reforms to the non-profit sector that were being proposed after these exposés, such as tighter legal regulation (Chisholm, 1995; Bogart, 1995; Hammack 1995).

Within the international NGO sector, development and humanitarian NGOs are the most engaged with the topic of accountability, with human rights and environmental NGOs at a far earlier stage, a situation which is reflected by the respective volumes of literature. There are, however, some papers in the human rights and environmental sectors which make significant contributions, such as Archer's (2003) comprehensive overview of accountability issues for human rights organisations and Jepson's (2005) paper, from the environmental NGO perspective, which presents a legitimacy-based framework for the accountability of NGOs. Both of these authors acknowledge that the development/humanitarian sector is leading the debate in the international NGO sector and catalysing environmental and human rights NGOs to view the issue more seriously. The next section provides a mapping of development and humanitarian NGO literature on accountability²¹.

3.6.3 Development NGO Accountability Literature

Having briefly mapped out the literature on accountability within the social science literature and the third sector literature, in this section I provide an overview and a classification of literature on development NGO accountability. This provides a basis for the themes and literature gaps to be discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

Similar to some of the US literature on accountability emerging from the occurrence of scandals, the literature on accountability in the development and

²¹ For the remainder of this dissertation, I use the term 'development NGO' to include both development and humanitarian NGOs. While some literature focuses on humanitarian NGOs, the line between the two is very blurred, particularly since many of the major humanitarian organisations also undertake development work.

humanitarian sectors can also be linked to trends and events in the external context. The first significant references to NGO accountability in the literature came in 1987 when the *World Development* journal published a special issue on NGOs catalysed by the “rapidly increasing involvement” of NGOs in development assistance due, in part, to the recent “ideological” trend of significant governmental funding of NGOs (Drabek, 1987, p. vii). Similarly, Edwards and Hulme’s (1996) widely cited edited volume on NGO accountability was motivated by the scenario in which donors were increasingly contracting NGOs to provide welfare services. Both of these early publications express serious concerns about what they view as an imbalance of accountability within NGOs, whereby intended beneficiaries often get left behind when accountability to donors is prioritised. This is still the dominant theme in the development NGO literature, as is further detailed below.

In terms of classification, three main categories on development NGO accountability literature are apparent and are detailed in Table 3.2 below. These are: (i) literature which predominantly discusses theories and concepts related to accountability, (ii) literature which engages with the policies and practices of accountability, and (iii) empirical literature which describes NGOs attempts to improve accountability to intended beneficiaries²².

²² Categorisation is not straightforward authors often combine these different aspects in the same book or article; I have thus tried to classify the literature on the basis of the predominant focus of the work in question.

Table 3.2: Classification of Development NGO Accountability Literature

| Literature Type | Characteristics | Sample of Key Authors |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Theoretical | <p>Authors usually academics and often coming from a different discipline (i.e. not development studies).</p> <p>This category of authors explores and provides insights into theories and concepts around NGO accountability and sometimes constructs new theories or conceptual frameworks.</p> | <p>Leat (1990); Brett (1993); Fry (1995); Uphoff (1996); Najam (1996); Brown & Moore (2001); Cooley & Ron (2002); Walker (2002); Hilhorst (2003); Peruzzotti (2006); Weisband (2007); Brown (2007); Lewis (2007a); Harsh, Mbatia & Shrum (2008); Seckinelgin (2008); Gugerty and Prakash (2010); Obrecht (2011); Watkins, Swidler and Hannan (2012); Neyland (2012)</p> |
| Policy Engaged | <p>Authors are a mix of academics and practitioners.</p> <p>This category of literature tends to be normative. The precise focus varies but commonly authors do some or all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -provide context, discuss and define the problems with accountability, sometimes using case studies of practice -give an overview of the key issues, dilemmas and principles involved -provide recommendations for improvement, for instance, new ways of thinking about accountability, new policies or accountability mechanisms. | <p>Edwards & Hulme (1996); Biekart (1996); Biggs and Neame (1996); Chambers (1996); Covey (1996); Bejar and Oakley (1996); Brinkerhoff (2001); Keohane (2002); Slim (2002); Goetz and Jenkins (2002); Starling (2003); Kamat (2003); Ebrahim (2003a); Naidoo (2003); Khan (2003); Shiras (2003); Omelicheva (2004); Mawdsley, Townsend & Porter (2005); Jordan (2005); Roberts, Jones and Frohling (2005); Gray, Bebbington & Collison (2006); Dixon, Ritchie & Siwale (2006); Bendell (2006); Goddard & Assad (2006); Keystone & AccountAbility (2006); Wenar (2006); Wallace, Chapman and Bornstein (2007); Bryant (2007); Jordan (2007); Brown & Jagadananda (2007); Cavill & Sohail (2007); Bonbright & Batliwala (2007); Lloyd, Oatham & Hammer (2007); O'Dwyer & Unerman (2008); Ossewaarde, Nijhof & Heyse</p> |

| | | |
|-------------------|--|--|
| | | (2008); Gugerty (2010); Zarnegar Deloffre (2010); Murtaza (2012); Schmitz, Raggio & Bruno-van Vijeijken (2012); Williams & Taylor (2013) |
| Empirical Studies | <p>Authors are a mix of academics and practitioners.</p> <p>Studies of NGO attempts to improve their accountabilities, with a focus on accountability to intended beneficiaries.</p> | <p>Johnson (2001); Kilby (2006); Walker, Jones, Roberts & Frohling (2007); Agyemang, Awumbila, Unerman and O'Dwyer (2009); Jacobs and Wilford (2010);</p> <p><i>Related to ActionAid ALPS</i> Scott-Villiers (2002); David & Mancini (2003); David & Mancini (2004); Chapman, David and Mancini (2003); Okwaare & Chapman (2006); David, Mancini and Guijt (2006); David & Mancini (2011);</p> |

The common thread in all three categories of literature is the view that accountability in NGOs is skewed toward donors and away from beneficiaries. In addition, each of the three categories can be said to have one main focus. The main focus of the theoretical category of literature is the search for appropriate models for NGO accountability, often drawing on other sectors. The central theme of the policy-engaged literature is the negative impact of neo-liberal managerial approaches, such as results-based management, on NGO accountability. Finally, the empirical category is focussed on providing examples of NGO attempts to improve the balance of their accountability between donors and beneficiaries.

The key point to note here for the discussion to follow is the imbalance of the sizes of the categories. By far the largest category of literature is the policy-engaged category. This category is strong on identifying the problem of unbalanced NGO accountability, but it does not engage deeply with concepts and theories, nor does it test out empirical solutions. The other two categories of literature are theoretically engaged and concerned with practice respectively, but as can be noted, these categories are far smaller.

Having outlined in broad terms what literature exists on accountability on development NGOs and in other sectors, for the remainder of this chapter, I evaluate this literature with respect to my three research sub-questions:

- what are NGOs aiming for in terms of their accountability to beneficiaries?
- how are these attempts at accountability to beneficiaries being practiced?
- to what extent, and why, is there a disjuncture between stated aims and practices?

3.7 What Are NGOs Aiming for? Models of NGO Accountability

My main research question asks about the obstacles to NGO accountability to intended beneficiaries. As my choice of sub-questions demonstrates, ascertaining obstacles requires knowing what is being aimed for with NGO accountability, and contrasting this with what is being achieved in practice. In this section, I explore my first research sub-question on NGO intentions. To do this, I seek working models of NGO accountability from the literature to see what it is possible for NGOs to aim for with their practice.

Models of accountability are commonly cited within the social science literature to enhance understanding of the concept. The most common models are the principal-agent model and the representative model, which correspond to the two historical prongs of accountability as mentioned above - financial and political. An important theme in the theoretical category of development NGO literature on accountability is the extent to which these two accountability models, used within other sectors, are appropriate for NGOs. I explore this theme in the next section, and include a description of a third 'model' which I came across in the literature: a set of social and ethical perspectives. These perspectives are proposed by some authors in the NGO literature as they view the principal-agent and representative models as a poor fit for NGOs, mainly due to the fact that these models do not promote a balanced accountability between donors and beneficiaries of an NGO's work. However, as I discuss below, it seems that none of these three models, not even the social and ethical perspectives, is viable for NGOs in terms of achieving the goal of accountability to intended beneficiaries. This discovery, that there is no viable theoretical model of NGO accountability that allows for accountability to beneficiaries, led to my identification of the first gap in the literature:

the weak focus on theory and on structural barriers to NGO accountability. I now describe the models in detail.

3.7.1 Principal-Agent Model

The principal-agent model of accountability is often associated with neo-liberal economic theory, contemporary ‘management’ perspectives on accountability, and institutionalism, due to its focus on contracts and incentives. Brett (1993) makes an early attempt to construct a theoretical framework around the issue of NGO accountability and expresses the potential he sees in the principal-agent model of accountability for the third sector. In this model, accountability is the basis of a contract between ‘principals’ and their ‘agents’ for performance of a certain task, in order to ensure that agents do not abuse the power that has been delegated to them by principals (Brett, 1993; L David Brown, 2007; Lewis, 2007a). As in Mulgan’s ‘core sense’ definition above, the principal-agent model implies that agents always have to explain and justify their actions to those who have authority over them.

This issue of ‘authority’ within the principal-agent model is the core reason why this model is problematic for NGOs’ accountability to beneficiaries, as beneficiaries tend not to possess such authority. As noted, this is a concern of the institutionalist theorists discussed above, who reference the vulnerability of beneficiaries vis-à-vis NGOs in developing countries (Brett, 1993; 1991). Leat (1990) echoes this concern and raises a related point that, in the non-profit sector, the capacity of beneficiaries to ask the right questions and assess the adequacy of answers is often lacking. She notes that client groups, often poor and marginalised, are “experts in their own needs but very often they are less knowledgeable about other social and political processes, about what is or is not possible or feasible” (pp. 147-148). This leads to an imbalance of knowledge, to add to the inherent imbalance of power between development NGOs and their intended beneficiaries, which makes it difficult for accountability to be meaningful. Similarly, Obrecht (2011, pp. 111-115), in a study of the moral agency of NGOs, states that the principal-agent model is fundamentally unsuitable for NGOs as, in its original form, it assumes a bi-lateral relationship between the NGO and a stakeholder who gives the

NGO money to perform a certain task. Hence, non-donor stakeholders, such as intended beneficiaries, are not well-accounted for in this model.

Thus, the application of the principal-agent model to NGOs' accountability to beneficiaries appears limited in both theory and practice. The critical limitations are that, in theory, it does not allow for accountability to stakeholders which lack formal authority over an NGO and, in practice, the poor capacity of beneficiaries to demand, particularly acute in the development NGO sector, hampers the application of the model. I now discuss the second model of accountability discussed in the literature, the representative model.

3.7.2 Representative Model

The representative model of accountability forms part of social democratic theory and provides a frame to assess the responsiveness of elected public servants to citizens (Walker, 2002). The two principal types of accountability mechanism under this model are vertical mechanisms, such as elections and media scrutiny, and controls on the bureaucracy through horizontal mechanisms, such as ombudspersons and commissioners (L David Brown, 2007; Walker, 2002). Therefore, if politicians perform inadequately, they may be exposed in the media and called to explain, or they may be sanctioned by the loss of their seat at the next election. Similarly, bureaucrats should fear that their failings might be picked up by the investigation of an ombudsperson. This perspective on accountability fits neatly into Mulgan's 'core sense', as it implies external scrutiny of the representative, either by the recognised authority, the citizen, directly, or by institutions working on behalf of the citizen.

The principal limitation of the representative model in terms of NGO accountability is that it assumes democratic functioning and is mostly applicable to the modern, liberal, democratic nation-state. While some NGOs have membership structures, such as Amnesty International, they construct these structures themselves. In addition, NGOs are usually established with their own sets of goals, rather than these being decided by an electorate (Obrecht, 2011).

There is considerable critical literature calling for clarity on who NGOs represent, perhaps most famously exemplified in an article in *The Economist* (2000, p.

130) which asked, “Who elected Oxfam?”. This article appeared in the wake of NGO demonstrations protesting the World Trade Organisation talks in Seattle in 1999 (Naidoo, 2003; Peruzzotti, 2006). Despite these critical calls, the consensus in the academic literature is that NGOs cannot be expected to be representative in the same way as nation-states, and that there are other ways for NGOs to gain legitimacy to advocate (Charnovitz, 2006; Obrecht, 2011; Peruzzotti, 2006).

Thus, like the principal-agent model, the representative model of accountability has an important limitation when it comes to the development NGOs as they are not formally within a democratic system²³. I now turn to a final set of perspectives on accountability that some authors believe provides viable alternatives for NGOs, given the inappropriateness of these two traditional models.

3.7.3 Social and Ethical Perspectives

A number of authors writing development NGO accountability literature advocate for alternative approaches to accountability that place emphasis on social relationships, ethics, and/or the internal and personal dimensions of accountability (L David Brown, 2007; Fry, 1995; Lewis, 2007a; Weisband, 2007). I term these ‘social and ethical perspectives’ on accountability. While these authors’ arguments do not fit into a neatly unified approach or model, many of them share common themes such as the need for dialogue, cooperation, trust and negotiation in accountability relationships.

Most of the authors of these social and ethical perspectives are reacting against neo-liberal accountability approaches that they view as problematic, usually as these approaches marginalise intended beneficiaries in favour of donors. These authors often suggest principles which should guide accountability mechanisms. For instance, in the aforementioned article on accountability within Bangladeshi NGOs in which Lewis (2007a, p. 134) describes the “audit culture” approach, he contrasts this with the “Durkheimian perspective”. This perspective assumes that organisations are socially constructed and that “accountability can be understood as the maintenance of

²³ It is worth noting that there is much literature on the limitations of the principal-agent and representative models even for the private and public sectors from which they originated.

organisational integrity through dialogues among and between different stake-holders”. Lewis sees openness to dialogue as a necessary component of an approach to accountability that takes into account the complexities of NGOs.

The authors of these social and ethical perspectives generally believe that the principles of trust and cooperation improve accountability, as both principals and agents will be more internally motivated to help one another, rather than being locked in an adversarial relationship or a ‘crisis of trust’ that external scrutiny can sometimes engender (O’Neill, 2002). In a widely cited paper on NGO accountability using an international development NGO as a case study, Fry (1995, p. 181) calls for NGOs to align external accountability requirements with “felt responsibility” within the organisation. Accountability should be seen as an opportunity, rather than simply the means to fix a problem (Obrecht, 2011).

In addition to proposing incorporation of these principles of dialogue, trust and cooperation, some authors of these perspectives, such as Obrecht and Brown, attempt to chart alternative models of accountability in more detail, to replace or supplement the principal-agent and representative models. Brown (2007, p. 95) describes a model of “mutual accountability”, which he defines as “accountability among autonomous actors that is grounded in shared values and visions and in relationships of mutual trust and influence.” He constructs this mutual accountability model around “multiparty social action initiatives”, such as a coalition in the Philippines which emerged to oppose the building of a geothermal plant (p. 89). An important feature of mutual accountability for Brown is the recognition that the tasks to be done, the accountabilities associated with these tasks and even the capacities to be accountable, will and should evolve and be negotiated over time between the parties in the relationships.

Obrecht (2011) sees more potential in Brown’s multi-party social action framework for NGOs than she does in principal-agent and representative models. However, she believes that Brown’s emphasis on shared values between actors is unrealistic (p. 123). As an alternative, Obrecht introduces the concept of “moral appraisal accountability”:

Under this conception of what I call *moral appraisal accountability*, accountable relationships can be good for their own sake, regardless

of what outcomes or ends they produce. This is because accountability is an embodiment of respect between an NGO and the parties whom it affects, and this show of respect is expected of an NGO by those who agree to collaborate with it. Thus, accountability is valuable for its own sake, as a constitutive element of the relationships that support an NGO's agency. (p. 88, emphasis in original)

Critical to Obrecht's framework is the concept of the responsibility of agents to 'be held accountable'. Recognising the lack of power of some stakeholders, such as intended beneficiaries in relationships with NGOs, Obrecht argues that NGOs should have a responsibility to enable these less powerful stakeholders to hold them accountable (p. 107).

In attempting to address shortcomings in other accountability approaches, the social and ethical perspectives help to broaden the accountability debate for the third sector and provide useful ideas for alternatives. However, these perspectives also have some shortcomings. Firstly, most of the works of literature do not provide any viable alternative models of accountability. They tend to focus on the principles guiding accountability relationships, rather than constructing detailed models of accountability. The key exceptions are Obrecht and Brown who construct interesting models, although these models appear to rely significantly on the good will of all the actors involved and their desire to be held accountable, which may not be realistic. Furthermore, Brown's model is centred around peers as "autonomous" actors and hence does not assist in thinking about how NGOs can be accountable to intended beneficiaries who hold less power than they do.

The second weakness of these social and ethical perspectives is that there is little empirical evidence for them. In some cases, authors use negative case studies to demonstrate why a new perspective on accountability is needed, and then discuss what would work better, but usually without any corresponding case study of where this new more social or ethical perspective has actually been implemented. While it is easy to see how the focus on negotiation, dialogue, trust and cooperation can work in terms of individual relationships, it is more difficult to imagine how this focus could work on a large-scale with big or multiple NGOs. This is partly related to the very defining features of these social and ethical perspectives which focus more on personal and

relational dimensions of accountability. Having reviewed all three models of accountability in relation to NGOs, I now conclude this section with a reflection on their viability.

3.7.4 Lack of Viable Model of Accountability for NGOs

In sum, this review of models leads to a conclusion that there does not appear to be any working model of accountability for NGOs, even in theory, that includes the multiple stakeholders of an organisation and that enables an NGO to strive toward ‘balanced accountability’ between donors and intended beneficiaries, which is the over-arching goal for NGO accountability in the literature. The principal-agent model suffers from both theoretical and practical limitations, notably only accounting for stakeholders that are a recognised authority over the NGO. The representative model is inapplicable to most NGOs as it requires democratic functioning. Finally, the only detailed models within the social and ethical perspectives on accountability require a high degree of good will and shared values from all actors, which may not be realistic, and moreover, there is little empirical evidence for these perspectives. Thus, NGOs face a theoretical void; there is no ‘ideal’ model of NGO accountability for which they can aim. This issue points to a broader gap in the literature, that it is weakly focussed on theory and structural barriers to NGO accountability. This gap is now elaborated.

3.8 Literature Gap: Weak Focus on Theory and Structural Barriers to NGO Accountability

I noted above that the major concern of the development NGO accountability literature is the imbalance of accountabilities, whereby upward accountability to donors is dominating over downward accountability to intended beneficiaries. However, it can be noted from the fruitless search for a working accountability model in the previous section that NGO accountability to beneficiaries faces serious challenges in theory, as well as in practice.

Yet, despite this, very few authors appear to be exploring the feasibility of the concept of accountability to NGOs’ intended beneficiaries. There is a lack of interrogation in most of the literature on possible structural issues that may be barriers to

NGO downward accountability. The few authors who do explore these structural barriers make a strong case. For instance, Uphoff (1996) points out the inherent difficulty with the concept of accountability to beneficiaries when he notes:

There are structural and philosophical reasons why NGOs that are private-sector service organisations should not be expected to function as agencies responsible to their clientele. In particular, the staff and trustees of such organizations have the burden of mobilizing and managing funds to keep their operations solvent . . . The fiduciary relationship between NGO staff and trustees and those who provide NGOs with their funds is greater than the NGO's obligation to recipients of benefits. . . Thus, proponents of making NGOs accountable to their beneficiaries face a structural constraint that cannot easily be done away with. (pp. 27-28)

This aligns with Hudock's (1999) finding from her case studies of the relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs in Sierra Leone and the Gambia where she finds that "Southern NGOs' resource dependence and vulnerability to external control impede their responsiveness to client groups" (p. 6).

However, the bulk of the development NGO literature, as suggested by the relatively large size of the policy-engaged category above, does not engage significantly with theory. Generally, the view within this literature appears to be that if NGOs make more efforts and try different mechanisms, they will have more success in balancing their accountabilities. There is, thus, a tendency for the literature to be action- and solution-oriented, to focus on how to achieve downward accountability, rather than improving understanding of why imbalances in accountability exist and what might be some fundamental and structural barriers involved.

This is the first critical gap in the literature and one which guided my choice of research question on exploring obstacles to NGO accountability. In the data chapters, I outline operational obstacles and in the discussion chapter I focus on more fundamental and structural barriers.

Having addressed the first sub-question on the aims of NGOs with respect to accountability, I now move to the second sub-question on the practice of accountability by NGOs.

3.9 How Is Accountability Being Practiced? Empirical Studies

My second sub-question focuses on how NGO accountability to beneficiaries is being practiced. This section explores the development NGO literature on this question. As noted above, the large category of policy-engaged literature, as well as criticising current accountability mechanisms, proposes new ideas and mechanisms to improve the balance of accountabilities. Indeed there has been a “staggering growth” in NGO accountability and development effectiveness initiatives over the past 10 to 15 years (ActionAid, 2010d, p. 3). Initiatives such as voluntary codes of conduct, certification initiatives and other accountability mechanisms have abounded, and organisations have been established to promote accountability improvement at global level, such as the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership (HAP), One World Trust, International NGO Accountability network, Keystone Accountability, Sphere Standards, and Compas Qualité (Jordan, 2005; Keystone & AccountAbility, 2006; Lloyd, et al., 2007; Omelicheva, 2004; Zarnegar Deloffre, 2010). Furthermore, there have been numerous codes of conduct and self-regulation mechanisms established at a national level, such as in the twenty-two African countries captured in Gugerty’s (2010) survey on self-regulatory initiatives on the continent.

Thus, the development NGO accountability literature has many ideas for how NGOs can improve their accountability. However, a key weakness of the literature is that there is often no evidence that these ideas have actually changed practice within an NGO context. For instance, Brown and Jagadananda (2007) describe the code of conduct of Ethiopian NGOs, the Organizational Self-Analysis tool for NGOs in India and the Keystone initiative among other initiatives, but do not give any indication of how these are operating in practice. Surprisingly, given the abundance of ideas and initiatives in the literature, aiming at balancing NGOs’ accountability between donors and beneficiaries, the empirical studies category in the table above is relatively sparse, with only five case studies, apart from the seven articles which all concern ActionAid’s initiative and which is described in the next chapter on ActionAid International. In the remainder of this section, I describe the case studies in the empirical category of literature.

The five non-ActionAid case studies in this category are examples of instances in which NGOs have instituted some participatory practices and in which the authors view that some accountability to intended beneficiaries has been realised, although at times this was not due to the deliberate efforts of the NGO. The studies are explicit on the numerous challenges, in practice, to attempts of NGOs to be accountable to intended beneficiaries and, in general, the studies do not present a very positive picture of how accountability is being practiced.

Two of the studies review the practices of multiple NGOs. In the first of these, Kilby (2006) researched 15 NGOs in India undertaking projects around empowerment. He found that the organisations which had the strongest formal accountability mechanisms toward community members were also those which delivered the stronger empowerment outcomes. Interestingly, only 3 of the 15 organisations had accountability mechanisms that Kilby classified as ‘formal’ and there was by no means a consensus that more accountability would be better for the NGOs:

the dominant view among the NGOs was that a large shift in accountability toward the constituency would weaken their control over programs, creating tensions, and divert the NGO away from their broader constituency and public benefit role, in order to serve a narrower membership base. (p. 960)

In the second example, a group of authors, Agyemang et al. (2009), also point to complexities in operationalising downward accountability. Their study comprises interviews with a range of international and local NGOs in Ghana at headquarters and field level, and with intended beneficiaries on the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms being used. While participatory meetings were generally held with intended beneficiaries at the start and end of projects, often a requirement of donor funds:

there was a perception that many beneficiaries consider themselves to be in a very weak negotiating position owing to a fear of losing the benefits from NGO aid projects. This fear is acute because of the poverty and resultant vulnerability of beneficiaries. . . . Many field officers explained that, as a result of this, beneficiaries do not often criticise NGOs or the delivery of aid projects. (p. 30)

This example recalls authors' findings above on power imbalances between NGOs and beneficiaries. These lead to a lack of 'exit' possibilities for poor communities, and also difficulties of 'voice' to fully engage with accountability mechanisms (Brett, 1993; Leat, 1990; Paul, 1991). Agyemang et al. therefore conclude that NGOs are still largely setting the agenda.

Similarly, in Jacobs and Wilford's (2010) paper describing a pilot system to manage downward accountability within some country programmes of the organisation Concern Worldwide, it emerged that existing participatory approaches were often more about informing intended beneficiaries of plans, rather than consulting them in any meaningful way (p. 805). The authors also point to issues around the quality of NGO management at local level and the attitudes of field staff which can influence NGOs' downward accountability (p. 809).

In the two other case studies in this category, Johnson (2001) in Thailand and Walker, Jones, Roberts and Frohling (2007) in Mexico, the accountability to intended beneficiaries achieved was not due to the direct efforts of the NGO, but rather due to local people exploiting the 'participation' language of the NGO to express their demands. I return to these case studies in the conclusion chapter.

The other case studies in the empirical category all related to ActionAid's ALPS and I discuss these in detail in the chapter on ActionAid International. In the next section, I highlight the gap in the literature around studies of practice.

3.10 Literature Gap: Lack of Empirical Studies of Practice

As evidenced by the previous section, the second major gap in the literature that has influenced my study is the shortage of studies of accountability initiatives in practice. Given that discussions have taken place since the mid-1990s on improving NGO accountability, and given that a myriad of accountability mechanisms have been established in the sector since then, it is noteworthy that there are so few case studies of how initiatives have been successfully or even unsuccessfully tried. While there is no shortage of literature expounding on what should happen in order for NGOs to be both downwardly and upwardly accountable, there is little literature on what actually does

happen when accountability mechanisms are tried in specific social and cultural contexts.

This dearth of empirical studies is noted by various authors. For instance, O'Dwyer & Unerman (2007, p. 447) observe, in a study on accountability within the Irish NGO sector, that:

Despite increasing attention being paid to the issue of accountability within practice in the non government organisation (NGO) sector generally (Unerman and O'Dwyer, 2006a), very few in-depth empirically driven academic examinations of its manifestation in specific NGO contexts have transpired (but see: Dixon et al., 2006; Goddard and Assad, 2006).

Similarly, McGee and Gaventa (2010, p. 19), in a study on the effectiveness and impact of transparency and accountability initiatives in the development sector, found “a marked lack of written-up NGO accountability initiatives to analyse”.

In sum, the literature has few empirical studies of NGO accountability initiatives and, as can be seen, the studies that do exist are quite limited in scope. Having discussed my second sub-question, I move to the final section of this chapter which discusses my third sub-question on the disjuncture between aims and practices.

3.11 To What Extent and Why Is There Disjuncture Between Aims and Practices?

In this section, I discuss my third sub-question: to what extent and why is there a disjuncture between stated aims and practices of NGO accountability to beneficiaries? As noted earlier, during the course of my study and through utilising an actor-oriented approach and a combination of ethnographic and sociological methods, disjuncture became the central phenomenon of interest in my study, even more so than accountability.

I find two levels of disjuncture in my study. The first level of disjuncture between aims and practices can be explained by the various operational and structural obstacles to NGO accountability, such as donor pressures, and power dynamics between NGOs and beneficiaries, which I expand on in later chapters. However, I also find that there is a second level of disjuncture which is both inevitable and required in the increasingly managerial context for NGOs, and which relates to the irreconcilability of the needs of NGOs' different stakeholders.

To explore my sub-question on disjuncture, I first look at some examples of disjuncture, before positing why disjuncture persists in the development sector. Key to this discussion is the concept of myth, to which I provide some background. Given the shortage of examples of practice of NGO accountability to beneficiaries, as noted above, this section also draws upon examples of disjuncture from NGOs' other accountabilities and some examples of disjuncture more broadly in the aid sector. I conclude this section with a conceptual framework to explain the second level of disjuncture, which I revisit with my data in the discussion chapter.

The notion of a disjuncture between what NGOs portray and what they actually do with respect to accountability is a strong theme in the literature. Wallace, Bornstein and Chapman (2007) conduct case studies of UK-funded NGOs in Uganda and South Africa which are using a results-based management framework. The authors take the example of the logical framework (logframe), supposedly a key accountability tool to be used throughout the lifecycle of a programme. The authors find that, while NGOs make enormous efforts to craft the logframe to the format accepted by the donor, the tool is only being used at the planning and proposal stage: "All said the tools do not work once implementation starts. There were no exceptions; this is a really striking finding" (p. 165). Similarly Roberts, Jones and Frohling (2005, p. 1851) study the impact of accountability mechanisms of a "distinctly northern type" on NGOs in Oaxaca, Mexico. They find that NGOs in Oaxaca resisted burdensome demands by developing certain practices, such as having one set of financial books for donors and another which reflected how money was actually used. Finally, in a case study from Tanzania, Goddard and Assad (2006) discover that NGOs are paying three-times the normal rate to hire international audit firms mainly to enhance their image with donors, with no history of actually implementing any recommendations which might ensue from these audits. These examples recall Hilhorst's actor-oriented case study in the Philippines mentioned above and the divide she saw between what actually happened within the NGO and what was reported in 'accounts'.

Much of the disjuncture in these case studies is attributed to an increasingly managerialist aid sector. So what is 'managerialism' and how does it create the conditions for disjuncture between aims and practices? Managerialism is said to be

characterised by “a relatively uncritical acceptance of corporate management in all administrative contexts” (2011, p. 9). Managerialism is closely related to an approach known as ‘New Public Management²⁴’ (NPM) which has spread from the corporate sector to the public and non-profit sector since the 1980s (Goetz & Jenkins, 2002, p. 80)²⁵. The two are neo-liberal approaches to management which fall within the Weberian theoretical perspective on accountability, and the principal-agent model discussed above. The contemporary manifestation of managerialism and NPM in the development sector is results-based management, which promotes the use of tools such as the logframe, critiqued by authors such as Wallace et al., and which has become dominant in the development sector in recent years (Kilby, 2004b; Shutt, 2009; Wallace, et al., 2007).

I now discuss why managerialism creates the conditions for disjuncture between aims and practices. A key characteristic of managerialist approaches, criticised by authors in the development sector, is the tendency of these approaches to overstate the potential of technical solutions in development programming and hence understate significant dynamics in local contexts, particularly power dynamics. Within this “technical-rational” realm, it is assumed that implementers of development work have control over what is needed to produce the ‘results’, which are therefore predictable (Harding, 2013, p. 131). Chris Mowles (2013, pp. 51-52), in an article criticising managerial methods of planning and evaluation, notes that:

International development is no exception for the use of abstract and logical methods for regulating social life. . . There has been a proliferation of abstract tools and techniques of management, based on assumptions of predictability and control.

²⁴ A primary objective of NPM when it was introduced was to give responsibilities to managers to achieve clear results, with less concern for the process by which this was done, and with a view to reducing bureaucracy and increasing efficiency (Behn, 2001). The rationale behind New Public Management was twofold. Firstly, the public sector was seen to be inefficient in comparison with the corporate sector because it was mired in red tape and excessive bureaucracy, hindering the performance of tasks. Secondly, the results that public servants were supposed to achieve were not clear, leading to poor performance management and hence sometimes corruption (Behn, 2001).

²⁵ Power (1997, pp. 43-44), in his book on the ‘explosion’ of audit in the UK since the late 1980s, cites three reasons why NPM became prominent in roughly the same period: the need for fiscal restraint, a commitment to neo-liberal ideologies, and the success of a discourse around the need for accountability to taxpayers for the use of public funds.

Mowles (p. 47) draws on complexity science²⁶ in his article to demonstrate that, contrary to the assumptions of managerial approaches, the future is “radically unpredictable” and that “without developing ways of engaging with the contextual, the particular, and the dynamic nature of social development, we risk covering over important relationships of power.”

Other authors in the development sector also provide examples of why the managerialist ‘technical-rational’ approach to social development is unlikely to reflect actual practice. For example, Ebrahim (2003b, pp. 16-17), in a book on organisational learning within development NGOs, brings in Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’, which he explains as “an orientation or disposition that guides our behaviour, and which is a product of structure and specific historical circumstance”. Ebrahim uses the example of the relationship between professor and student which he describes as:

governed by certain norms of behavior. The student is predisposed to treat the professor with deference, while the professor is expected to provide guidance to the student . . . The notion of habitus is also extendable to social class, in the form of a class habitus, which informs the behaviour of entire social groups.

While acknowledging that Bourdieu’s theory provides for changes in these relationships over time, Ebrahim uses the concept of habitus to propose that change in society (or indeed organisations) is likely to be slow and incremental and thus not very amenable to managerial prediction or control (p. 20).

A second perspective which belies an exclusive focus on the ‘technical-rational’ realm is the literature on emotions within organisations. Within the broader organisational literature, there has been an upsurge in interest in the topic of emotions in organisations since about 2000 (Ashkanasy, 2003, pp. 9-10). Flam and King (2005, p. 1) in the introduction to their book on emotions and social movements note that:

²⁶ In a paper on the potential utility of complexity science to the development and humanitarian sectors, Ramalingam and Jones (2008, p. 1) define complexity science as “a set of concepts, principles, propositions and ideas that have emerged and clustered together over the course of the 20th century. The concepts of complexity science have presented a way of better describing and understanding dynamics and processes of change found in a range of physical and biological phenomena.”

Even the most ardent enemies of emotions, such as the rational choice proponents, have come to recognize that they are unable to explain the many anomalies which they encounter in their research without recourse to emotions.

Ashkanasy (p. 19), in an article presenting a framework for emotions in organisations discusses “affective events theory” which is:

predicated on the proposition that employees’ behavior and performance at work are not so much determined by attitudes and personality, but rather by moment-by-moment variations in the way they feel at work see Fisher, 2000b; Weiss, Nicholas & Daus, 1999). Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) argue in particular that events and conditions in the workplace environment constitute “affective events,” and that it is these events that ultimately determine moods and emotions. Such emotions and moods can lead to the formation of more long-term attitudes, reflected in low job satisfaction and low affective commitment, or even a propensity to leave the organization.

This lens of emotions in organisational life is consistent with the actor-oriented perspective which highlights the need to consider the constantly evolving perspectives of actors such as the field staff and the intended beneficiaries of development interventions.

These perspectives on the impact of emotions, power dynamics and other issues on development practice belie the linear and ‘technical-rational’ assumptions of managerialism. Yet, as the examples above demonstrated, practitioners are continuing to ‘play along’ with managerialist requirements, while in reality, these may be irrelevant to their practices. Thus, authors such as Wallace et al. and Robert et al. make a strong case that managerialism creates a conducive environment for disjuncture.

Mosse (2003, p. 1), in his case study in India, goes further by labelling the disjuncture between policy and practice as inevitable, while stressing the high priority development practitioners place on maintaining the illusion of coherence between the two. Mosse challenges the assumption:

that development practice is driven by policy, suggesting that the things that make for ‘good policy’— policy which legitimises and mobilises political support — in reality make it rather unimplementable within its chosen institutions and regions. But although development practice is driven by a multi-layered complex of relationships and the culture of organisations rather than policy, development actors work hardest of all to maintain coherent representations of their actions as instances of authorised policy, because it is always in their interest to do so.

The key issue here is not practice, but representation: “For policy to succeed it is necessary, it seems, that it is *not* implemented, but that enough people, and people with enough power, are willing to believe that it is” (Mosse, 2005, p. 232, emphasis in original).

Similarly, Lewis and Mosse (p. 5) note that “the disjuncture arising from the autonomy of practice from rationalizing policy is not an unfortunate “gap to be bridged” between intention and action, but is instead necessary and must therefore be actively maintained and reproduced.” The authors find that an increasingly professional and managerialist development sector has created the conditions for greater disjuncture between policy and practice in that it attempts to portray development programmes as based on “bureaucratic rationality” and involving the execution of “locationless [policy] logic”²⁷ which is far from the complexity and messiness of actual practices, and thus these practices become “necessarily hidden” (pp. 3-5). In my research, I found that myth played a key role in sustaining the representations necessary for the maintenance of disjuncture. As noted earlier, I define myth as an ‘idealised’ or exaggerated conception. I now provide some background on the concept of myth.

The concept of myth has a long and complex history, with considerable variation in understandings across disciplines and time periods. Segal (2004) summarises different approaches to myth from philosophy, literature, psychology, anthropology, science, sociology and religion. He notes that nineteenth century theorists focussed on the explanatory function of myth and viewed myth as becoming irrelevant vis-à-vis the ‘truth’ of the emerging modern science. However, twentieth century theorists from across disciplines have embraced the concept of myth, albeit in very different ways. For instance, for structural anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, myth was the equivalent of modern science for ‘primitive’ people, focussing on observable rather than abstract phenomena (Akoun, Mourin, & Mousseau, 1972, p. 39). Physician Freud famously saw myths, such

²⁷ The term “locationless [policy] logic” is a citation of the work of Mitchell (2002). The full quotation is as follows: “In particular, we need to show how actors in development work to secure and support representations that hide the actual contingencies and networks of practice so as to ‘allow reason to rule, and allow history to be arranged as the unfolding of a locationless [policy] logic’ to which expertise is attached (Mitchell, 2002, pp. 15, 36)” (Lewis & Mosse, 2006a, p. 4).

as the myth of Oedipus, as dreams, which resonated with readers at different levels of their consciousness (Freud, 1953 [1913]; Segal, 2004).

The work of Malinowski and Sorel on myth has particular resonance with my study. Anthropologist Malinowski moved on from nineteenth century concerns with myths as explaining physical phenomena to explore the role of myth in terms of legitimising social phenomena (Monro, 1950). The purpose of myth for Malinowski was to promote acceptance of aspects of the social world: “The myth comes into play when rite, ceremony, or a social or moral rule demands justification, warrant of antiquity, reality and sanctity” (1954 [1925], p. 107). Segal (2004, p. 128), contrasts the work of Malinowski with philosopher Sorel. Sorel viewed myth as an instrument of revolution in society, whereas Malinowski saw myth as helping to maintain social norms. For Sorel (1941), myth was a guiding ideology which inspired rebellion in that it convinced fighters of the heroism of their cause. Sorel noted that “myths are not descriptions of things, but expressions of a determination to act . . . A myth cannot be refuted since it is, at bottom, identical with the convictions of a group” (1941, p. 33). Sorel’s view of myth has been cited in some recent publications in the development sector. For instance, Eyben (2006) cites Sorel in her description of ALPS as a ‘myth’, in which she stresses the power of the myth for motivational purposes. I return to Eyben’s work in the chapter on ActionAid International.

For my study, the work of Malinowski and Sorel on myth is important for two reasons. Firstly, they both speak of the function of myth as providing legitimacy. Malinowski speaks of myth as promoting the legitimacy of certain rules or practices to the wider society, whereas Sorel raises the notion of myth as a motivational tool for individuals involved in a certain cause, which I term ‘internal legitimacy’. Legitimacy is a key aspect of the conceptual framework on disjuncture which I outline below. I use Suchman’s (1995, p. 574) definition of legitimacy: “Legitimacy is a generalized perception that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions.” This definition echoes many others in the literature, particularly in its focus of legitimacy as a shifting concept that depends on perceptions of particular stakeholders or groups of stakeholders at particular times (cf. L. David Brown & Jagadananda, 2007, p. 7).

The second reason why the views of Malinowski and Sorel on myth are pertinent to my study is that neither author is concerned with whether or not myths are ‘true’. As Segal notes, while making this observation, “what matters is that myth works when believed to be true” (2004, p. 129). Importantly, Segal also raises the notion that followers of myths may not completely believe them all of the time. Citing the work of child psychiatrist Winnicott (1982 [1971]) on adult versions of children’s play, Segal uses the example of the myths which enable the devotion of fans to their favourite film stars, “their devotion is not mindless. It is done knowingly. It is, following Winnicott, make-believe, not credulity. It requires the refusal to let contrary evidence get in the way” (2004, p. 135).

Drawing on the work of these theorists, I contend that practitioners in the aid sector ‘refuse to let contrary evidence get in the way’ as they, consciously or sub-consciously, create myths to sustain the disjuncture between policy and practice. Thus, in order to lay the groundwork for responding to my research sub-question on disjuncture in the discussion chapter, I conclude this chapter by proposing a framework from the literature to explain the second level of disjuncture. I then return to this framework in the discussion chapter in light of my data.

3.11.1 Conceptual Framework to Understand Disjuncture

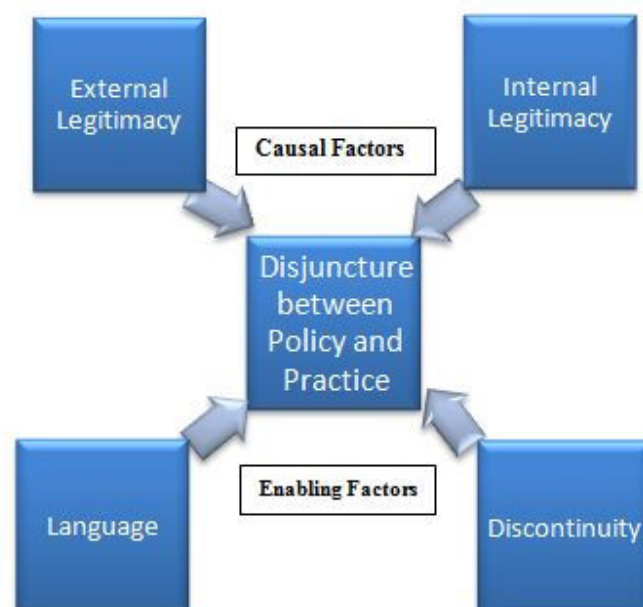
My conceptual framework aims to respond to the following two questions about the second level of disjuncture:

- why does this disjuncture persist within development NGOs?
- what factors enable disjuncture to function?

Figure 3.3 sets out this framework which is further detailed in the sections below.

Firstly, the framework proposes ‘causal factors’ of the persistence of this disjuncture, and its corresponding myths: benefits to the organisation in terms of legitimacy to external and internal stakeholders respectively. Secondly, the framework proposes ‘enabling factors’ which are mechanisms through which disjuncture functions. These are the use of language, and the characteristic of discontinuity in development NGOs. Importantly, this framework can apply to various aspects of NGO life, not simply to aspects related to accountability.

Figure 3.3: Causal and Enabling Factors of Disjuncture



3.11.2 Why Does Disjuncture Persist?

In terms of why NGOs continue to go along with donor approaches, even in cases such as those mentioned above in Mexico, South Africa, Uganda and Tanzania when the requirements are irrelevant to actual practice, I contend that there are two main needs of NGOs fulfilled by acceptance of this disjuncture:

- external legitimacy
- internal legitimacy.

External Legitimacy: An important part of the reason why the disjuncture persists between what is reported and what is done in development NGOs would seem to be the need to be legitimate to external stakeholders, particularly donors, in the context of NGOs' resource dependence. This includes satisfying the managerial requirements of

donors in the short-term, and also enhancing and safeguarding the NGOs' reputations in the long term.

In the aforementioned study of Tanzanian NGOs by Goddard and Assad (2006, p. 394), the authors found that the accounting practices adopted by the organisation, which they associated with "creeping managerialism" mainly served the needs of external stakeholders:

the primary purpose of accounting was its symbolic use in navigating legitimacy. This transcended any technical or even informational contributions of accounting reports. It also transcended the use of internal accounting information within the organisations for decision-making. (p. 377)

The enhanced accounting system described by Goddard and Assad, including the international audits and use of consultants, appears to align with the interpretation of myth²⁸ in Meyer and Rowan's (1977) widely cited article on the impact of myth on institutional structures. Meyer and Rowan note that organisations can bring rules or "societally legitimated rationalized elements" into their structures which function as myths (p. 352). Importantly, Meyer and Rowan note that the changes made to organisations' structures based on these myths do not necessarily reflect the actual demands of work activities (p. 341). However, these myths can help the organisation to "gain legitimacy, resources, stability and enhanced survival prospects" (p. 353) as the organisation demonstrates that it is acting on, "collectively valued purposes in a proper and adequate manner . . . The organization becomes, in a word, legitimate, and it uses its legitimacy to strengthen its support and secure its survival" (p. 349).

As Meyer and Rowan are writing about private sector organisations, the external stakeholders to whom they want to increase legitimacy include customers and government. However, in development NGO literature, the focus is primarily on donors. Resource dependency theory is useful to better understand the need for NGOs to enhance their legitimacy with donors, even when it means going along with practices which serve no inherent utility. Developed from mainstream organisational theory, resource dependency theory was elaborated by Pfeffer and Salancik in 1978. Gugerty

²⁸ Meyer and Rowan do not define the concept of myth.

and Prakash (2010, p. 7), in their book on self-regulation mechanisms for accountability, provide a useful synopsis of the theory:

Resource dependency approaches highlight the social control that resource-holding organizations can exert over others (Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978). When the resource is critical to the consuming organization and few substitutes are available, the resource-holding organization may be able to exert strong influence over the resource-consuming organization. Consequently, the consuming organization will be willing to spend a great deal of time and effort complying with the demands of the resource provider.

An African proverb, quoted by Kramer (1981, p. 158) graphically illustrates this point, “If you have your hand in another man’s pocket, you must move when he moves”. It is clear from the literature that many development NGOs are dependent on major bodies such as governments for their funding in an increasingly competitive fundraising environment in which NGOs fight for survival (Baur & Schmitz, 2012; Harris, 2011).

Therefore playing along with donor²s’ managerial requirements, no matter how seemingly irrelevant to their day-to-day work, is a rational decision.

There is much evidence in the literature that it is not only the fight for survival that ties NGOs into funding relationships, they also fight for growth (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Wallace & Porter, 2013). In an article on the ‘insulation’ of development workers which I return to below, Scott-Smith (2013, p. 108) reflects on his experience as an NGO practitioner in Malawi: “We were always willing to bend our aims and objectives to the demands of donors, because the mantra was growth: more income, more impact, more results.”

In sum, resource dependence and the desire for external legitimacy provide one possible explanation for why NGOs ‘play along’ with managerialist practices which do not appear to work in terms of managing programmes, and hence feed into myths and the ongoing disjuncture between policy and practice. A second possible causal factor is that of legitimacy to internal stakeholders.

Internal Legitimacy: The development NGO literature has a tendency to attribute the causality for many NGO decisions to donors, particularly in the context of increasing managerialism. However, in this section, I argue that legitimacy in the eyes of its internal stakeholders is also part of the explanation for why NGOs sustain disjuncture by

implementing managerialist requirements, even in cases when these requirements clearly do not work in the way that they are intended to work.

An example of the benefits of the disjuncture between policy and practice to internal stakeholders can be found in an account given by Hilhorst of her ethnographic research in the Philippines. Hilhorst (2003) describes a model for creating self-reliant ‘people’s organisations’ that the NGOs in her case study use. This is a ‘step-by-step’ model that “leans on notions of modern organizations and the linearity of planned intervention” (p. 103). Hilhorst (pp. 121-122) comes across a paradox:

The contrast between the intimate knowledge of actual village organizing processes and the idealistic or normative way in which NGO actors talked about the step-by-step organizing model amazed me. At some point I had the idea that the model only had a formal life. In meetings of the NGOs it was used to report on organizing processes, even though all the cases were always presented as exceptions. I wondered if there was anyone who seriously believed in the possibility that the model could be achieved in practice. I slowly came to realize, however, that most people in the NGO did.

The fact that the model was being promoted internally within the NGO and not simply in reports to donors demonstrates that the NGO workers were gaining some kind of benefits from believing in the linear model, despite their own experience that it never functioned as it was supposed to function. In other words, the model clearly ‘worked’ for the NGO practitioners in some way. Hilhorst (pp. 122-123) concluded that the model ‘worked’ in that it provided an anchor and a guideline to assist with decision-making, it helped to establish routines, it provided a language for making sense of and communicating the work, and, above all, it played a symbolic role in letting NGO workers believe that they were making progress towards an end goal.

As in Hilhorst’s study, Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 389) note that the purpose of the myths developed by organisations is not restricted to convincing external audiences: “incorporating externally legitimated formal structures increases the commitment of internal participants and external constituents”. Similarly, Goddard and Assad (2006) found that the purpose of ‘navigating legitimacy’ in the case study was not merely to produce an image for outsiders, while this was probably the most important function. They note that there was also a “deeper moral base” where controls such as accounting

mechanisms are internalised within the organisation, despite their lack of utility in a functional sense (p. 387).

These examples raise the question of what it means for development interventions to ‘work’ or not work, to succeed or fail. As noted in the introduction, Mosse (2003, 2005), in his ethnography in India, finds that ‘success’ and ‘failure’ are related to the representation of the concept of the project rather than its actual operations on the ground:

Ultimately what secured rising success for this project (in 1994-6) was neither a series of trivial participatory events ([participatory rural appraisals] etc.), nor even the delivery of quality physical programmes. Rather, success depended upon the donor-supported (and consultant elaborated) theory that linked participation/farmer control on the one hand, and better, more effective/sustainable programmes on the other. (2003, p. 18)

Correspondingly, Mosse found that, at a later stage, the project became “vulnerable to ‘failure’ not because of its practice, but because a new (ODA) policy environment, made it harder for the project to articulate with the pre-occupations and ambitions of its donor supporters and interlocutors” (p. 21).

Lewis cites Mosse’s case study in an article exploring the concept of ‘organisational failure’ in which he presents various ways in which organisation may ‘succeed’ even when it would appear that they are failing in terms of what they ostensibly set out to achieve. Citing an article by Seibel (1999) which looks at why resources can be continuously mobilised by organisations appearing to ‘fail’, Lewis (Forthcoming) notes that these ‘successful failures’ include when NGOs “maintain the illusion that something is being done about an issue, they placate a potentially disruptive political constituency, or they serve a particular ideological purpose”.

Scott-Smith (2013) provides one ‘particular ideological purpose’ for the presence of disjuncture in the work of development NGOs. In asking the question of why development workers ‘do managerialism anyway’, despite knowing that is not suitable for their work, he turns to the concept of ideology of the Slovene philosopher Slavoj Žižek (1989, 1991). Žižek rejects the concept of ideology as ‘false consciousness’ in the classic Marxist sense, defined as “they do not know it but they are doing it” (Žižek,

1989, p. 28). Rather, as Scott-Smith (p. 110) notes, “According to Zizek, ideology functions today. . . through a partly acknowledged, self-limiting action, which can be summarized in the phrase ‘they know it but are doing it anyway’”. Scott-Smith introduces Zizek’s concept of a ‘sublime object of ideology’ (Scott-Smith, p. 111; Zizek, 1989) as “the end point of ideology which gives meaning to our actions and structure to our lives.” In this case, development is this sublime object that ‘captures’ and ‘blinkers’ development workers and creates a division between how they think and talk, and how they act (Scott-Smith, p. 112). Therefore, he says of development workers:

Even though they know that logframes are crude devices for capturing reality, that their reports overemphasize success, and their targets priorities numerical growth over subtlety and understanding, they do not change the way they act? Why? Because the whole arrangement can be justified in the name of development. (p. 111)

Thus, the end-goal of development obscures what would appear to be an obvious choice to resist managerialism on the grounds that it does not reflect the realities of NGO practice.

In sum, in this section it can be seen that there are strong reasons for NGOs to accept disjuncture and ‘play along’ when policy and practice diverge, as in the context of managerialism, as this helps to increase their external and internal legitimacy, particularly with donors and with their own staff. The actor-oriented approach brings out these issues as it requires a focus on the different perspectives, motivations and strategies of the different actors affected by an intervention. Having discussed these factors that lead to the persistence of disjuncture between policy and practice in the development sector, I now discuss the mechanics through which the disjuncture operates.

3.11.3 What Enables Disjuncture to Function?

In this section, I describe two mechanisms which promote disjuncture in the aid and development sector: language, the particular way of speaking and writing within the development sector, and discontinuity, the tendency of the sector to constantly change personnel and focus.

Language: One mechanism which aids the continued disjuncture between policy and practice is the use of language in the development sector, which can often be opaque, exclusive and misleading. This kind of language creates myths necessary to sustain disjuncture. Apthorpe's (2006, p. 16) description of 'Aidland', in a scathing critique of the aid sector, is illustrative here:

the Aidland balloon has come to have a very thick skin. Among other things this allows it to contain securely a lot of very hot air that is produced by relentless use of vogue keywords - 'participation', 'partnership', 'empowerment', 'civil society', 'democracy' and the like as well as the innocuous little 'local ownership'. Pumped-up to a very high density, this opacity acts to keep ordinary words and language usages out, ordinary sense-making too.

Other authors similarly comment on the way in which language in the development sector tends to be vague and unclear, and also how this lack of clarity facilitates the continuation of the status quo. Mosse (2005, p. 230), in the aforementioned case study of a rural development project in India remarks that "Policy discourse generates mobilising metaphors ('participation', 'partnership', 'governance') whose vagueness, ambiguity and lack of conceptual precision is required to conceal ideological differences." Scott-Smith (2013, p. 107), speaking of his experience as an NGO worker in Malawi caught up in the managerialist framework, talks of the obscurity of 'development speak':

these assumptions-that everyone agrees on the basic concepts, that everyone supports the aims of the project, that our overall objectives are good-tend to disguise the contested nature of our work, and obscure how often we become separated from the way people speak, think, talk, and desire at the local level.

Similarly, Cornwall and Brock (2005), in an article on the power of development 'buzzwords' speak of the "consensus narrative" in the development sector.

The authors also point to both external and internal legitimacy benefits of such a narrative. In terms of external legitimacy, they note that: "The fine-sounding words that are used in development policies do more than provide a sense of direction: they lend the legitimacy that development actors need in order to justify their interventions" (p. 1).

Cornwall and Brock, like Eyben (2006), cite the work of Sorel on myth and the motivational properties of the myths propagated by the development buzzwords:

Myths safeguard utopias, Sorel argues. The statements of intent that constitute the policies and prescriptions of international development agencies gain the qualities of myth precisely because they are born of convictions: and they seek to call us to action, name what we can do, give us a sense of the possible, and make us into agents of the possible. (p. 16)

Thus, language is an important enabling factor for myth, and hence the persistence of disjuncture between policy and practice.

During my field work, I coined the term ‘brochure talk’ to describe the way in which practitioners in the aid sector give public relations-type descriptions of their work, as might be read in a brochure. The concept emerged from interviews with ActionAid staff and former staff members. At times, the ‘brochure talker’ may be completely sincere. Indeed, their presentation may be entirely accurate. At other times, and more frequently in my experience during my research, the talker is aware, at some level, that what they say does not reflect a reality which they have observed. As with my definition of myth and drawing on Segal’s (2004, p. 135) point about myth as “make believe, not credibility”, the important feature of brochure talk is not whether it is ‘true’ or ‘false’, but that it is designed to present a positive image, regardless of what the realities might be. Brochure talk therefore supports the continuation of a disjuncture between policy and practice. It is usually replete with jargon and it is ‘rhetorical’ in that it is designed to persuade the audience or reader of the desired profile²⁹. An example of this kind of use of language is provided by Watkins, Swidler and Hannan (2012, p. 302), in an article on the sociology of development NGOs. The authors quote from a case study of NGOs and farmers associations in Guinea-Bissau by Temudo (2005) which clearly illustrates rhetoric or brochure talk targeted to a particular external audience. Some of the farmers, “usually among the most charismatic and eloquent” were chosen:

by their capacity to accept and reproduce the development “cargo-cult” rhetoric of the NGOs toward foreigners, be they evaluators, researchers or

²⁹ Aristotle defined rhetoric as “an ability, in each [particular] case, to see the available means of persuasion” (Aristotle, 1991, p. 1355b; Sellars, 2006, p. 59). While often seen in modern journalism as inherently misleading, in academic writing this is not necessarily the case, the common feature of rhetoric being that it is intended to influence the audience (Kennedy, 2001).

simple visitors: “we are poor but we work hard” (anós i pobre, má nô pega tesó). The other farmers called them the project “bards” (djidios) . . . They also appeared to be the ones most willing to mouth donor agendas in order to gain access to the material and symbolic resources that donors provided. (p. 261)

Therefore, in various ways, by being vague, obscure or rhetorical, language in the development sector allows myth and disjuncture to continue. I now discuss the second enabling factor: discontinuity.

Discontinuity: In this section, I discuss how the constant changes in approach and staffing within the development sector allow disjuncture to continue between managerial policy and actual practices. Lewis (2013, pp. 116-117), speaks of the “relentless emphasis on novelty and change” that characterises managerialism and also helps to maintain it, as expatriate staff of NGOs, often comprising the NGO management, are on short-term contracts and are less likely to learn enough in this time to deeply question the status quo. Furthermore:

The bureaucratic logic within many agencies also tends to create incentives for a new appointee to a particular position to show their effectiveness by deliberately downplaying the ideas and work of their immediate predecessor, and beginning new work as a way to demonstrate their own particular ‘added value’. The result may be the unnecessary development of new initiatives, terms, and approaches in a process that further contributes to the suppression of past experiences and restricted learning. (p. 117)

This contributes to what Lewis (p. 116), citing postmodern theorist Frederick Jameson (1998), calls the ‘perpetual present of policy’, whereby history and its lessons are ignored. This echoes Sogge’s (1996, p. 16) discussion of the “continuity of discontinuity” problem within the development NGO sector. Sogge asks why funding of NGOs is not more linked to outcomes:

One reason is that agencies can just keep moving. Staff can often ‘escape into the future’ through a succession of short-gestation, photogenic projects and ‘partners’. . . Moreover, aid fashions change, new staff arrive, a new crisis spot grips world attention . . . This ‘continuity of discontinuity’ afflicts not only private aid agencies of course, but it seems especially marked among them. (pp. 16-17)

Thus, the preponderance of fads and trends in the development sector, the practice of having short-term staff in decision-making positions, combined with the opaque nature of language used, make it less likely that development workers will question the managerialism within which they are embroiled, despite the fact that the techniques of managerialism are not necessarily useful or relevant to their work. Unclear, rhetorical language and the constant evolution of staff and ideas work together against clear discussions of issues, restrict learning, and hence facilitate acceptance of managerialist practices.

Having discussed both the causes and the enabling factors of the second level of disjuncture between policy and practice in the aid sector, I move to the chapter's conclusion.

3.12 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed literature on accountability within the social science literature, the third sector literature and, in the greatest detail, the development NGO accountability literature. I have also explored theories and concepts within the organisational literature and aid sector literature more broadly to draw out some of the themes which are relevant to my study of NGO accountability. As well as positioning my study and laying the conceptual and theoretical foundation, this chapter explored my three research sub-questions on NGO accountability aims, practices and the disjuncture between the two. The exploration of these questions highlighted the two key gaps which contributed to the derivation of my research question, and suggested a conceptual framework for my sub-question on disjuncture.

The literature on accountability within development NGOs has clearly developed considerably over the past twenty-five years. There is a close engagement with practice and, in particular, there has been much exposition of the key problems with balancing accountabilities, such as reconciling multiple stakeholders, particularly donors and intended beneficiaries and particularly in the context of the current dominance of managerialist practices. Some interesting discursive work has emerged in the literature, especially from academics outside the development studies field. However, two key gaps remain.

Firstly, the exploration of my research sub-question on NGO aims demonstrated that, despite what has been noted above about the absence of working theoretical models for NGO accountability, and despite all the reported difficulties caused by managerialism within the sector, the NGO accountability literature is weak on theory, and particularly on considering structural barriers which may make NGO accountability unfeasible. Analysis of the literature with respect to my second research sub-question on the practice of NGO accountability also found a gap in the literature - despite many ideas and mechanisms established over the past 15 years to improve NGO accountability, very few case studies exist of such ideas being practiced. My case study of practice is thus informed by relevant theories and concepts, particularly those identified in this chapter which suggest structural barriers to NGO accountability, such as power differentials between donors and NGOs, and NGOs and intended beneficiaries.

These literature gaps suggest a broader point, which is that, in its lack of balance between different categories of literature, the NGO accountability literature may be helping to reproduce the weaknesses of the sector. The preponderance of desk-based studies on accountability, which neither engage significantly with theory nor with empirical practice, suggest that the NGO sector may be closing itself off to outside, or even inside critique.

My third sub-question relates to the disjuncture between aims and practices, which the literature suggests to be both significant and increasing in the context of managerialism. As noted, disjuncture ultimately overcame accountability as the central phenomenon of my study. Critically, my study brings out two levels of disjuncture. The first level of disjuncture relates to shortcomings in NGO accountability practice as a result of various obstacles, which are outlined in the data chapters and the discussion chapter. However, the second level of disjuncture relates to an inevitable gap between policy and practice, in the context of managerialism in the aid sector. I proposed a framework from the literature to explain the persistence of this second level of disjuncture. In this framework, external and internal legitimacy benefits cause disjuncture to persist, and disjuncture is facilitated by the use of language in the development sector, and by the tendency towards discontinuity.

In the next two data chapters, I explore ActionAid's aims and practices, and indeed find significant disjuncture between the two. Specifically, the next chapter discusses my data on ALPS in ActionAid International, the first embedded study.

4. ALPS at International Level: Best Practice?

4.1 Introduction

This chapter begins to get to the ‘heart of the matter’: what I discovered in my research about ActionAid’s downward accountability practice. The previous three chapters have established the basis for my dissertation. I have discussed why the topic is important, how I went about my research framed by the actor-oriented approach, what the gaps in the literature are and what the literature says on my research sub-questions. The literature gaps around both the theory and practice of NGO accountability led to my research plan for an in-depth case study of the NGO accountability initiative that appears to be the ‘best case’ in the development sector: ActionAid’s Accountability Learning and Planning System (ALPS). In order to capture both the macro and micro dimensions of this accountability practice, my case study looks at two levels: ALPS at international level and ALPS in ActionAid Uganda.

This chapter presents data and preliminary findings on the first level: ActionAid’s implementation of ALPS at the international level. As noted earlier, while ALPS has other related purposes around learning, planning and reporting, my focus is on the role of ALPS in promoting downward accountability to ActionAid’s intended beneficiaries. This data chapter is based on 22 in-depth interviews, on approximately 1130 documents and on a small amount of participant observation. Interviewees were staff, former staff, board members and advisors of ActionAid International (see list in Appendix 1). Interviews took place in multiple locations between 2008 and early 2012. Interviews, documents and observation provided contemporary, as well as historical information and insight on ALPS. While my interviews were mostly focussed on the evolution and practice of ALPS and downward accountability, the large amount of documents that I read, such as strategic plans, evaluations, annual reports, were particularly useful for placing ALPS and downward accountability in the context of broader organisational developments.

This first of my data chapters serves four main functions for my dissertation. Firstly, it provides a historical background to ALPS, reconstructing the history of ALPS and discussions on accountability in ActionAid since the late 1990s, with a view to using the past to better understand the present. This also provides useful context for the next chapter on ActionAid Uganda. Secondly, this chapter highlights the emergence and persistence of a ‘myth of ALPS’, which focuses particularly on the success of ALPS in promoting downward accountability. I provide examples in which stakeholders, both internal and external to ActionAid, have fed into a mythical conception of ALPS at international level with the use of brochure talk. Thirdly, this chapter compares the various realities of ALPS implementation at the international level, as viewed by different actors, against the stated intentions of ActionAid. Using the actor-oriented approach, the chapter challenges assumptions that pre-designed plans function as they appear on paper. Moving to my final sub-question, at this international level of ALPS I find a significant disjuncture in almost all aspects of downward accountability between the intentions of ActionAid and the realities, as perceived by my interviewees and the authors of documents reviewed. Fourthly, this chapter begins to ask why this disjuncture exists and proposes a framework of operational obstacles hindering downward accountability, which begins to respond to my main research question.

4.2 Structure of This Chapter

This chapter has three main parts. The first provides background information on ALPS. I start by defining some of the terminology to be used in the chapter. I then provide a historical background to how ALPS came into being. I discuss ALPS in detail and what both outsiders and insiders have been saying publicly about the system over the years, which I argue has led to a mythical conception of ALPS. I conclude the background segment of the chapter by summarising the internal discussions on accountability that were taking place when I began my case study in 2009³⁰.

The second part of the chapter presents findings on how the aspirations of downward accountability, discussed earlier in the chapter, played out in practice. The

³⁰ While I conducted exploratory interviews in late 2008, my case study began formally in 2009.

third part of the chapter begins an analysis on why a disjuncture exists between stated intentions and practice. I posit some operational obstacles that have contributed to this disjuncture. More in-depth analysis of obstacles follows in the discussion chapter, after the case study of ActionAid Uganda in the next chapter.

4.3 A Note on Terminology

Before proceeding further, it is important to clarify the terminology to be used in these data chapters. What is meant by ActionAid's 'stated intentions' on accountability? Even more fundamentally, what is meant by 'accountability' in ActionAid?

The literature review chapter discussed the definition of accountability and noted that there is a large degree of consensus in the academic literature around a 'narrow' definition wherein actors are only accountable to 'principals' who wield authority over them. However, the literature review also noted that many authors in the development sector, often practitioners, use a broader definition that calls for NGOs to be accountable to anyone impacted by their work. These authors tend to be invested in improving accountability to intended beneficiaries. ActionAid has adopted this broad definition, as can be seen by the following statement introducing the revised version of ALPS in 2006:

In ActionAid we have multiple accountabilities – to the poor and excluded people and groups with whom we work, supporters, volunteers, partners, donors, governments, staff and trustees. ALPS emphasises accountability to all our stakeholders – but most of all to poor and excluded people, especially women and girls. (ActionAid, p. 4)

There was no distinct organisational definition of accountability within ActionAid during the time of my study. However, it is possible to extract a working definition from ALPS, as the most central published document on accountability within the organisation. ALPS provides the closest equivalent available to an official organisational definition of accountability as it sets out a standard against which accountability efforts of ActionAid should be measured. The original ALPS document mentioned two aspects in reference to accountability to poor people: "priorities and perspectives of poor people should inform the decisions we make. . . we must be transparent in sharing full information about the outcomes of meetings, plans, budgets and expenditures" (ActionAid, 2000, p. 5). These two elements of "priorities and

perspectives informing decisions” - I use the term ‘participation’ as shorthand for this - and “transparency” are echoed in the revised ALPS document from 2006. These elements thus function as the two components of the working definition of accountability within ActionAid for this dissertation, hence forming the core of what I refer to as ActionAid’s ‘stated intentions’ about accountability. In addition, more specific aims and objectives of different aspects of ActionAid’s downward accountability, taken from ALPS and other organisational documents, are mentioned in the relevant sections below and are used as standards against which to view implementation.

As noted earlier, I use the definition of a myth as “an exaggerated or idealized conception of a person or a thing” (OED, 2013c). My term ‘brochure talk’ is a way of talking or writing that I observed among NGO practitioners during my research. Brochure talk is aimed at portraying a positive image or profile, regardless of whether ‘other realities’ might be known to exist. The key terminology for this chapter thus defined, I proceed to describe the process of the evolution of ALPS.

4.4 ActionAid International: Major Shifts in the Late-1990s

Accountability became a major topic in ActionAid in the late 1990s when areas such as the organisation’s programming approach and its planning and reporting systems were seen to be deeply problematic by some of the new leadership of the organisation at the time, leading to significant organisational reforms. This section provides a background to these reforms and the major implications thereof. Unless otherwise referenced, the material below is informed by interviews conducted.

Firstly, a brief background to the organisation. ActionAid International was founded in 1972 in the UK as a child sponsorship agency, originally named Action in Distress (Ebrahim & Gordon, 2011, p. 2). ActionAid currently works in 45 countries worldwide and its budget in 2011 was €224 million (ActionAid, 2013c; Lynch-Bell, 2012, p. 2). These 45 countries are either net fund-raising countries (mostly in the

North) or net fund-spending countries (mostly in the South) where most programming takes place³¹.

Until the late 1990s, ActionAid was a community development organisation, working largely in service delivery mode in a wide range of sectors such as health, education and income generation. Its funds were raised largely from the members of the public in the UK, who ‘sponsored’ children within the communities in which ActionAid worked, in that they contributed a monthly amount in a particular child’s name. The funding modality of child sponsorship had implications for how ActionAid worked, as the organisation focussed on certain geographical areas called ‘Development Areas’ (DAs) for approximately ten years, in order that it could work with the same groups of children to fulfil the promises made to the sponsors. Local programme units in ActionAid are now referred to as Local Rights Programmes (LRPs), and this term is used throughout this dissertation as much as possible for the sake of clarity, even when referring to times when the programme units had carried the earlier name of Development Area or the variant Development Initiative.

Since the late 1990s, ActionAid has been attempting a significant transformation as an organisation, catalysed by both external and internal factors. In the external context, the 1990s saw changing roles for development NGOs from the global North. Southern NGOs became increasingly prominent and thus Northern NGOs engaged more and more in partnership and capacity building with their Southern counterparts. Changes in development thinking also meant that NGOs began to put more emphasis on advocacy for the responsibility of governments to provide services for their citizens (Hudson, 2000; Simbi & Thom, 2000).

These new approaches were seen to be particularly advanced in countries in South Asia and Latin America, and many interviewees cited that the appointment of Indian Salil Shetty to the position of ActionAid Chief Executive in 1998 was a major contributor to the organisational reforms that followed. Salil Shetty had risen through the ranks of ActionAid India and had worked as country director of ActionAid Kenya (Newman, 2011, p. 126). Salil was one of a new cadre of Southern leaders in

³¹ Officially these are known as ‘net contributing units’ and ‘net spending units’ (Ebrahim & Gordon, 2011, p. 11).

ActionAid, and working with the other leaders and a group of Northern staff and board members interested in change, he launched an ambitious new strategy for ActionAid, *Fighting Poverty Together*, which took effect in 1999. The strategy focussed on how the organisation worked, more so than what it did. The main focus was to tackle the root causes of poverty through adopting a ‘human rights-based approach’ to development. This involved moving away from ActionAid’s traditional approach of mainly delivering services to needy people, towards empowering citizens to seek accountability from their governments. There was to be a particular focus on women’s rights in the strategy (ActionAid, 1999)³². The language within ActionAid documentation changed from speaking about ‘beneficiaries’ to speaking about ‘rights-holders’. This new direction had enormous implications for how ActionAid worked as an organisation and for its accountabilities. Three implications are particularly notable in the context of this chapter.

Firstly, the strategy called for ActionAid to work with significantly more partners at local and national levels (pp. 9, 24). The partnership approach was an attempt to move ActionAid programming closer to its intended beneficiaries, with local groups of community members empowered to make decisions on how best to improve their lives and livelihoods. In many countries, particularly in Africa, partnership was a radical change from the past, as ActionAid had previously tended to directly implement programmes. The shift created new sets of actors and hence new accountability relationships, between partners and community members, partners and ActionAid, and vice versa.

Secondly, the *Fighting Poverty Together* strategy called for a major change in ActionAid’s governance system (p. 23). Up to that time, ActionAid had been governed by a board in the UK. A key element of the new strategy was ‘internationalisation’, whereby power and authority was to be decentralised, ultimately to rights-holders at community level. Internationalisation, as it evolved during the strategy period, meant

³² Accountability is at the very core of a rights-based approach as this quotation from international NGO CARE from 2001 demonstrates: “A rights-based approach focuses deliberately and explicitly on people realizing their rights. A key difference between needs and rights is that, while needs can exist in isolation from others, rights always trigger responsibilities. A rights-based approach to relief and development helps us to a) take responsibility for the human rights impact of our work, and b) hold others accountable for their human responsibilities” (p. 12).

that ActionAid countries, including Northern fundraising offices such as the UK and Southern country programmes, would become self-governing, semi-autonomous entities within the global ActionAid network with their own country-level general assemblies and boards. These country-level structures would then send representatives to a global general assembly and board which would govern the entire organisation. Furthermore, ActionAid would move its headquarters from the UK to the ‘global South’ (ultimately South Africa).

The third implication of the *Fighting Poverty Together* strategy, given that working in a human rights-based approach tends to be inherently more unpredictable and dynamic than service delivery, was that ActionAid needed to gain more flexibility around what work to do and where and when to do it. This meant having to significantly change the way that ActionAid raised its money (ActionAid, 1999, p. 23). It was decided, as the strategy period progressed, that the organisation had to be freed from the strictures of child sponsorship which bound ActionAid to specific communities for long periods. This led to a new approach to child sponsorship whereby sponsors were requested to allow ActionAid to use their money more flexibly after three years, i.e. not just in that child’s community. In the UK, the hub of global fundraising for ActionAid at the time, this new approach was called *Next Steps*. Most sponsors agreed at the time to make this transition or, at least, failed to disagree, since ‘no response’ was interpreted by ActionAid as agreement.

In order to test the organisation’s readiness to undertake the journey called for by the *Fighting Poverty Together* strategy, Salil commissioned a group of consultants to undertake an organisational review called *Taking Stock* (Dichter, 1999). The review was “excoriating” and “devastating” (Scott-Villiers, 2002, p. 431). It categorically stated that ActionAid was not ready to implement the planned strategy. It painted a picture of a heavily bureaucratic, non-transparent, sometimes arrogant organisation which was working mainly at the local level on symptoms of poverty, rather than on deeper structural issues. The review concluded that organisation was generally not learning or reflecting, not innovative or outward looking and not accountable to the poor.

The *Taking Stock* review was a shock to many in ActionAid and catalysed significant energy around the reform of ActionAid to enable the implementation of the

Fighting Poverty Together strategy. Various processes and initiatives began, some of them painful and leading to termination of long-standing staff, as the organisation shifted to partnership (Newman, 2011). At the country programme level, some country directors carried out reform processes, notably the new Indian country directors in Uganda and Kenya (Helman & Moore, 2002; Wallace & Kaplan, 2003). It was in this context of energised reform that the next major shift occurred, the creation of the Accountability Learning and Planning System (David & Mancini, 2004, p. 6).

4.5 Introduction to ALPS

This section details how the ALPS system came into being, its main features and how the system evolved from 2000, the year of its inception, to 2011, the year of my field work.

The *Taking Stock* review was particularly critical of ActionAid's system of planning, monitoring and reporting, which it found to be extremely time-consuming, while bearing little fruit in terms of bringing the voices of poor people into the organisation's decision-making (Dichter, 1999). As Salil Shetty noted:

A growing concern voiced by staff and local partners in recent years has been the disproportionate amount of time and effort that is going into meeting ActionAid's planning and reporting requirements. If it were only a question of wrong priorities, the problem could easily be rectified by reordering time allocation. The bigger risk is the spread of a culture of bureaucratisation and disempowerment of staff, partners and ultimately the poor people that we work with. (ActionAid, 2000, p. 1)

This was not a new criticism. ActionAid had been struggling internally for several years with its Annual Planning and Reporting System which emphasised standardised and linear planning and upward reporting, and which was viewed as bureaucratic and cumbersome (Scott-Villiers, 2002). For instance, annual reports of country programmes could take several months to prepare. Various efforts had been made to try to reform the Annual Planning and Reporting System and had failed. The *Taking Stock* review provided the impetus for a new process to reform these systems. A committee was established to create a new system, including senior programme staff and Robert Chambers, a member of the UK board of Trustees and a leader in participatory

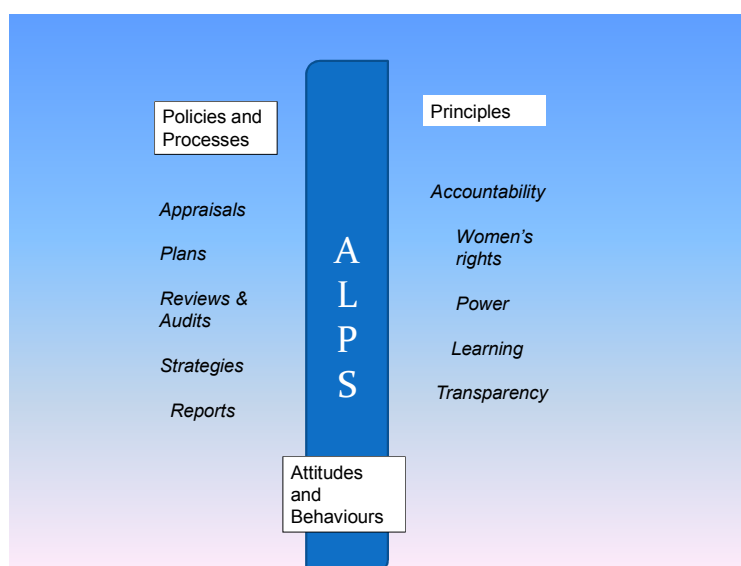
methodologies for development (David & Mancini, 2011). In 2000, this work led to the birth of 'ALPS', the Accountability, Learning and Planning System of ActionAid.

Salil Shetty, in his introduction to ALPS, sets out the aims for the system. ALPS was expected to help operationalise the *Fighting Poverty Together* Strategy by:

fostering a culture where staff and partners do not have the comfort of relying on rules and procedures but have to use their own initiative to achieve our common mission; significantly improving the quality and quantity of interaction with poor people and other partners; raising the premium on reflection, analysis and learning that can be converted into improved programme and advocacy actions; ensuring that decisions are taken as close to the point where their consequences are felt and bringing the concerns and aspirations of poor people into the centre of our decision making. (ActionAid, 2000, p. ii)

What was particularly remarkable about ALPS when it was launched in 2000 was its effort to align the organisation's programming systems with its values. In a review of ALPS in 2004, Guijt summarised the system: "In a nutshell, ALPS is an organisational charter of values and procedures that guide its planning and accountability strategies, the operational aspects, and the attitudes and behaviours it expects of its staff" (p. 3).

The three inter-linked components of ALPS are: policies and processes, principles, and attitudes and behaviours. Policies and processes are how ActionAid's work with communities is planned and monitored, via appraisals, plans, reviews and audits, strategies, and reports. The principles of accountability, women's rights, power, learning and transparency should infuse these processes, and the attitudes and behaviours of staff and partners must reflect the principles (ActionAid, 2000, 2006a). Figure 4.1 below summarises the three components.

Figure 4.1: Components of ALPS

ALPS was designed to meet ‘multiple accountabilities’ with its various processes: accountability to donors, supporters, government, trustees, staff, and volunteers. However, accountability to poor people, especially women and girls, is central (ActionAid, 2000, p. 5). In the next section, I provide a brief chronology of ALPS key events since its launch to provide context for the findings later in this chapter.

4.6 Chronology of ALPS

This section details the key events relating to ALPS since its publication. Table 4.1 below summarises the chronology.

Table 4.1: Chronology of ALPS

| Year | Event |
|-------------|--|
| 2000 | -Publication of original ALPS |
| 2001 | -Pilot work in 4 countries with Institute of Development Studies (IDS) team -Publication of Guidelines: <i>Notes to Accompany ALPS</i> |
| 2004 | - <i>Taking Stock 2</i> Review of ALPS |
| 2006 | -Publication of revised ALPS |
| 2007 | -Internal Review of ALPS |
| 2010 | - <i>Re-imagining Accountability</i> workshop at IDS, Sussex discusses ALPS - <i>Taking Stock 3</i> Review of ActionAid explores many accountability issues, but not ALPS |
| 2011 | -Interim ALPS for 2011-12 published in August |

One of the major changes with the introduction of ALPS in 2000 was that country programmes were expected to institutionalise community-based participatory practices and principles as the core of their accountability, where previously accountability had been centred on the production of lengthy and often arduous reports. The lead unit at ActionAid headquarters for ALPS was the Impact Assessment Unit (later renamed the Impact Assessment and Shared Learning Unit, IASL), managed by Rosalind David and Antonella Mancini. In an article reflecting on ALPS, David and Mancini (2004, p. 11) describe how a proposal for a comprehensive training and induction programme for countries on ALPS was rejected by senior management³³ on the basis that ALPS should not become an ActionAid UK-driven process, and that countries should seek their own support at national and regional levels. Approval was, however, granted for a pilot programme along with the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) in the UK covering four countries: Kenya, India, Brazil and Ethiopia. This pilot

³³ Some of my interviewees believe that this decision was a mistake and that many countries subsequently floundered for lack of guidance.

supported initial ALPS workshops in these countries and helped the Impact Assessment team to create a set of guidelines for ALPS in 2001.

ALPS was a relatively loose framework when it was introduced in 2000. As part of the *Taking Stock 2* process of reviewing the implementation of *Fighting Poverty Together* in 2004, ALPS implementation was reviewed. The findings of this review are discussed later in this chapter. This review informed the 2006 revision of ALPS³⁴. The revised version of ALPS is broadly similar to the original in terms of principles, attitudes and behaviours. As Ramesh Singh (ActionAid, 2006a, p. 4) notes in the introduction, “This revision of Alps seeks to remain true to its original intention: to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, while retaining core accountability.”

There are two main differences between the 2000 and 2006 versions of ALPS that pertain to my study. Firstly, the 2006 revision gives significantly more guidance on how to carry out the ALPS processes and provides tighter formats. Secondly, the 2006 version is more explicit about the area of power. While power is mentioned in the 2000 version of ALPS, in the 2006 version power analysis and transformation are included in the ALPS goals, principles and behaviours, and power analysis features in the formats provided for the plans and reports. The definition of power is given as “the degree of control over material, human, intellectual and financial resources exercised by different individuals, groups and institutions. It also means the power to make decisions and choices” (p. 7). Before discussing ALPS implementation, I detail what has been published about ALPS since its launch in 2000.

4.7 Discussion of ALPS in the Public Domain

ALPS was introduced in the country programmes of ActionAid in late 2000 and early 2001. Soon thereafter, literature started emerging in the public domain written by authors internal and external to the organisation. The next two sections describe the internal and external published literature, and I then summarise the overall gaps of the

³⁴ A new ‘interim’ version of ALPS, including a detailed set of guidelines for processes, was produced in August 2011, the last month of my field work in ActionAid Uganda. While I have reviewed these documents and refer to them in this dissertation as relevant, the 2011 version cannot be expected to have influenced the vast majority of the people I interviewed or documents I read. Thus, the 2000 and 2006 versions of ALPS remain the main reference points for my study.

published literature on ALPS. Brochure talk, leading to the ‘myth of ALPS’, emerges in these next sections. Internal, unpublished literature on ALPS is discussed later in the chapter.

4.7.1 Internal Authors

In the early years of ALPS, while practitioners within ActionAid were considering what ALPS meant for them, ActionAid staff members were already discussing ALPS in external literature and at conferences. In particular, six articles on ALPS were written using data collected up to 2004 (although some were published later) by ActionAid staff members, along with regular consultants linked to the organisation (Chapman, et al., 2003; David & Mancini, 2003, 2004, 2011; David, et al., 2006; Okwaare & Chapman, 2006). As noted earlier, this literature on ALPS comprises a significant contribution to the sparse literature in the empirical category of literature on NGO accountability. Films on ALPS were also made by the Kenya country programme in 2007 and the Bangladesh country programme in 2008. Presentations were also given by ActionAid staff members at various external conferences³⁵. In one of their articles, David and Mancini (2004, p. 17) speak of the frequent requests to give talks on ALPS from its early days.

The articles, films and presentations on ALPS follow a fairly consistent pattern: they reflect on why there was a need for a re-balancing of accountabilities, describe how ActionAid created ALPS in an attempt to do this and outline ALPS, with a specific focus on its principles, attitudes and behaviours. The articles give more detail on challenges than the presentations and films, especially a learning paper by David and Mancini who, as noted, were former staff members who were central to the implementation of ALPS. In this paper they note that “the culture of some country programmes was (and, in some cases, remains) quite at odds with both ALPS and *Fighting Poverty Together*” (David & Mancini, 2004, p. 12). They note challenges for ALPS implementation such as high staff turnover and restrictive donor requirements. These and the other challenges are discussed further in the findings section below.

³⁵ Examples include presentations which I attended at a learning forum for Irish Aid partners in Dublin (Ferretti, 2007) and at the BOND Quality Group in London (Ferretti, 2008). Laurie Adams and Sandeep Chachra gave a presentation on ALPS at the Berlin Civil Society Center conference on *Exploring Mutual Accountability* (2009).

Despite describing challenges, internal authors are generally very positive and hopeful about ALPS. For instance, David and Mancini (p. 9) note:

ALPS breaks new ground. ALPS is different because it is an [international] NGO system which aspires to promote organisational adherence to much-vaunted rhetoric. Embedded in each of the core requirements of ALPS is the emphasis on process, the aim being to gradually transform the way ActionAid carries out its work. At each stage there is an emphasis on increasing transparency, participation, gender and power analysis, downward accountability, honesty and a genuine sharing of power in the development process.

In fact, the externally-presented works on ALPS, particularly the presentations I attended, could potentially give the impression that the introduction and existence of the system is an achievement in itself, rather than real achievement being based on how ALPS is actually operating in practice (Ferretti, 2007).

This tendency within the literature by internal authors to portray ALPS in an aspirational manner persisted in spite of the fact that there was a shortage of empirical practice to back up the hopeful perspectives, in part as this literature was being written in the early years of the system. This tendency contributed to the ‘exaggerated or idealised’ conception of ALPS which I refer to as a myth. One international interviewee spoke of the “mythology that built up around ALPS” in the way in which staff were constantly asked to write papers about it and present at conferences. Thus, this high demand for presentations and articles on ALPS within the sector is both a result of the myth of ALPS, and propagated it further³⁶. Having discussed the published literature on ALPS involving internal authors, the next section explores literature on ALPS by external authors.

³⁶ In my observation, at two of the conferences which I attended, this propagation appeared to be supported by a desire by many conference participants to believe in a working system of NGO downward accountability. I return to this idea of people wanting to believe in ALPS in the discussion chapter.

4.7.2 External Authors

Literature written by authors outside ActionAid³⁷ has some similar features, but tends to be even more positive about ALPS, despite most of the authors citing little evidence as a basis. This external literature has tended to cite ALPS as an ambitious and rare example of an NGO attempting to put its values into practice within its organisational systems. A large number of articles describe ALPS in this way, usually in brief mentions within articles on broader topics related to NGO accountability (L.David Brown, 2008; L. David Brown & Jagadananda, 2007; Ebrahim, 2005; Edwards, 2006; Guijt, 2007; Hanna, 2010; Jacobs, 2004a; Jordan, 2007; Keystone & AccountAbility, 2006; Koch, 2008; McGee & Gaventa, 2010; Namara, 2009; Nelson & Dorsey, 2008; Newman, 2011; O'Dwyer & Unerman, 2010; Pasteur & Scott-Villiers, 2006; Wallace & Chapman, 2003, 2004).

Authors tend to particularly applaud ActionAid for its downward accountability system which encourages learning, such as Brown (2008, pp. 89-90) in an article on accountability within transnational civil society. Ebrahim and Gordon (2011) discuss ALPS favourably in a paper focussed on what they see as ActionAid's ground-breaking internationalisation process. ActionAid usually features in the literature as the only positive example of an organisation practicing balanced accountability that authors name. For instance, ActionAid was cited positively in an article by Koch (2008, p. 64) which argued that NGOs should be held as accountable as governmental donors within the aid effectiveness agenda. In a review of publications on learning and social change, Guijt (2007, p. 34) stated that "[ALPS] is arguably the most discussed and quoted shift by an international NGO to ensure that its Strategic priorities and principles are reflected in its procedures for learning and accountability". From my review of this literature, this is not arguable; no other organisational example even comes close to being cited as much as ALPS.

However, it should not be assumed that these authors have knowledge of ALPS at implementation level. One World Trust, a London based think-tank on accountability,

³⁷ There is a somewhat blurred line here with authors having differing levels of involvement with the organisation. For example, Jacobs was on the advisory board for the 2004 review of ALPS. Generally, I have classified authors as 'internal' if there is at least one ActionAid staff member or former staff member among the author(s).

rated ActionAid the highest of all 11 international NGOs reviewed in its 2006 rankings on accountability (Blagescu & Lloyd, 2006). However, this ranking was based on ActionAid's policies, such as ALPS and the organisation's 'Open Information Policy', rather than its practices which were not reviewed. Similar to One World Trust, very few of the authors mentioned above are basing their assessment of ALPS on any study of practice. Neither do they claim to. Most of the references to ALPS are very brief and usually, at most, cite ActionAid publications as references, rather than any independent study by the author. In fact, most authors appear to be basing their positive assessment simply on the existence of the ALPS document.

Not all authors are entirely positive. Jacobs and Wilford (2010, p. 801) cite the 2007 ALPS review as finding variable implementation quality and suggest that this may have been due to inconsistent management of the processes at field level, possibly related to insufficient performance management and support. Shutt (2009, p. 25), in a report on issues facing large international NGOs in the UK cites decentralisation as a difficulty in implementing ALPS.

Two authors to have done some in-depth study of ActionAid and ALPS are Scott-Villiers and Eyben³⁸. Scott-Villiers (2002) provides an account of the origins and early years of ALPS, having been involved in the above-mentioned process with the Institute of Development Studies of supporting the roll-out of ALPS in four countries. The focus of Eyben's (2006) aforementioned study is broader than ALPS, but is based on research with ActionAid and discusses areas such as the tension between ALPS and results-based management approaches, an issue that is taken up further below. Eyben (pp. 171-172) sounds a rare note of caution in the effusive literature on ALPS when she says that ALPS can be considered a "myth", not in the sense that it is not true, but in the sense that it is emotionally resonant and aspirational, and therefore its actual progress might be overstated. This is an important point. Indeed, the numerous authors mentioned above who have cited ALPS positively, without basing their assessment on any in-depth study of practice, can be seen to be both influenced by and subsequently feeding into the idealised myth of ALPS, about which Eyben cautions. Having

³⁸ Jordan (2007) provides a brief case study of ALPS but it is not in-depth and seems based on a literature review only.

discussed the literature in the public domain from internal and external authors, I now summarise the gaps in the published ALPS literature.

4.7.3 Gaps in the Literature

Three main gaps are evident in the externally presented literature on ALPS. The first of these echoes a gap in the overall NGO accountability literature, as described in my literature review chapter, which is that the ALPS literature is very weak on in-depth studies of practice. While there are some examples from country programmes in the articles and presentations that demonstrate how ALPS is operating in different countries, these are brief and the same anecdotes tend to be repeated from article to article and from presentation to presentation, such as financial transparency in Kenya which is discussed below. There is no in-depth or longitudinal study in any of the published literature of how ALPS is operating in practice in any country. In this sense the ALPS literature mirrors the broader NGO accountability literature which is very scant on the actual practice of accountability attempts.

A second and related gap in the ALPS literature is that the articles that focus solely on ALPS (the six articles from internal authors and the Scott-Villiers article) were all based on data from 2004 or earlier. This is surprising. Given that ALPS began in 2000, it would be assumed that more examples of practice would have become available as the years progressed and as the system matured in country programmes. Yet there has been a silence on ALPS in the published literature in recent years from staff members or academics linked to ActionAid after the initial articles listed above. This may suggest a de-prioritisation of ALPS within the organisation as attention may have moved on to other areas, or it may suggest that there are not sufficient success stories to present. These are issues which are explored further in later chapters. A third gap in the literature is that there are almost no independent studies of ALPS, the Scott-Villiers (2002) article being the only exception - Scott-Villiers was engaged in the joint programme of ActionAid and the IDS, but as an IDS staff member.

My study aims to contribute to filling each of these gaps by producing an independent, in-depth, actor-oriented study of practice over a number of years, including contemporary data. Having discussed what has been said about ALPS in the public

domain, I now describe the accountability discourse within ActionAid when I began to study the implementation of ALPS in 2009.

4.8 Accountability in Crisis?

I approached ActionAid in early 2009 to seek permission to conduct a case study of ALPS in practice. I discovered that it was a very interesting time to be discussing accountability in ActionAid. The organisation was in the process of reflecting on its various accountabilities due to perceived shortcomings. Accountability was highlighted in the ActionAid International 2009 Annual Plan as an area of special priority (ActionAid, 2009a, p. 6). The Chief Executive at the time, Ramesh Singh, convened a group of international secretariat staff to discuss accountability within ActionAid:

Through this discussion, staff from [Impact Assessment and Shared Learning], themes, finance agreed that despite ActionAid's strong commitment to accountability, the concept is neither well documented, nor is it commonly understood. This was identified as one of the reasons for what was agreed to be an unacceptably weak and inconsistent practice of accountability. (ActionAid, 2010e, p. 2)

After this series of meetings, a draft accountability strategy for 2010-11 was formulated by the Impact Assessment and Shared Learning (IASL) Unit, the lead unit on some of the areas related to accountability, such as ALPS, and monitoring and evaluation. In this document, more detail was given on the problems with ActionAid's accountabilities:

Within the organisation we do not feel we are meeting our current accountability standards sufficiently. We are unhappy with the level of accountability we have achieved to rights holders (see Alps Review), to donors (see [International Partnership Development]³⁹ review and strategy) and to sponsors (see Child Sponsorship reports). (IASL, 2009b, p. 1)

While this draft accountability strategy was not finalised, attempts were made to address concerns about ActionAid's accountabilities through various processes since 2009. I highlight three of these in this section as they have produced significant data for my study.

³⁹ International Partnership Development was a department in ActionAid at the time concerned with fundraising.

Firstly, renewed focus was put on monitoring and evaluation within the organisation, through a taskforce constituted in 2009. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is critical to provide performance information to any of ActionAid's stakeholders who are attempting to hold the organisation accountable. Yet M&E has been a long-standing area of weakness in ActionAid (ActionAid, 2010b). It was an area flagged for improvement in 2006 (Fowler & Crane, 2010, p. 17). While some measures were taken, such as the introduction of the Global Monitoring Framework for the *Rights to End Poverty Strategy 2005-10*, it was only in 2011 that a comprehensive new M&E system was put in place (ActionAid, 2011a).

The second process in which accountability was highlighted was ActionAid's participation in a research project in 2010 called *Reimagining Accountability* with IDS. This research project included five ActionAid countries formulating case studies on an aspect of accountability related to their work in-country. A key theme of these studies was how accountability intentions played out in practice. The case studies were presented to representatives from these countries, a group of international staff members and a small group of academics in a workshop in Brighton in August 2010. I attended this workshop and my observations from the case studies and subsequent discussions feed into the findings in this chapter.

Thirdly, accountability within ActionAid was a significant topic in the extensive process of reviewing the organisation's strategy, *Rights to End Poverty 2005-2011*. As noted in the methodology chapter, the *Taking Stock 3* review process took place in 2010 and its findings fed into the ActionAid global strategy approved in 2011, *People's Action to End Poverty 2012-2017*. This strategy review and formulation process was a massive exercise, including extensive studies by external consultants of various aspects of ActionAid's work, a stakeholder survey, self-reviews by country programmes and departments, and a 'proposition' process whereby ActionAid staff could propose various ideas for the new strategy. The documents produced in these processes comprise a significant amount of data on ActionAid's relationships with various stakeholders. These data are referred to in the findings below.

While *Taking Stock 3* reviewed ActionAid's relationships in terms of partners, staff, sponsors, donors, and trustees, the review was limited in that it lacked an emphasis

on downward accountability to intended beneficiaries. The following quote from the *Taking Stock 3 Synthesis Report* illustrates this limitation and encapsulates an important trend in discussions in recent years on ActionAid's accountability to intended beneficiaries, as compared with that to other stakeholders:

The ALPS is justly famous as an innovation in downward accountability, but [ActionAid International] has not yet figured out how to convert micro-level learning to more aggregated interpretations and conclusions. It also needs to balance its primary accountability to poor and excluded populations with accountabilities to other key stakeholders, such as donors, governments, allies and staff. (L. David Brown, 2010, p. 29)

There are two interesting points which may be inferred from this quotation in relation to ALPS.

The first expresses the widespread view that ALPS was seen to contribute to a neglect of quantitative monitoring and evaluation, due to its strong focus on learning and qualitative M&E with communities and partners (Guijt, 2004, p. 32). The *Taking Stock 3 Campaigns* report quotes former staff member Kate Newman:

It appears that (because of a commitment to ALPS?) ActionAid had avoided designing any system to support the flow of knowledge and information from the grassroots upwards, perhaps fearing that any system would lead to a feeling of upward reporting and accountability. (Gilmore, 2010, p. 24)

There is now a wide consensus in ActionAid documentation that ALPS is insufficient for monitoring and evaluation (Fowler & Crane, 2010). However, some of the weakness in M&E within ActionAid is attributed to the original ALPS document creating the impression to some that quantitative monitoring was no longer required.

The second interesting point implied in the quote from *Taking Stock 3* is that, given that ALPS focussed mainly on downward accountability to intended beneficiaries, that this must therefore be progressing well and must no longer need attention, relative to accountability to other stakeholders. The assumption that downward accountability is going relatively well is perhaps further illustrated by the fact that, unlike *Taking Stock 2* in 2004, *Taking Stock 3* did not have a review specifically or even partially on ALPS or downward accountability, whereas there was, for instance, a special focus on governance, fundraising, women's rights and various other themes. This would suggest

that downward accountability was not a major concern at the time of commissioning the review, relative to other priorities, either because it was seen to be going well, or because it was simply not a high priority for the organisation. Both of these themes are revisited below and the issue of prioritisation is further explored in the discussion chapter.

Having set the context within which my study began, I now proceed to present my findings on ALPS and downward accountability, in order to analyse the practice in relation to what was intended, as per my first two research sub-questions on aims and practices.

4.9 What Happened with ALPS?

In this section, I provide a brief overview of findings on the implementation of ALPS before going into different aspects of ALPS in the subsequent sections. Using the actor-oriented approach, I demonstrate views of different stakeholders emerging from documentation, from interviews and from observation. Three main themes emerge from the data: inconsistent implementation of ALPS, ritualistic implementation and yet, a persistence of brochure talk about implementation which portrays ALPS practice as matching up with its aims.

The first theme that arises from the data is that ALPS implementation is “patchy” (David & Mancini, 2004, p. 18). The review carried out of ALPS by an external consultant in 2004, as part of the broader *Taking Stock 2* organisational review, showed that the implementation of ALPS was inconsistent. There were some pockets of excellent practice, particularly around participatory planning, shared learning with stakeholders, financial transparency, and staff being open to critical reflection. Conceptually ALPS reinforced the new direction of *Fighting Poverty Together*. However, Guijt (2004, p. iii) concluded that much progress was still to be made: “ALPS is not yet being applied systemically or systematically within each country or across the countries, themes and functions. There are some critical gaps in the ALPS logic and in its implementation”. A second review of ALPS in 2007, this time internally conducted, came to a similar conclusion to the first - that some positive creative examples existed of

putting ALPS principles into practice, but that these examples were still not widespread (ActionAid, 2007).

My review of case studies of ALPS implementation since its launch, gathered from sources such as internal newsletters, annual reports and the *Reimagining Accountability* process, supports the finding about the patchiness of ALPS implementation. There are strikingly few in-depth case studies available of ALPS practice of downward accountability, given that the system has been in place since 2000. Furthermore, there is much repetition of the examples provided in different documents. For instance, participatory budgeting in Guatemala features frequently, as does social audit in Nepal and financial transparency in Kenya (Chapman, et al., 2003; David, et al., 2006; Ical & Leon, 2009). The inconsistency of implementation that emerged in the reviews and documents was also expressed by my interviewees. One former staff member said, “In 2003 . . . some were doing bits of ALPS, some not at all, some didn’t get it, some still don’t get it”. Another former staff member commented, “You had just isolated examples of good practice, which didn’t blossom and didn’t flower.” Newman (2011, p. 136), in her study of rights and participation in ActionAid commented on the inconsistency of ALPS:

it is important to note that while there was emphasis on transparency to the poor and marginalised people with whom ActionAid worked, in practice this has been distinct from accountability. There were no systems by which poor people could actually hold ActionAid to account, no exit or guarantee of voice. The extent to which ActionAid listened and learned was dependent on the motivation of the individual staff involved, and how conducive and interested their management is.

The second and related theme that emerges is that of ALPS implementation being ritualistic and not demonstrating the requisite principles. As noted, *Taking Stock 3* did not have a specific focus on ALPS but some reviewers commented on various aspects. In the review of governance, human resources and organisational development, Fowler and Crane (2010, p. 17) note:

The Accountability, Learning and Planning System (Alps) focuses on processes and values that emphasise learning, transparency and accountability. The mechanics of Alps processes are widely understood and practiced, though perhaps with insufficient consistency and quality.

However, attention to its underlying principles and values is noted by many as problematic.

The 2007 ALPS review also raised a serious concern about the practice of principles. It noted that, despite commendable efforts within ActionAid to expose staff to ALPS:

many staff are still not familiar with Alps . . . There is far too much attention on the bureaucratic requirements of Alps, and insufficient attention to the principles. In particular, too much attention is put to the output –e.g. the plan or the report – rather than the process. . . . the poor quality of our plans and reports, our inability to be accountable to multiple stakeholders – is related to an insufficient attention to principles in process. (ActionAid, 2007, p. 3)

Similarly, while all interviewees viewed the spirit of ALPS as laudable, many commented that its original spirit has been lost. Some interviewees talked about the way in which ALPS over time has become routine and automatic. One current staff member, working at regional level, commented on ALPS implementation, “Most countries in the region are very weak . . . ALPS is seen as imposed . . . It has become a ritual to do a [Participatory Review and Reflection Process]”. A former staff member reflected, “After a few years ALPS became part of the institution and devalued. Originally it had freshness and was revolutionary. Then it became part of the mainstream, a box you tick. Not something you think about”.

In sum, the overall assessment of implementation has remained fairly consistent over the years since the ALPS review in 2004: ALPS processes are usually happening but, despite a few notable exceptions, there are serious question marks over the extent to which these processes in many countries match up with ALPS principles. This leads to the third and final theme that emerged from the overview of ALPS, that ActionAid’s practice of downward accountability is often still described positively by ActionAid staff, even when realities do not appear to match it. There are a number of examples in internal documentation that would leave a reader with the impression that downward accountability practice is more or less as per ActionAid’s stated intentions. For instance, the *Right to End Poverty* strategy states, “The majority of our time and resources are [*sic*] spent on the poverty frontline and our staff and local partners have built long-term relationships of mutual trust and respect with many poor and excluded people”

(ActionAid, 2005b, p. 16). In the management response to the *Taking Stock 3* review, ActionAid management notes that the accountability approach and system of ActionAid International (AAI):

is based on primary accountability to the poor, with an understanding that through fulfilling this accountability we build the foundation to fulfil multiple accountabilities. In this approach community participation and feedback is catalysed to generate key information to fulfil other accountabilities, and it is necessary to reinforce and strengthen this accountability. (ActionAid, p. 8)

Finally, in their ‘self review’ for the *Taking Stock 3* strategy, the ActionAid International Directors stated that “ActionAid is now increasingly recognised for its grassroots people centred development and acknowledged as a leader in downward accountability and transparency” (ActionAid, 2010g, p. 1).

On the other hand, many internal interviewees and authors of documents expressed scepticism that ALPS implementation of downward accountability is going as well as is sometimes implied, and raised the issue of a disconnect between what ActionAid says and what ActionAid does. The 2007 ALPS review noted, “Our reputation and stated commitment to accountability and transparency is stronger than our practice” (ActionAid, p. 3). In the internal newsletter *Exchanges*, a trustee commented, “The test is whether poor and excluded people fundamentally shape ActionAid’s work. I think most of us judge that our actions do not yet match our rhetoric here” (K. Brown, 2009, p. 31). A former advisor commented in an interview, “ActionAid talked more about ALPS than did it”. ActionAid’s Risk Management Report for 2011 notes, “In the last few years however, our rhetoric on accountability has not been matched with actions which leaves the organisation vulnerable to accusations of not walking the talk” (p. 4).

This theme of the persistence of ‘brochure talk’, when it does not appear to match with realities, helps to build and maintain the ‘ALPS myth’ as mentioned above. The former staff member quoted above, who reflected on the “mythology” of ALPS which led to many demands for presentations, went on to say that the mythology of ALPS was “not matched by internal effort”.

Thus, an overview of findings on ALPS suggests that implementation has been patchy and sometimes ritualistic, with particular shortcomings around values and

principles, and that brochure talk on ALPS persists despite an apparent disjuncture between aims and the realities of implementation.

While ALPS had aims around learning and planning, increased accountability to intended beneficiaries is at the core of what ActionAid set out to achieve with ALPS and is my main interest. The next three sections discuss accountability to intended beneficiaries more specifically. The first two describe the extent to which ActionAid is living up to its stated intentions on participation and transparency, and the third section describes the extent to which ActionAid's governance processes are impacting on downward accountability.

4.10 Participatory Processes

Participatory processes are central to ALPS in terms of promoting ActionAid's accountability to communities. ActionAid has historically been a leader in participatory approaches, having introduced several methodologies into the sector, such as *Reflect*⁴⁰, which are now practiced within other organisations (Guijt, 2004, p. 22). Robert Chambers was apparently attracted to serve on ActionAid's board due to its work on participatory rural appraisal (Newman, 2011, p. 129). However, according to interviewees and documentation, the practice of participatory processes within ActionAid generally does not come close to matching up to the organisation's intentions. In this section, I look at both the stated intentions and the practices of participatory processes. In terms of the practice, I first provide an overview of positive reviews of practice, before describing more negative reviews. I then explore an in-depth example of social audit in Nepal from different perspectives in order to draw out some of the key issues which hinder downward accountability.

A core process in ALPS is the Participatory Review and Reflection Process (PRRP) which is a tool for monitoring, learning and further planning with communities. The ALPS guidelines provide direction on the PRRPs, which should be held annually by

⁴⁰ In a recently published 'mother manual' on *Reflect*, co-authored by a senior ActionAid staff member, *Reflect* is described as an "approach to adult literacy which fuses the theory of Paulo Freire and the practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal". It is also cited that *Reflect* is being used in over 75 countries by hundreds of different organisations (D. Archer & Cottingham, 2012, pp. 1, 3). While *Reflect* was an important topic in my study as an example of a participatory process, I do not discuss its evolution specifically as it began in 1996 and is therefore not a methodology that was introduced with ALPS.

all countries, regions, themes and functions within the organisation. The purpose of PRRPs is said to be to work with stakeholder groups to:

- Assess what has been done
- What has been learnt
- And, within this analysis, articulate what will be done differently in the future. (ActionAid, 2006a, p. 27)

Guidance is also given on how the PRRPs should be conducted:

The process should be fully transparent and participative. The process should involve as many stakeholder groups as possible (including poor and excluded people, partners and donors and supporters) and provide space for them to express their ideas, priorities and concerns. (p. 27)

Some of the internal documentation talks positively on the practice of PRRPs. The interim ALPS in 2011 states that that, “PRRPs enhance our relationships with and accountability to primary stakeholders, keep us focussed and energised and help ensure that we are on track in achieving our objectives” (ActionAid, p. 24). A report sent by ActionAid as part of its membership of the International NGO Accountability Initiative stated that:

Feedback received from stakeholders, particularly during participatory review and reflection sessions, is used for monitoring and adjusting programme plans. This process ensures accountability to the rights holders and to other stakeholders and donors. (Adams & Mikkelsen, 2011, p. 18)

One innovative feature of ActionAid’s systems is that the internal audit units, globally and within different countries, have a responsibility to audit not just financial systems but also programmes and, specifically, compliance of different parts of the organisation with ALPS core requirements and the principle of stakeholder accountability (ActionAid, 2006a, p. 40). In 2010, as a contribution to the *Taking Stock 3* review process, the international Internal Audit Unit produced a review of local level

work within what were then termed Development Areas⁴¹ (now termed Local Rights Programmes), known as the ‘DA Review’. This review was based on reports and audit observations from internal auditors in twenty ActionAid countries. The Impact Assessment and Shared Learning (IASL) Unit, the unit with the responsibility for supporting and tracking ALPS implementation, responded to this review by noting that the findings concur with IASL’s own findings from field visits (ActionAid, 2010b, pp. 3,33).

This review and other documents describe examples of positive practice of participation. On PRRPs, the DA Review cites examples in Sierra Leone and Ghana (p. 25). For instance, in Sierra Leone, the auditors note that:

The [Country Programme’s] PRRP process ensures that each DA Manager coordinates the Participatory Review and Reflection Process (PRRP) of another DA other than theirs. This has facilitated learning and allowed better participation of stakeholders.

In its management response to the DA Review report, ActionAid management mentions five additional positive examples of planning and budgeting, review or social audit processes. These are the “bottom up” planning and budgeting process in India, social audit and participatory budgeting in Guatemala, social audit in Nepal and PRRPs with partners in Pakistan (ActionAid, 2010b, p. 22). The Interim ALPS guidelines also cite the positive example of participation from Pakistan: “ActionAid introduced peer reviews in which all partners and community representatives gathered at sub-national level to consolidate and share community feedback for planning and transparency” (ActionAid, 2011d, p. 23). Other documents, such as the internal newsletter *Exchanges*, cite positive examples of participatory practice within ActionAid, such as participatory budgeting in Guatemala (Ical & Leon, 2009).

⁴¹ The management response for this review suggests that the review was somewhat controversial within ActionAid, while it was ostensibly welcomed. Nevertheless, the review was taken very seriously. The review report took seven months to finalise, in part as there was a wide consultation on the management response. The final version of the review includes a detailed management response for each recommendation, in addition to a separate management response on the whole review. The management response mostly focuses on initiatives that are already ongoing to address the issues identified. It also highlights areas where management thinks the Internal Audit Unit has over-generalised findings. In response, the Internal Audit Unit provided new annexes to the final version of the report, highlighting some good practices in the areas covered by the review, and also providing detail on the country-level findings which led to the overall findings.

However, from reviewing the documentation, two difficulties emerge with assessing these participatory processes. Firstly, it is often unclear whether the author of the document, for instance, the internal auditor, actually saw the PRRP being carried out or is operating on the basis of hearsay. Secondly, there is often mention of processes being carried out, with no mention of the quality of that process. For instance, the internal auditors' example of positive ALPS practice in Ghana states that:

[ActionAid Ghana] demonstrates a solid commitment to ALPS processes. Transparency Boards are used at all offices and PRRPs are conducted twice a year with community members at the planning/budgeting stage and at the annual review stage. (p. 25)

Yet there is no analysis of the quality of these PRRPs or indeed of the transparency boards in Ghana. Therefore, there is a need to look at particular examples in-depth, as I do below with my analysis of social audit in Nepal and transparency boards in Kenya. Before that, I provide an overview of some of the more negative reviews of participatory approaches, including PRRPs, from the DA Review and other documents.

Despite the positive examples from the DA review mentioned above, on the whole, the DA Review is hard-hitting and very critical of ActionAid practice, including the practice of participatory approaches. On the topic of PRRPs and other programme reviews, the auditors state:

Most [Country Programmes] actually carry out a PRRP but in many cases, the PRRP and other programme reviews are not being carried out effectively due to absence of key internal and external stakeholders. Local government representation for example is not always ensured. In some cases, reviews are often precipitated because of a pressing need to feed into other strategic activities such as [Country Strategic Plan] review or affiliate review, and therefore tend to be either impromptu or not well-managed. Limited time allocated to cover both desk reviews and visits to communities can make the review a hasty exercise rather than a useful learning and planning tool. There is also no real evidence in some cases that the reviews lead to improvements in the planning and implementation of programmes. . . . Unless we review and assess our work appropriately we cannot be sure we are carrying out the right activities in the right way. If so, we are failing in our accountability to the communities with whom we work. (ActionAid, 2010b, p. 6)

Interviewees provide similar feedback. A former staff member, who left the organisation in 2006 after eight years, commented:

I did see some good stuff in my time at ActionAid but also an awful lot of poor stuff in terms of tick box participation with no real understanding of what a learning or empowering process might be, and no evidence of actually listening to or respecting community views.

A review of participation in ActionAid in 2005 found that participation within the organisation was not invested in and that it was taken for granted that participation was happening at field level (ActionAid, 2005a, p. 7). The *Taking Stock 3* Review of women's rights and the Africa region brought out similar issues of poor quality participatory processes: "judging by the descriptions of their use, the participatory techniques themselves are not always well handled, so that impact assessment becomes a routine gathering of (favourable) comments, with little depth or actual reflection and critique" (Imam, 2010, p. 12).

The disjuncture between ActionAid's intentions for participatory processes, such as PRRPs, and the realities of practice was a strong theme in my interviews. In order to draw out the issues, I now look in-depth at one often celebrated case study of participation: social audit in Nepal.

4.10.1 Social Audit in Nepal

Social audit in Nepal is often lauded within ActionAid as one of the best examples of ALPS practice (ActionAid, 2010b, p. 22). Social audit, as defined by ActionAid Nepal (AAN), is similar to the Participatory Review and Reflection Process (PRRP) called for within ALPS: it is a session with partners, intended beneficiaries and government actors to present current programming work, including the budget, and to seek feedback on performance (ActionAid Nepal, 2010). The Asia report of the *Taking Stock 3* review, based on a visit to Nepal⁴², states that:

Downward accountability is a unique attribute of AA. Partners as well as communities value the PRRP process and feel empowered by these consultations. In Nepal, AA and partners have been using Social Audits for the last seven years and this has tremendously contributed to their credibility with many stakeholders, including government. In India and Nepal, community members are now involved in partners' annual budget setting . . . which allows transparency and accountability of all involved

⁴² I have been unable to ascertain whether the reviewers witnessed any social audit processes during their review.

and encourages communities to in turn question local government's budget allocation process. (Jagadananda & De Chassy, 2010, pp. 15-16)

However, around the same time as this *Taking Stock 3* review was conducted, an internal case study by ActionAid Nepal gives quite a different perspective. While the case study notes that there are certainly positive aspects to the social audit process, particularly around creating a culture of transparency that has had ripple effects to other organisations, some significant weaknesses are identified, most remarkably, "We have not been able to encourage participants to give honest and critical feedback. It is important to ensure that the process does not end up becoming a back-slapping exercise" (ActionAid Nepal, 2010, p. 2). Receiving honest feedback should be at the very heart of the PRRP or social audit process, as ActionAid opens itself up to stakeholders. Thus, it is surprising to see this frank assessment by the implementers themselves that this shortcoming exists, particularly given that the social audit process was launched in 2002, illustrating that this is presumably a long-standing issue.

Along similar lines, in a report of a visit by a UK trustee to look at accountability mechanisms in Nepal and India, the same issue of reticence of community members to be critical of ActionAid and partners arises again. The trustee, Pat Caplan (2008, p. 13), cites a 2004 external review of ActionAid Nepal (Misra, 2004, p. 55) which speaks of various positive aspects of the PRRP process: "The coverage and regularity is high and they are seen to have enhanced accountability of the AAN and the [long-term partner], while obliging both to be more transparent". However Caplan notes that the same review also refers "a distinct de-emphasis of questions related to accountability" in the PRRPs as the sessions are led by partners (Misra, p. 57 cited by Caplan p.14). On the same issue of rights-holders not demanding accountability, Caplan (2008, p. 14) cites another review from 2006, this time an internal review of ALPS across three districts of Nepal:

The very objective of boosting accountability faces some challenges and constraints. AAN and its partners have grown [more] conscious of [the necessity for] granting accountability than rights-holders ... of demanding accountability. As for example, AAN and its partners lay bare details of programmes, plans, income, expenditures etc. Judging it from AAN and [the] partners' perspectives they are perfectly honest and fair. But, to see it from [the] rights-holder's perspectives, they are not capable enough to best

utilise the opportunity and build pressure on AAN and partners for increased accountability. They hardly recall a moment when they questioned the rationale or the relevance of any particular programme or budget allocated to them. The Social Audit has merely remained an event carried out to get the nod from rights-holders. It is done to put the organisation through the critical examination of rights-holders and thereby prove its transparency and accountability. The question arises if [as to whether] the rights-holders are capable to make [a] critical assessment of AAN and its partner works [*sic*]. (ActionAid Nepal, 2006, p. 9, brackets in original)

The key point here is that, even in the best case scenario, if an organisation such as ActionAid Nepal is making significant efforts to be transparent and accountable, various barriers such as community members' dependant position, lack of confidence of community members to be honest and frank with ActionAid staff or partners, and other cultural factors, may prevent them from taking advantage of this. A former ActionAid staff member provided similar feedback after a visit to a West African country: "As far as I saw in [country name] PRRPs were top down, they gave information and asked 'what do you think'? The question was how much people felt able to criticise? You'd need to be brave to stand up to this".

While the issue of the lack of critical questioning is the predominant theme from the reviews cited by Caplan, she also cites external reviews from 2004 and 2007 (Misra, 2004; New Era, 2007) that mention various other problems with social audits and PRRPs such as their lack of regularity, over-formality and the dominance of political parties workers and local elites. On this last point, the 2007 review states, "The community people reported that most of the time the local elites and the political leaders dominate the session giving very limited opportunity to the primary rights-holder... to voice their concerns" (New Era, p. 106, cited in Caplan p.13). Thus, Caplan's review in Nepal, while largely positive on PRRPs and social audits, raises some critical questions that belie the image often given in the internal documentation of social audit in Nepal as a pure 'good practice'.

Below, and in the discussion chapter, I explore in more detail the reasons behind the disconnection between the intentions and the realities of participatory processes as per my data. For the time being, what can be concluded is that, despite ActionAid's

strong reputation for participatory processes and their central place in ALPS, there are many instances of poor participatory practice which hinder downward accountability. Despite this, participatory practice, such as the social audit example from Nepal, is often still talked about positively with little analysis of these challenges. I now discuss the second element of accountability to intended beneficiaries: transparency.

4.11 Transparency

Transparency is the second aspect that sheds light on ActionAid's downward accountability practice. In this section, I outline the intentions of transparency within ALPS, and the extent to which ActionAid appears to be meeting them, in general and at community level.

The ALPS guidelines provide detail on what is intended in terms of transparency:

Alps requires transparency, and the proactive sharing of information in relevant forms with all our stakeholders, particularly poor and excluded people. Alps requires all ActionAid information, including appraisals, strategies, plans, budgets, reviews and reports to be open to all stakeholders, especially poor and excluded people. It promotes such openness in an active way by requiring translations of key documents to local languages and promoting visible public sharing of information as a right. . . . Alps written information must be relevant and useful primarily to the people who produce it, receive it and who need it to make decisions and for learning. It should be written in a way that is easily understood by most people and in the language of the majority of users. (ActionAid, 2006a, p. 6)

ActionAid published an Open Information Policy in 2006 which forms a part of ALPS. This policy details the wide range of documents that should be proactively shared by the organisation and provides guidance on how this should be done (ActionAid, 2006a, 2006c). The organisation One World Trust, in its aforementioned review of ActionAid, praised the Open Information Policy, particularly for its expression of a "narrowly defined set of conditions for non-disclosure" (Blagescu & Lloyd, 2006, p. 26). However, the 2007 ALPS review found that the organisation had not made significant progress on implementation. It noted that, for instance, the organisation is "falling very far short of the standards of budget transparency that we lobby others for"

(ActionAid, p. 17). In 2009, the draft Accountability Strategy states, in relation to the Open Information Policy, that “We are currently not even compliant with the routine, easy aspects (e.g. posting documents on website) much less the more labour-intensive and sensitive sharing with communities” (IASL, 2009b, p. 5). Similarly, an interviewee commented that “The Open Information Policy lacked an implementation process. It was a shame. It rapidly became a list of things to put on the web rather than being open to people. It was considered too difficult. It never got past the paper stage”.

At the community level, there are some positive examples of transparency. One of the most cited case studies is ActionAid’s programme in Sri Lanka after the tsunami, in which ActionAid instituted transparency boards, social audit and other participatory reviews. One interviewee, a former staff member, visited Sri Lanka and reported that these processes made ActionAid “very transparent”.

Transparency boards are one of the most widely cited components of ALPS. The ALPS guidelines states that “Alps encourages open information through bulletin boards and posters easily accessible to communities with details of our own plans and budgets” (ActionAid, 2006a, p. 8). Transparency boards in Myanmar and Pakistan have been commended in the internal literature, but the most celebrated example is that of Kenya, which is now discussed (ActionAid, 2001a, pp. 4-6; David & Mancini, 2004; Ebrahim & Gordon, 2011; Scott-Villiers, 2002).

4.11.1 Transparency Boards in Kenya

A case study was presented at the *Reimagining Accountability* workshop at IDS on the topic of transparency boards in Kenya. Similar to Nepal, Kenya is another country which has been considered one of the stronger implementers of ALPS, particularly for financial transparency. One positive example was given by Scott-Villiers (2002, p. 426), who describes the presentation of ActionAid and partner budgets in Kenya during the ALPS pilot. The partner responded to the presentation as follows:

Can we take this [financial] information away and analyse it further? We should have had this information before. It has a benefit. I feel that we are like a child growing up, when the child gets real information from an elder, then he knows he is growing. This has opened our eyes and given us a picture. It satisfies us about the work we did and helps us see the gaps.

In principle, transparency boards in Kenya display detail on the expenditure of ActionAid and partners, in order that members of the communities can study this information and ask questions or make suggestions on expenditure (ActionAid Kenya, 2006). However, when the case study of transparency boards was presented at IDS, serious shortcomings were highlighted:

In terms of understandability of the transparency boards and its content, however, various gaps were realized. First, Partners and Rights Holders felt that the financial details provided on these boards are too general . . . for the partners to understand such critical information as; who/which Community Based Organization (CBO) has received resources from [ActionAid Kenya], an aspect that would help in tracking their use. . . Further still, the fact that the decision on what to put on the Transparency Board is usually a prerogative of [ActionAid Kenya's LRP] staff limits the simplicity of the information posted on these boards, thus hindering participation of the Rights Holders in auditing the use of the funds. (ActionAid Kenya, 2010, p. 19)

The absence of 'critical' and 'simple' information would appear to be a serious shortcoming with respect to transparency boards.

An analysis of photographs from the case study presentation by ActionAid Kenya is illustrative. The photographs below show two different types of transparency board. The first, Photograph 4.1, is an ActionAid board (ActionAid Usigu), which lists the sectors supported, for instance "women's rights", the broad objectives of this support, for instance "increased number of women accessing rights, participation in governance", and the anticipated amount of funds available. The ActionAid board also details expenditure from the previous year, by sector, for instance "cross-cutting issues", what the funds were spent on, for instance the Ministry of Health's tuberculosis programme, and the total amount per sector. The transparency board is entirely in English and not very reader-friendly with small text. In terms of the information provided, it certainly provides some insights into the ActionAid programme but, as mentioned in the case study presentation, the board lacks important information about partners and activities, which is key information for community members.

Photograph 4.1: ActionAid Usigu Transparency Board

| Area of Focus | What changes are anticipated | Amount available |
|---|---|------------------|
| Women Rights | Increased number of women accessing justice, particularly women | 1,500,000 |
| HIV/AIDS | Reduced infection rates, increased awareness of HIV/AIDS, and increased use of condoms | 1,500,000 |
| Food Security - (Women Rights) | Reduction in hunger, increased food security, and improved livelihoods | 1,500,000 |
| Education and Child Rights | All children attending school, low absenteeism, and improved learning outcomes | 1,500,000 |
| Governance/Just Democracy | Increased citizen participation in governance and improved service delivery | 1,500,000 |
| Water - (Women Rights) | Improved access to clean water, reduced risk of waterborne diseases, and improved livelihoods | 1,500,000 |
| Sponsorship | Minimum adequate child lines to ensure sustainable livelihoods | 1,500,000 |
| Cross Cutting (PEWEE, Communication, ICS) | | |

| Area | Details of how money was spent | Date of expenditure | Amount Spent |
|---|---|---------------------|--------------|
| Women Rights | Manjezo kuhusu fedha zilizotumiwa | 27/11/2009 | 271,400 |
| HIV and AIDS | (NB: If money has been given to a community organisation, please question them on how they spent funds) | 28/11/2009 | 1,500,000 |
| Food Security | | | 1,500,000 |
| Education and Child Rights | | | 1,500,000 |
| Governance and Just Democracy | | | 1,500,000 |
| Sponsorship | | | 1,500,000 |
| Support to other stakeholders (Cross cutting) | | | 1,500,000 |
| Cross cutting | | | 1,500,000 |
| GRANTS TO CBOs | | | 1,500,000 |
| | | | 18,241,140 |

Source: ActionAid Kenya (Ileri, 2010, p. 18)

The second example, Photograph 4.2, from a local partner called Barokwiri Abidha Magombe Achuodho, is clearer, while information is limited and in English. The board mentions how much money was spent, from which donor, which activities were done and the extent to which they were completed.

Photograph 4.2: Barokwiri Abidha Magombe Achuodho Transparency Board

| DATE | AMOUNT | ACTIVITY | DEVELOPMENT PARTNER | COMMENT |
|---------------|---------|--|---------------------|---|
| FEBRUARY 2010 | 116,000 | Drug storage Drugs | ActionAid | Completed |
| MARCH 2010 | 197,000 | Orphans Support PLWHA'S Support | Amref Maanisha | Completed |
| JUNE 2010 | 279,000 | Human Rights Adherence Training | Amref Maanisha | In Process |
| JUNE 2010 | 272,000 | VCT Couple Mobiliza tion Sensitiza tion SS Review | Action Aid | Not Completed because of lack of funds and Testing kits Have requested further support |

Source: ActionAid Kenya (Ileri, 2010, p. 21)

Therefore, this case study illuminates both positive and negative features of transparency boards. On the one hand, transparency boards are still in existence in ActionAid Kenya a number of years after the launch of ALPS. In addition, partners have clearly been influenced by ActionAid to have their own boards - the same case study speaks of local government offices which have also begun the practice. However, while the boards provide some relevant programme information, the case study paper and photos do not suggest that intended beneficiaries are able to obtain basic programme information with the level of accessibility that was intended. All boards are in English, and the ActionAid board, in particular, is quite difficult to read and contains limited information.

Another key issue raised in the case study presentation from Kenya was the ability or willingness of community members to question ActionAid, similar to the point raised regarding the Nepal social audits above:

according to the rights holders, their lack of access to information on the resources provided to their organizations coupled with the fear of [ActionAid Kenya's] withdrawal of its support from the area in case of rights holders' question prevented them from raising any issues with the organization. (p. 22)

This resonates with a quote from a partner in Kenya in David, Mancini and Guijt's paper (2006, p. 145). Partners were asked to make honest criticisms of ActionAid during a participatory process and one partner responded, "We can only respond to the questions raised if you can promise that you will not victimize us by cancelling our project."

Interestingly, despite the shortcomings of the transparency boards and the lack of critical engagement, as acknowledged in the Kenya case study paper, the tone of the paper is nevertheless upbeat. The paper lists "impacts" which include "Impact One: Transparent Boards have ensured that [ActionAid Kenya] remains accountable to all the stakeholders at all levels, particularly the rights holders" (p. 17). Given the paper's own findings, this appears to be a considerable overstatement and an example of 'brochure talk' of ActionAid staff that contributes to the myth of ALPS as functioning well for downward accountability.

In broader terms, considering community level transparency processes, the Internal Audit DA Review notes that "Information-sharing with communities needs to take a leap forward by including both budget and actuals information, on both income and expenditure, for both the partner/DA and the ActionAid country office" (ActionAid, 2010b, p. 7). One former advisor noted the "explosive potential of financial disclosure" for ActionAid but concluded that it required too much change and was hence too challenging for the organisation.

In sum, the previous two sections on downward accountability to beneficiaries in terms of participatory processes and transparency are consistent with the overview of ALPS finding as noted above. The general impression from these discussions is that downward accountability at the ground level is far from what was envisioned in ALPS. While participatory processes are being held, and while transparency boards are being

displayed, the quality and hence the consistency with ActionAid's values is often questionable in these processes. Positive exceptions are cited by interviewees, however generally the conclusion is that ALPS implementation is not meeting its aims. Yet, there are still examples of the myth of ALPS being propagated. I now discuss findings in terms of ActionAid's governance structure, as this is planned to be another way to increase ActionAid's downward accountability.

4.12 Accountability through Governance

While it emerged in parallel with ALPS, Action Aid's new governance structure is another key mechanism which has the potential to enhance ActionAid's downward accountability. Thus, I describe it briefly here and the extent to which this potential appears to be fulfilled.

The governance structure that has evolved during internationalisation has been much lauded. This process involved restructuring ActionAid:

from a loose alliance of agencies in Europe into a coherent international federation. . . so that its units in the developing countries of the 'global South' could have an equal say in governance matters with units in wealthier nations of the 'global North'. (pp. 1-2)

The *Taking Stock 3* governance review sets out the vision: "The AAI Constitution of 2009 articulates a bold and visionary proposition: the re-distribution of organisational power in favour of people who are poor" (Fowler & Crane, 2010, p. 9).

The governance structure is generally viewed positively by interviewees and in documents at the international level. It is said to constitute a significant shift of power from North to South that is aligning the organisation's structure more closely with its values. One current staff member comments:

The new Governance structure is significant. It was a revelation in the [*People's Action to End Poverty 2012-2017*] strategy process how much input they had. It's a wonderful shift of power and increase in democracy. This is a new accountability and needs to be embedded more.

A recent study by Jayawickrama and Ebrahim (2013, p. 9) found that most respondents felt that internationalisation had deepened ActionAid's legitimacy and accountability.

A key consideration when it comes to assessing the downward accountability impact of the governance structure is to ask who is represented in the structure. ActionAid's vision is contingent on representatives of the interests of poor and marginalised people being involved in the governance structure, for instance, farmers, youth leaders, representatives of women's groups. As Ebrahim and Gordon (2011, p. 6) note in a Harvard Business School case study on ActionAid's governance structure, ratios were designed to ensure representation of poor and excluded people on the general assemblies at country level. How this process is operating is explored further in the next chapter on ActionAid Uganda.

In terms of representation of poor people on the board at international level, the international board aims to seek at least "two representatives of the primary rights-holders whom ActionAid works with" for membership (ActionAid, 2010c, p. 30). It was pointed out as a "substantial gap" by a board member in 2009 that there were not yet any direct representatives of the poor on the board, and this situation does not appear to have changed (ActionAid, 2009c, p. 26, 2013a). However, 6 of the 11 current board members are from developing countries, including the chair. Therefore, in broad terms there is no doubt that the internationalisation process has made ActionAid's board significantly more 'Southern', although the 'directness' of the representation of poor people still appears to be lacking.

Having now explored each of the different aspects of downward accountability, in the next section, I highlight the main issues which seem to be affecting ActionAid's accountability to its intended beneficiaries.

4.13 Key Issues Affecting ActionAid's Downward Accountability

Having completed an analysis of ActionAid's accountability to intended beneficiaries at international level, it is clear that there are significant differences between what was intended with ALPS and what is happening on the ground. My research question asks why this disjuncture occurs, and there are many views expressed by my interviewees and in documents on this. Four main issues stand out as creating a disconnect between the standards set out in ALPS regarding ActionAid's downward accountability, and the implementation at operational level: quantity of staff time available, quality of staff and

partners, prioritisation of donor requirements, and leadership. I describe these as the ‘operational obstacles’ to downward accountability. Building on these, more fundamental causes are posited in the discussion chapter. The four issues are illustrated in Figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4.2: Operational Obstacles to Downward Accountability



4.13.1 Quantity of Staff Time Available

One key obstacle that emerged strongly in interviews in terms of accountability to intended beneficiaries and partners is the quantity of ActionAid staff time available for processes related to downward accountability.

As noted above, the *Fighting Poverty Together* strategy from 1999 led to a shift to working in partnership with local organisations. This led to major restructuring within country programmes to reduce numbers of staff. However, in some cases this reduction did not take into account the high number of partners, or their low capacity

level, or the sheer volume of work involved in quality capacity building. Many ActionAid partners, notably in Africa, are small and nascent community-based organisations. This has led to situations of inexperienced partners leading participatory processes, poorly supported by over-stretched ActionAid staff. The *Taking Stock 3* review notes that staff numbers have been “seriously depleted” since the 1999 launch of *Fighting Poverty Together*, but that this issue seems to be finally gaining traction within the organisation (Fowler & Crane, 2010, p. 17). As the IASL Self Review for the *Taking Stock 3* review notes:

Despite the language of downward accountability, in reality, AAI, in an attempt to work at a scale, is not structured to deeply engage with people at the grassroots level. We have over the past five years expanded at such a rate that we have a very high ratio of partners to staff, and of villages to partner. We do not have enough capacity at local level to really build the capacity of partners or community leaders to deal with difficult issues of power that come up around transparency and accountability, except in a few countries. (IASL, 2010, p. 5)

An illustration of this was provided at the *Reimagining Accountability* workshop in relation to ActionAid Nepal: “there are 247 communities that are worked with and many partners. What does this mean for ongoing processes? . . . ActionAid Nepal staff are overloaded. One staff might be supporting ten to twenty organisations”. This issue exemplifies the tendency as phrased by one ActionAid staff member, for “our engagement to be 30 miles wide and half an inch deep” (ActionAid, 2006b, p. 3).

One of the quotes above from the DA Review report mentions that sometimes participatory processes can be rushed due to overload of staff (ActionAid, 2010b). Excessive workload and a poor work-life balance for staff is an issue that has plagued ActionAid for many years and it was frequently raised in interviews and documents at the international level (Hewitt Associates, 2007, 2010a). One contributing factor here, which I return to below and particularly in the next chapter on Uganda, is the pressure on staff time for participatory processes given other tasks, particularly around sponsorship, donor reporting and internal procedures. This can compromise the quality of PRRPs and other accountability-related processes. The report from the *Reimagining Accountability* process makes this point:

The case studies show how applying the same accountability tools and mechanisms without dedicating sufficient time, can lead to bureaucracy rather than critical reflection and transformative participation. In consequence, AAI commitment to accountability calls for a critical reflection on the time and staff requirements of each of its commitments. (Ho, 2010, p. 4)

Thus, an insufficient quantity of staff time for ALPS processes is one factor having a negative impact on ALPS implementation. I now discuss the issue of the quality of the staff and partners engaged in these processes.

4.13.2 Quality of Staff and Partners

The second key obstacle apparent in the data was the quality of frontline staff and partners. In fact, quality of staff and partners is a point raised even more strongly than quantity of staff by interviewees. The *Taking Stock 3* review found that there were shortcomings in principles and values of ALPS practice and noted that “In part this relates to the quality and skill of frontline staff on the ground” (Fowler & Crane, 2010, p. 17). There are two aspects here which are problematic: how staff are recruited and partners are selected, and the induction and training provided by ActionAid on ALPS and related processes.

In terms of how the recruitment of staff impacts on downward accountability, numerous interviewees spoke of a shift, since the introduction of the human rights-based approach in the late 1990s, to the recruitment and promotion of staff which could write and speak well in policy fora, rather than those which could work well with communities and partners. Newman (2011, p. 262) notes:

ActionAid had inadvertently excluded the voices of those to whom it strove to be most accountable. The gap existed in part because of the emphasis at the recruitment stage where policy and advocacy skills were being stressed, over and above experience in programme development and community participation.

A former staff member recalled, “[Salil] recruited activists . . . there was a move to not valuing community development skills.” A staff member commented, “people are being hired on paper qualifications, not for values and learning spirit - staff have [*sic*] lost the skills for participatory processes”. Criticising one decision of country director (CD)

recruitment, one interviewee, a staff member, said, “They looked for activists not management skills. It was about articulating. This was the case in many countries. It was about aura and profile whereas being a CD needs a whole range of skills.” Thus, the predominant view of interviewees is that there has been a tendency to recruit the wrong type of staff for community level work.

With respect to partners, given that a significant amount of the direct community work within ActionAid programmes is now being implemented by partner staff rather than ActionAid staff, partners’ understanding of, willingness for and practice of downward accountability to community members is crucial for ActionAid’s accountability. The partnership policy document states that:

All partners must share ActionAid’s commitment to accountability and transparency. The partnership should detail explicitly how accountability to poor and excluded rights- holders will be realised, and what information will be provided to demonstrate transparency. (ActionAid, 2009b, p. 7)

However, a specific area of weakness of some ActionAid partners, which was mentioned frequently, was that of poor linkages to the communities in which they work. ActionAid Kenya staff spoke of dysfunctional ‘community-based organisations’ that had been established purely to seek partnership with ActionAid, without any community ownership (ActionAid Kenya, 2004, p. 4). The case study of transparency boards in Kenya highlighted the “privacy” of information to “partners’ elites” as a hindrance to accountability (ActionAid Kenya, 2010, p. 22). Similarly, one of the reviewers of the Nepal social audit process above attributed the lack of focus in PRRPs on accountability to the fact that they were run by partners (Misra, p. 57 cited by Caplan p.14). More broadly, interviewees and documents highlighted that ActionAid partners are often weak and dependant on a dominant ActionAid (Elbers & Schulpen, 2011, pp. 13-14; Imam, 2010, p. 14). The DA Review notes that the problem of dependency, and partners lacking their own coherent vision, is more pronounced in Africa (ActionAid, 2010b, p.

12)⁴³. Thus, partners' accountability to communities is often raised as a challenging area by ActionAid staff raising questions about partner selection (ActionAid, 2009a, p. 3).

The issue of the quality of staff and partners⁴⁴ to implement ALPS processes is related, not just to recruitment and selection, but also to induction and guidance. Many interviewees spoke of the lack of induction and support given to staff and partners to embody the principles and behaviours required by ALPS, and to deal with difficult areas of culture and power dynamics that arise in participatory work. David and Mancini (2004, pp. 11-13) describe how this area was weak in the early days of ALPS. It was noted above that a proposal for a comprehensive training and induction on ALPS for country programmes was rejected by senior management, despite support being requested by many country directors. Referring to the situation within the UK office the authors note, "A strong induction process explaining the philosophy and thinking behind the new accountability, learning and planning system was vital. This was never given priority. It was a major mistake" (p. 13).

Guijt (2004, pp. 32-33) in the *Taking Stock 2* ALPS review, while commending the openness and critical engagement of staff, found that investment in ALPS had not been sufficient and that attitudes and behaviours were left entirely to the discretion of staff. She elaborates:

The lack of staff capacity is stifling the further uptake of ALPS. Competency gaps exist in analytical writing, facilitation, gender and power analysis, as well as limited understanding of the need for ALPS (Kantelberg 2004) and in particular of how to operationalise the principles. (p. 31)

In her broader *Taking Stock 2* review in 2004, Bhasin (p. 18) cites an interviewee who noted that "AA has done and is willing to do very little work inside, on people and their attitudes and behaviour. There is little attempt to change people and to reflect on processes". Similarly, the 2007 ALPS review noted that:

⁴³ On the other hand, some of ActionAid's partners are reported to be extremely strong in terms of downward accountability processes. For example, the management response to the DA Review cites a positive example of transparency of partners in Pakistan, and the *Exchanges* newsletter highlighted a positive example of participatory processes by partners in India (ActionAid, 2001a, p. 11, 2010b, p. 22)

⁴⁴ It should be recalled that no partner was interviewed at the international level, which possibly explains why the data in this section are somewhat skewed towards the needs of staff for training.

Embedding Alps requires more than training on ‘how to’ – it requires transforming attitudes and behaviours, unlearning traditional ways of managing programmes. It requires changing organizational culture to create an enabling environment. (ActionAid, p. 3)

The same review found that many staff members did not have an adequate understanding of ALPS and that “much more work” was required on attitudes and behaviours (p. 19).

In recent years, there was a decision to invest more of the capacity of the Impact Assessment and Shared Learning Unit (IASL) into capacity building of staff for ALPS, particularly to enhance learning and the quality and consistency of ALPS processes and ActionAid’s multiple accountabilities more broadly. However, interviewees, including those from IASL, did not see this as adequate. The 2007 review, in fact, stressed the crucial role of managers.

One staff member expressed the need for more support for staff: “ActionAid staff do [*sic*] need guidance and have been grabbing rules from others. They can’t make these things up on their own, they don’t have the time or the knowledge.” Another former staff member referred to the “ceremonial” nature of ALPS processes if staff did not have enough guidance. One issue which accentuates the need for induction and training is high turnover within ActionAid, which I return to in the discussion chapter. Having discussed issues around quantity and quality of staff and partners, and how these emerged as barriers to downward accountability, I now turn to the issue of donor requirements as an obstacle to ALPS implementation.

4.13.3 Prioritisation of Donor Requirements

ActionAid has two main types of donor: individual and institutional. Thirty-one per cent of ActionAid’s global income in 2011 came from official donors or governments, which are the most significant institutional donors for ActionAid (ActionAid, 2012a, p. 4).

This percentage of income coming from official donors is a significant increase on the

past⁴⁵, as ActionAid has tended to be largely dependent on individual donor, or sponsor funds. In 2011, 48% of income came from child sponsorship⁴⁶. In this section, I discuss how accountability to institutional donors - upward accountability - is said to be negatively affecting downward accountability, as this was a key theme in the data at international level.

As noted in the literature review chapter, a major development in the international NGO sector in recent years has been the increasing focus on results (Shutt, 2009; Wallace, et al., 2007). As with managerial approaches more broadly, the implementation of results-based management approaches is highly controversial within the development sector. Three issues were apparent at the ActionAid International level that negatively impacted on ALPS implementation: the heavy burden imposed by time-consuming and reductionist donor requirements, the prioritisation of donor requirements over community accountability processes, and the lack of challenge by ActionAid of donor requirements.

My data show that the institutional donor requirements are seen by ActionAid staff members to be both overly-bureaucratic and reductionist. ActionAid directors referred to the “Increasing donor insistence on the ‘counting bednets’ style of accountability” (ActionAid, 2010g). Indeed, interviewees complained about the linear notions of change under results-based management approaches, one referring as these understandings as “over-simplistic”. Many interviewees expressed concern that the largely quantitative donor requirements leave little room for reflection or context-specificity and are thus incompatible with ALPS processes. These requirements will tend to compromise downward accountability as they take up much ActionAid staff time.

This relates to the second key issue of prioritisation. Interviews and recent documentation suggest that ALPS and donor processes are happening in parallel, rather than there being one system of primarily downward accountability which feeds into

⁴⁵ In 2002, the official donors figure was 19% as opposed to 67% from child sponsors (ActionAid, 2004a, p. 28, 2012a, p. 4). The *Taking Stock 3* fundraising review notes that most of this increase is due to the merger of ActionAid with MS Denmark whereby ActionAid gained funding from the Danish government (Sherrington, 2010, p. 5).

⁴⁶ Other income includes individual donations, funds from the UK Disasters Emergency Committee and Ayuda en Acción, donations from companies, trusts and NGOs and investment income (ActionAid, 2012a, p. 17).

donor and other accountabilities, as was envisioned in ALPS (Adams & Chachra, 2009, p. 12; IASL, 2009b; Newman, 2011, p. 23). In other words, proposals and reports for donors are being written separately from PRRPs and other community processes (ActionAid, 2007). There is a consensus in the data that, of the two separate streams, donor accountability is being prioritised over community accountability. The *Taking Stock 2* review team concluded that upward accountability was far stronger in ActionAid than accountability to values (Jacobs, 2004b). A peer review⁴⁷ in Nigeria in 2009 also observed the dominance of upward accountability (IASL, 2009b, p. 2). This was a major theme during the *Reimagining Accountability* workshop in 2010.

Thirdly, the 2007 ALPS review found that ActionAid staff members are generally continuing to satisfy donor requirements as normal, rarely challenging the donor on the nature of these requirements to promote downward accountability, as was envisioned in ALPS (ActionAid, 2000, p. 21). Eyben (2006, pp. 8-14), in her research study on ActionAid, recalls that, in the early years of ALPS, ActionAid objected to the logframe requirement in the DfID Partnership Programme Arrangement. However, she notes that, later, ActionAid attempted to diversify its funding from child sponsorship toward more institutional funding

to release itself from the powerful grip of its own marketing team and the pressure of one way accountability back to the donor. However, it found that it had jumped from the frying pan into the fire. Government donors, such as DFID, proved to be equally insistent on reporting procedures that focussed on their needs, rather than being accountable for performance to the citizens in the South for whom ActionAid exists. (p. 14)

Similarly, one former advisor felt that ActionAid missed the opportunity around the year 2000 to influence the donor agenda on accountability, and that now it is too late as linear notions of change have taken hold too strongly: “It should have been the start of something. Now it’s different, NGOs are imperialist, we set targets, fill in dots. Results-based management . . . Now is not the time for innovation, participation, respect for local culture.”

⁴⁷ Peer reviews are one of the ALPS processes and involve a team made up of representatives of trustees and staff from different countries within ActionAid International visiting a country to share learning and to ascertain consistency with ActionAid policies and strategies (ActionAid, 2006a).

However, it should be noted that other interviewees stated that ActionAid tends to blame donors for their conditions when, in fact, ActionAid itself has responsibility in accepting funds under these conditions, related perhaps to a continuous organisational drive for growth as discussed in the literature review chapter. I return to the issue of growth and funding dynamics in more depth in the discussion and conclusion chapters. I conclude this section with the fourth obstacle: leadership.

4.13.4 Leadership

The final obstacle evident at operational level, leadership, impacts considerably on the other obstacles. Leadership commitment and prioritisation were frequently mentioned by interviewees as critical to the implementation of downward accountability in ALPS (Guijt, 2004). At international level, at different times, the leadership of certain individuals, or the lack thereof, was said to either promote or hinder ALPS implementation. For instance, in a case study of ActionAid Sri Lanka, former IASL regional advisor Yoneda (2008, p. 8) notes:

not all ActionAid Sri Lanka staff may have been aware of ALPS document. Nonetheless, “ALPS way” of working was visible within the organization. ALPS has been internalized within ActionAid Sri Lanka, not through formal induction and training, but through implicit norms and organizational culture that govern our way of life. Practice speaks more powerfully than any kind of talk. The management has consistently demonstrated ALPS principles in their relationships with the staff, even when making such a sensitive decision as downsizing the organization. The management practice has set the norm for the rest, and has positively influenced relationships between the staff.

At international level, according to interviews and documents, the leadership of then-trustee Robert Chambers, as well as other trustees and senior staff members, such as Africa Director, Colin Williams, was said to have been invaluable at the inception of ALPS (David & Mancini, 2011). On the other hand, some interviewees felt that Salil Shetty, as Chief Executive, had not placed a high priority on ALPS, despite the fact that the system was introduced during his tenure. As one interviewee put it, “Salil was not inspired by ALPS”. A former staff member pointed to the leadership on ALPS of particular country directors in the early 2000s, which she felt had great potential, but

concluded that the lack of overall organisational leadership negated these efforts: “Meenu, Georgio in Brazil and John in Burundi [were] exploring and working, made it happen . . . But implementation completely died a death. They needed senior people to champion it. There was a critical period.”

Interviewees suggest that Salil Shetty and the Chief Executive that followed him, Ramesh Singh⁴⁸, were more concerned with bringing in the human rights-based approach and reforming ActionAid’s governance system, than they were with downward accountability. For instance, it is telling that there is little focus on downward accountability in the international *Rights to End Poverty Strategy* drafted in 2005, and that ALPS is not mentioned in the strategy, although there is one reference to PRRPs. The organisational objective around ‘accountability’ in the strategy is primarily about governance (ActionAid, 2005b). Indeed, the IASL self-review for the *Taking Stock 3* strategy reflecting on the period 2005-10 notes that “although accountability and Alps in system, the exciting new accountability issue was governance (e.g. internationalisation/board development) so much of management attention went to that” (2010, p. 4). When Ramesh Singh took an increased interest in accountability late in his tenure in 2009, the documentation shows that downward accountability was not among his main concerns. In a letter of key priorities for 2010-11, Ramesh noted five priorities for accountability, none of which related to ALPS or downward accountability specifically, although one was the Open Information Policy implementation⁴⁹ (Singh, 2009).

One way in which the lack of leadership manifested itself at the international level was in the lack of accountability inside the organisation for the implementation of ALPS. One staff member commented, “There’s no accountability for accountability in Action Aid. Questions are asked but nobody checks up.” The *Taking Stock 3* governance review noted that “the application of a revised version of Alps, following the

⁴⁸ Ramesh Singh’s successor, Joanna Kerr, took office in June 2010 and resigned in July 2013. The majority of her emphasis during the period of my field work appeared to be on the formulation of the new strategy, *People’s Action to End Poverty* 2012-17, which, as noted earlier, was a remarkably participatory process within ActionAid and with external stakeholders. By the time I finished my field work, interviewees had not yet identified clear policy directions of Joanna Kerr. Since the completion of my field work, these have become more evident, in particular, a significant restructuring of ActionAid’s management.

⁴⁹ The other four priorities were the management information system, monitoring and evaluation, a resource allocation framework, and improving cost ratios (Singh, 2009).

agreed universal roll out in 2006, proved uneven, with no consequences for those responsible” (Fowler & Crane, 2010, p. 16). When a review system for ALPS was established in 2009, only 11 countries out of 43 returned the ‘mandatory’ self-review, but there was no sanction for non-compliance (IASL, 2010, p. 4). The IASL 2008 annual report noted that, apart from planning, which has resource implications, “there is no management consequence for a team that does not carry out any other Alps process or fulfil Alps standards” (2009a, p. 3)⁵⁰.

Thus, leadership was seen as a key obstacle to ALPS implementation. In the discussion chapter, I return to some of the factors which may have influenced the leadership in its decision-making. Having discussed the operational obstacles hindering downward accountability at the international level, I now move to the chapter’s conclusion.

4.14 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the ActionAid International component of my case study of ALPS, and in doing so, has provided a useful backdrop for my next chapter on ActionAid Uganda. The chapter reconstructed the history of ALPS and described the organisational context in which it began and evolved. In line with my actor-oriented approach, I examined both the ‘theory’ and practice of ALPS at international level. I found significant disconnects between what was intended by ALPS and the practice, despite the brochure talk which is propagated by various stakeholders. This brochure talk helps to sustain the ‘myth of ALPS’, whereby ALPS has become famous within the sector for its achievements in downward accountability.

This chapter has begun the analysis of why the disjuncture exists between what ActionAid intended, and what is actually happening. I discuss operational challenges

⁵⁰ In particular, poor internal accountability and weak performance management were expressed constantly as problems in ActionAid, affecting all areas of work. This was a strong finding of *Taking Stock 3* (L. David Brown, 2010, pp. 25, 29). One interviewee who left the organisation in 2006 linked these macro-issues specifically to ALPS implementation: “until ActionAid sorts out its own internal accountability process, and then its relationship with partners it is very difficult to expect PRRPs to be effective. . .while there is no concept of internal accountability within ActionAid, or a concept of mutual accountability in relation to partners it sort of makes a mockery of any idea that ActionAid can or will be accountable to the grassroots”.

around staff and partner quantity and quality, donor requirements and leadership. The discussion chapter continues and deepens this analysis, looking at the more fundamental issues which make downward accountability seem improbable. Before that, my next chapter on ActionAid Uganda, based on considerably more primary data, takes a more in-depth contextual look at the same themes.

5. ALPS in Action in Uganda

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the core of my primary data, in describing and analysing how ActionAid Uganda's accountability aspirations are playing out in practice, using an actor-oriented approach. Notably, as Long (2001, p. 89) calls for, I bring in voices of groups which are, on the surface at least, relatively powerless, i.e. junior staff and community members, as well as voices of leaders and managers. As has been noted, there is a major gap in the literature, both the ALPS literature and the NGO accountability literature more broadly, of in-depth case studies of accountability practices in particular contexts. This is particularly important given that accountability is not just a technical issue for NGOs, but is closely linked to contextual issues such as culture and power dynamics, as noted in the literature review chapter. This study of ActionAid Uganda (AAU) contributes to filling this gap in the literature with a holistic analysis of downward accountability practices, and the various factors affecting them, over a time period of almost 15 years. Building on the previous chapter's historical reconstruction of ALPS, and its analysis of the key issues at the international level, this chapter drills down to the national and local levels.

The data in this chapter comes from 100 interviews, 618 documents, a survey, and observation over a four month period in 2011. The actor-oriented approach encouraged me to include the narratives of all actors, not to be restricted "only to those actors and elements identified in the discourses and practices of development institutions and personnel" (Long, 2001, p. 89). Thus, stakeholders interviewed included staff and former staff, partners, trustees, community members, donors, advisors, NGO network representatives and government officials at national, district and local levels (see Appendix 1). I reviewed documents relating to ActionAid Uganda's accountabilities, as well as a broader set of documents to gain a comprehensive understanding of the organisation. I took the same approach to observation, focussing mostly on processes and meetings related to accountability, but also attending general meetings on areas such

as strategy formulation and audit. As noted in the methodology chapter, there was significant interaction between the methods of interviews, documents and observation. Despite its limitations, as have been outlined in the methodology chapter, the survey carried out of 30 AAU staff provides some useful data. In addition to the national level perspective, I placed a particular emphasis on interviewing, observing and reading documents on two operational areas (Katakwi and Pallisa LRPs) in order to hone in on the detail of local-level practice.

Methods provided historical, as well as current information and perspectives on ALPS in Uganda. I made a particular attempt to interview stakeholders with a long-standing relationship with ActionAid, and to seek documents from the mid-1990s to 2011. While the documents provided important information about developments within the organisation, interviews were particularly useful in their insights on how stakeholders understood and felt about these developments. My direct observation of ActionAid Uganda operations, especially participatory processes, was critical in demonstrating what was actually happening with ALPS in a certain place, at a certain time, as opposed to what was said to be happening. Participant observation was particularly important in light of the fact that so little of the sparse empirical literature on ALPS or NGO accountability is based on direct observation. The staff survey and interviews added stakeholder perspectives to complement what I saw and heard.

This second of my data chapters, mirroring the first, serves four main functions for my dissertation. Firstly, it reconstructs the evolution of ALPS within one particular context, bringing in the different perspectives of actors involved. Secondly, this chapter highlights the brochure talk and the ‘myth of ALPS’ at the Uganda level. Thirdly, it tackles my sub-questions by comparing ActionAid’s stated intentions with the observed realities of ALPS practices and by highlighting the disjuncture that exists. In Uganda, as at international level, I find that ALPS processes are taking place but that, despite the persistence of brochure talk, these processes seem to have lost much of the intended spirit of downward accountability. Fourthly, this chapter proposes preliminary findings on why the practices are not living up to the organisation’s intentions or the brochure talk, building on the framework from the previous chapter as per my main research question. Most of the operational obstacles at Uganda level align with those at

international level, but some interesting differences exist which are explored. For instance, while the main ‘donor’ concern at international level related to institutional donors, sponsorship funding was far more frequently cited as an obstacle to downward accountability in Uganda. The analysis of these obstacles is deepened in the discussion chapter that follows.

5.2 Structure of This Chapter

I start this chapter by giving a brief introduction to the NGO sector in Uganda and NGO relationships with the state, by way of background. Using ethnographic ‘thick description’ based on observation, interviews and documents, I then describe the major developments within ActionAid Uganda since the mid 1990s, particularly as they relate to downward accountability⁵¹. I subsequently discuss the findings of my research on ActionAid Uganda’s accountability to intended beneficiaries and the disjuncture that exists between intentions and practices. I conclude this chapter by highlighting some operational obstacles which are contributing to this disconnect in the Ugandan context.

5.3 NGOs in Uganda

A brief introduction to the context for NGOs in Uganda is provided here to set the scene for my discussion of ActionAid Uganda and its partners. Apart from document review, this section is based on interviews with Ugandan government officials, academics, and NGO network representatives at national, district and local levels.

Civil society organisations have been active in Uganda since at least the 1920s. During colonial times, these organisations usually took the form of co-operatives, trade unions and mission hospitals (Burger, 2012, p. 99; DENIVA, 2006, p. 19). Uganda’s post-colonial politics was notoriously turbulent and organisations were tightly regulated. By the time the current president, Yoweri Museveni, took power in 1986, “chaos had

⁵¹ In this dissertation the ActionAid internal context is discussed considerably more than the Ugandan context. This is due to the fact that the Ugandan context appeared to play far less of a role in what happened with downward accountability in ActionAid Uganda than the ActionAid organisational context. This resonates with a comment from one of my interviewees about the aid sector, under managerialism, moving away from considerations of context. It recalls Lewis and Mosse’s (p. 4) discussion, citing Mitchell (2002, pp. 15, 36) of the desire, within the increasingly managerialist development sector, for the appearance of a “locationless [policy] logic” which drives action, but which is far from the complexity and messiness of actual practices.

only allowed a truncated form of civil society to emerge, much weaker than in some other parts of East Africa at the time” (De Coninck, 2004, pp. 56-57) .

In 2011 there were an estimated 10,000 NGOs in Uganda, which indicates a phenomenal growth from the 1986 figure of 160 (Kwesiga & Namisi, 2006, p. 82; Namara, 2009, p. 54; NGO Forum, 2011, p. 1)⁵². Factors influencing the rapid growth included increased foreign donor interest in NGOs, and sub-contracting opportunities for NGOs which emerged from the shift to decentralised government in Uganda (One World Trust, 2009, p. 6). Traditionally in Uganda, NGOs contributed in the areas of health, education and relief work. Currently, NGOs of all sizes are to be found in a wide range of sectors, including agriculture, HIV&AIDS, and children’s rights.

A detailed study in 2006, commissioned by international civil society network Civicus, assessed the Ugandan NGO sector and raised some criticisms. The study concludes that NGOs:

appear to often be a donor-dependent part of civil society, with staff, vehicles, projects and agendas that ordinary people do not always associate with, or feel close to. It is a somewhat fragmented and competitive sector that is often governed by suspicion, and where accountability to donors often takes precedence over accountability to the local population. (DENIVA, 2006, p. 5)

Similarly, Omona and Mukuye (2013), in a study involving respondents from 100 Ugandan NGOs, are critical of the organisations’ accountability, transparency, flexibility to community needs, community roots and internal democracy. Later in this chapter some of these weaknesses, particularly lack of closeness to their supposed ‘constituents’, emerge with regards to some of the organisations with which ActionAid Uganda has partnered over the years. Having given this brief introduction to the NGO sector in Uganda, I now discuss NGO relations with the Ugandan State.

5.4 NGO Relationships with the State

This section looks at two inter-related aspects of NGO relationships with the Ugandan state: NGO legislation and the stance of the government toward NGO advocacy.

⁵² Namara (2009, p. 53) notes the difficulty in obtaining accurate statistics on the number of NGOs in the country due to the constant change in this number and the limited capacity of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to keep updated lists.

Relationships between the Ugandan state and NGOs are complex and have suffered from tensions in recent years. The 1995 Ugandan Constitution guarantees freedom of speech, assembly and association, including to civic organisations seeking to influence government (Hayman, et al., 2013, p. 28). However, in 2006, the Civicus Civil Society Index rated the civil society environment in Uganda as ‘disabling’ rather than enabling (DENIVA, 2006). Tensions between the Ugandan state and NGOs have risen since approximately 2000. Some members of the government began, at that time, to question the mandate, legitimacy and accountability of NGOs. NGOs were also accused of threatening national security, by opposing the government and fuelling the war in Northern Uganda (Chapman, 2009, pp. 8-10). The NGO sector in Uganda has been active in self-regulation, particularly through the launch of the ‘Quality Assurance Mechanism’ in 2006, which sets out standards of responsible practice in areas such as governance, finances and the involvement of beneficiaries (Chapman, 2009, p. 18; DENIVA & UNNGOF, 2006). However, these initiatives have not had the effect of curbing the trend toward tighter regulation by government.

Despite significant lobbying by the NGO sector, such as the networks Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA)⁵³ and the NGO Forum, ‘The Non-Governmental Organizations Registration (Amendment) Act’ was passed in 2006 to the dismay of many NGOs (Larok & Kija, 2009). The Act and its 2009 regulations give significant powers to an NGO board, under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, to register and regulate the activities of NGOs. The key issues of contention are the non-recognition of advocacy NGOs, wide discretionary powers of the NGO board, and heavy, yet changeable, registration requirements (DENIVA, 2009; Government of Uganda, 2006, 2009; Larok & Kija, 2009; Tiwana, 2006).

In reality, many provisions of the NGO Act and Regulations are rarely enforced. No NGO has, to date, been deregistered. According to Larok and Kija (2009) of the

⁵³ There are two main NGO networks in Uganda: DENIVA and the Uganda National NGO Forum, both heavily involved in issues around NGO accountability and the enabling environment for NGOs in Uganda. DENIVA was founded in 1988 and has over 700 members. The Uganda National NGO Forum, was founded in 1997 and has over 400 members (Namara, 2009, pp. 58-63; NGO Forum, 2013).

NGO Forum⁵⁴, the state wants to maintain restrictive legislation which can be invoked as and when deemed necessary, in particular when NGOs undertake political actions that appear to pose a threat to the government. In a parallel development, an NGO Policy was formulated in 2010, with significant NGO input, and this policy is considerably more positive than the Act on the contribution of NGOs to Uganda's development (Government of Uganda, 2010; NGO Forum, 2011).

In recent years the advocacy and policy influencing work of NGOs in Uganda has increased significantly on a wide range of issues, including good governance and democratisation (Olum, 2010, p. 2). This shift in the work of NGOs is perceived negatively by some elements of the Ugandan government, viewing NGOs' involvement in politics as inappropriate. During my field work in 2011, which began just after the February 2011 elections, considerable civil disobedience took place, including demonstrations on high food and fuel prices, interest rates, and public sector salaries (ActionAid Uganda, 2012d, pp. 6-7). At one point, staff members of the NGO Forum, of which ActionAid is a member, were briefly imprisoned for being part of the civil disobedience. A controversial Public Order Management Act was passed in August 2013 after almost two years of debate. ActionAid Uganda cited this act as likely to become a "major intrusion into the fundamental rights to associate, assemble and express opinions" (ActionAid Uganda, 2012b, pp. 1, 2). For instance, the Act puts severe restrictions on meetings to discuss political issues (ICNL, 2013).

Thus, ActionAid often walks a fine line, needing to be registered by the government as per the NGO legislation - since its internationalisation process, ActionAid Uganda registers in countries as a national NGO - while at the same time, wanting to confront the government, directly and through its partners as part of its human rights-based approach. Having introduced the context of NGOs in Uganda and their relationships with the state, I now describe the evolution of ActionAid's work in Uganda.

⁵⁴ Arthur Larok, formerly of the NGO Forum, is now the Country Director of ActionAid Uganda.

5.5 ActionAid in Uganda: “Country Director Is King”

It was often stated by interviewees that the country director in ActionAid holds enormous sway over the direction of the country programme (David, et al., 2006, p. 145). As one interviewee put it, “the country director is king”. ActionAid Uganda is no exception to this. My findings showed that the top leadership in Uganda has played a large role in the priorities of the country programme and hence the priority given to ALPS and downward accountability over the years (Guijt, 2004, p. 31). Before detailing the different phases of ActionAid Uganda’s development since the mid 1990s, I provide a summary in Table 5.1 of the different focus areas of the various country directors, as relates to accountability. This information is then elaborated on in the sections to follow, starting with ActionAid Uganda pre-1998.

Table 5.1: Focus Areas of ActionAid Uganda Country Directors

| Dates | Country Director | Focus Areas |
|-----------|--|--|
| 1994-1998 | Anthony Wasswa Ugandan | -mission, vision, values -community management <i>-Reflect</i> |
| 1998-2003 | Meenu Vadera Indian | -organisational learning -collective leadership -partnership -human rights-based approach & advocacy -women’s rights |
| 2003-4 | <i>Transition-John Bulega (Acting)</i> | |
| 2004-2007 | Amanda Sserumaga Canadian | -advocacy and human rights-based approach -women’s rights -governance structure |
| 2007-8 | <i>Transition Joan Sawe (Acting)</i> | |
| 2008-2012 | Charles Businge Ugandan | -financial accountability -relationships with donors and government -participatory approaches -governance structure |

5.6 Early Days of ActionAid in Uganda: The Pre-1998 Era

ActionAid started working in Uganda from a base in Kenya in 1982 to assist the country during and after the highly destructive war that ended in 1986 (Kabenge, Magala, Mugisha, & Mpagi, 2005, p. 2). By the late 1990s, under the country director Anthony Wasswa, ActionAid Uganda was undertaking major service delivery projects such as building schools and roads, with up to 200 staff at a time. As with ActionAid at the international level, 1998 was something of a watershed year for ActionAid Uganda, when a country director, Meenu Vadera, took office who, like Salil Shetty, had a radically different approach to her predecessors.

One of the striking aspects of my early field work with ActionAid Uganda was how differently the pre-1998 period of ActionAid's work is perceived by different actors, specifically most of the Ugandan staff which worked in the organisation at the time and some of those who subsequently looked back on it. Before my field work, based on international interviews and documents, the impression I had of ActionAid Uganda pre-1998 was of a hierarchical, insular, static, organisation with heavily service delivery- oriented programme activities (Wallace & Kaplan, 2003). However, in the first days of my field work, when I interviewed a number of staff members in Uganda about that period, I was struck by how positive they were.

Most ActionAid staff members who worked at that time reported feeling very close to the communities they were serving. They highlighted the community management of projects of that period as highly progressive within the context. In at least certain areas of the country, community members were empowered to plan, budget and monitor their own activities. In addition, the participatory methodology *Reflect* was operating in some parts of the programme (ActionAid Uganda, 2000a). The combination of this participatory approach with the tangible contributions ActionAid was making to the community through service provision and infrastructure programmes made this a very special time for these ActionAid staff. Anthony Wasswa was known by staff as 'Mr. MVV' because he focussed on ensuring that staff knew about the mission, vision and values of ActionAid.

To understand how such different perceptions of the pre-1998 country programme can co-exist requires a level of understanding of the wider context of NGOs like ActionAid in Uganda at the time. After the war ended in 1986, the country, and its infrastructure, were completely devastated. International NGOs such as ActionAid played an important role in re-building infrastructure such as schools, water points, and roads.

However, by the late 1990s, the development status of the country had significantly improved. What's more, new thinking had come into the development sector in Uganda and internationally in terms of partnership with local organisations, government's responsibility for development work, and citizens getting more engaged in demanding services from their government (Okwaare & Chapman, 2006). Within developing countries, the new thinking was most pronounced in South Asia and Latin America - both regions with long civil society traditions and relatively strong organisations. In this context, and in the context of the aforementioned shift within ActionAid International, a new Indian country director started work in ActionAid Uganda in 1998, taking over from Anthony Wasswa and bringing with her many of these new ideas. The period of Meenu Vadera's tenure is detailed in the next section.

5.7 Major Change in ActionAid Uganda: 1998-2003

The new country director, Meenu Vadera, like then-Chief Executive Salil Shetty, had spent most of her career in ActionAid India. India was considered to be a highly advanced ActionAid country programme at the time in terms of the approaches emphasised in the global *Fighting Poverty Together* strategy, such as partnership and working in a human rights-based approach. Coming from this background, interviewees reported that Meenu was taken aback with what she encountered in ActionAid Uganda. Meenu reportedly found the Uganda country office to be overly bureaucratic with programmes which were too ActionAid-centric, and a lack of learning from other organisations.

A review commissioned by Meenu in 2000, conducted by British development academic Tina Wallace with a team from the country programme, provided support to Meenu's impressions (ActionAid Uganda, 2000a; Okwaare & Chapman, 2006). The

review commended ActionAid's committed and skilled staff, strong poverty-focus, good reputation, and its emerging work on national-level campaigns and partnerships. However, it also found that the organisation was widely spread and activity focussed, with over-burdened staff members who lacked time to reflect on their work and instead rigidly followed hierarchy and procedures, rather than questioning whether these made sense in the context or circumstances (ActionAid Uganda, 2000a).

Supported by a strong management team which she put in place, Meenu set about transforming the country programme, firstly in terms of programme priorities and modalities, and secondly in terms of organisational development. These aspects are elaborated in the next two sections.

5.7.1 Programming Shifts

Similar to the shifts occurring around the same time at international level under the *Fighting Poverty Together* strategy, the main changes in terms of programme during Meenu's tenure were a shift to work predominantly in partnership, and the instituting of the human-rights based approach (HRBA) and advocacy work at all levels (ActionAid Uganda, 2001c).

The first shift, partnership, was a major change of orientation for the organisation. While partnerships existed in the late 1990s, not least the extremely successful partnership with the HIV&AIDS organisation, The AIDS Support Organisation, the country programme review found that most partnerships to date had been focussed on sub-contracting of specific programme activities by ActionAid, rather than allowing partners autonomy for driving their own poverty reduction activities (ActionAid Uganda, 2000a, p. 58). Meenu vastly increased the focus on the latter form of partnership. During Meenu's tenure, the organisation went from partnering with 56 partners in 1999, to 116 in 2000, and to almost 200 in 2001 (ActionAid Uganda, 2001a, 2002a, p. 3). Simultaneously, there was a significant reduction in staff numbers, as the country programme set about becoming leaner in order to let partners take the lead. From 202 staff members in 1994, numbers dropped to 142 staff members in 2000, and to 99 staff members in 2003 (ActionAid Uganda, 1994, p. 6, 2001a, 2004).

The second shift, moving toward implementing a human rights-based approach, rather than simply a service delivery approach, became central to ActionAid Uganda's programming, with a particular focus on women's rights. For instance, ActionAid's country strategy paper, 2001-5, included as objectives the influencing of the district government to work in participatory ways, and the promotion of pro-poor usage of funds by government at district level (ActionAid Uganda, 2001c, pp. 39-40).

However, perhaps the most fundamental shift attempted by Meenu was not within the realm of programme strategies, but was rather an organisational transformation, which is described in the next section.

5.7.2 Organisational Shifts

Meenu aimed to turn ActionAid Uganda into a decentralised learning organisation, whose staff exercised collective leadership. As she wrote:

One of the early principles that we made clear to ourselves was that true decentralisation could only be possible when there was a collective leadership, of the country programme. Collective leadership of a team that could be critical, reflective and rigorous in learning to work in ways that help the organisation to keep responding in flexible and meaningful ways to the external environment. (ActionAid Uganda, 2002b, p. 1)

Meenu instituted various learning mechanisms such as learning diaries and mentorship to promote reflection and learning. A manual called '*Kanambut: Learning, Planning and Reporting Guidelines for ActionAid Uganda*' was developed in 2000 to guide staff. In particular, *Kanambut* was aimed at reducing bureaucratic planning and reporting and enhancing critical thinking along with partners and community members. *Kanambut* is a word in Eastern Uganda (Kapchorwa) for a chameleon, a creature that learns, and adapts, as it moves (ActionAid Uganda, 2000b).

Becoming a learning organisation required reflective and responsive staff members, rather than those who simply followed hierarchy. This principle was the central tenet of an organisational development (OD) process for which Meenu hired veteran development thinkers Tina Wallace and Allan Kaplan as long-term consultants from 1999 to 2002. Wallace and Kaplan were to assist in reforming the organisational structure and ways of working of ActionAid Uganda to facilitate the new programme

direction. The OD process consisted of regular workshops, leadership retreats, training and various other activities with staff over the course of three years (Okwaare & Chapman, 2006). A group of about forty members of ActionAid leadership was included.

When I began my exploratory research on ActionAid, the Uganda country programme during Meenu's time stood out, from documents and international interviews, as a champion of ALPS. ActionAid Uganda seemed to be one of the few examples of country programmes that had seriously invested in organisational change for ALPS. Its production of a 'domesticated version of ALPS' (*Kanambut*) was lauded (ActionAid Uganda, 2000b; Okwaare & Chapman, 2006). Authors praised the OD process as a rare example of investment in the necessary capacities for ALPS. The results of the "intensive processes" in Uganda were said to have been "transforming" (Chapman, et al., 2003, p. 149; David & Mancini, p. 6, 2004, p. 23; David, et al., 2006, p. 147). A comment in the 2004 *Taking Stock 2* review is typical of descriptions of ActionAid Uganda's efforts:

AA Uganda's ceaseless efforts are particularly well known and documented. . . Two years of creative, sensitive reflection and team building work made this transformation possible. Success is indeed possible if we trust people's abilities to evolve and if we facilitate the process of growth, growth in individual and collective thought and action. (Bhasin, 2004, p. 7)

Okwaare and Chapman (2006, p. 176) are similarly complimentary:

through the different meeting foras [*sic*], the [*Kanambut*] system has encouraged greater participation, improved our analysis of power and gender, enhanced a culture of transparency and openness, and increased our accountability to poor people, partners and other stakeholders.

Yet, I discovered during my field work that the perspective at Uganda level was much more complex. This is where findings from interviews and national level documentation clashed with impressions from international documentation. For instance, in terms of learning mechanisms, rather than 'domesticating' ALPS after it was written, *Kanambut* was actually initiated independently of ALPS and written, in part,

simultaneously⁵⁵. While there is considerable overlap in spirit and in content, the main emphasis of *Kanambut* was on internal learning, whereas ALPS was broader and expounded more on accountability at community level and requisite attitudes and behaviours.

The differing views in my data on the organisational development process are even more striking. One of my first introductions to ActionAid Uganda was reading the final report of this process, 'The Taking of the Horizon' (Wallace & Kaplan, 2003). The report pointed to a significant change within ActionAid Uganda, mainly in terms of staff members' mindsets. The consultants viewed that the organisation's staff had become more reflective and more open to new approaches to development that were less 'ActionAid-centric'. Wallace was reportedly "deeply struck by the huge gains made in terms of organisational openness and intelligence, demonstrated largely through the developing organisational capacity to reflect and learn, and adapt" (p. 55). Kaplan concluded that "Courage, and inner authority, remain key. And in these things above all, AAU has developed immeasurably" (p. 62).

However, in spite of positive reviews, there were areas of contention about the OD process, some raised by the consultants themselves. I describe two: the extent to which the process impacted on field staff and programme work, and its impact on individual staff members.

On the first point, the consultants noted in their final report that they were concerned that their work had not reached deeply enough to the field staff:

The openness, questioning, confidence seen in the leadership teams was not reflected in the programme staff, who showed signs of being quite cynical or disenchanted about aspects of AAU and who saw many contradictions in what AAU was saying and the ways that it was working. (p. 30)

Indeed, there was a wide consensus among my interviewees that the OD process did not reach the field level. One former staff member noted:

The OD process was very good at empowering leaders. The disadvantage was that the reflection stopped at the leadership level. They became strong leaders, there was creativity, an open process, a flatter structure, matrix

⁵⁵ The process of developing *Kanambut* ran from April to October 2000, whereas ALPS was published in July 2000.

management. . . . Leaders were empowered but frontline staff hadn't been taken through.

Related to the point about the process not reaching field staff, some interviewees felt that, while valuable in some ways, the process was disconnected from ActionAid's programmes and poor people. One former staff member recalled:

There was lots of confusion. The approach was good on paper but what were the tangible results? How was AA accountable at field level?Yes there was a vibrant team and respect, but what about the poor people? What to do? It was a case of paper versus the reality on the ground. . . . During Meenu's time there were efforts to bring everyone on board. There were big retreats with everybody but people were not convinced. They were organised in such a good way but how does it relate?

One staff member put it simply "The OD process didn't help AA become a better programme." In the discussion chapter, I demonstrate how disconnection from programme staff and work is a common feature of new initiatives and trends within the contemporary development NGO sector.

Secondly, regarding impact on individuals, a few of the staff and former staff who were heavily involved in the OD process remember it as a time of great personal growth and development. However, most remember the process primarily in terms of instability and job insecurity due to the restructuring taking place and the ensuing reduction in staff numbers. One typical quote from a former staff member is illustrative:

The OD process caused anxiety. In any of this, people's individual job [*sic*] is at the core. These processes may affect organisations but in a deeper way they affect individuals and cause anxieties. People not knowing whether staying or goingWhat will we get from it? What will this cause? Work goes on but by people who are anxious. . . . People didn't know what would happen and ended up leaving due to the insecurity.

This quote raises the harsh realities of livelihood concerns that can often be missed when organisations in developing countries are discussed in the abstract. These realities are all too dominant in the lives of many national staff. Recognising these kinds of staff issues which impact on what Hilhorst (2003) terms the 'real world of NGOs' is central to the actor-oriented approach. I return to this point in the discussion chapter.

Interviewees pointed out that the job insecurity resulting from the OD process led to turnover. For instance, staff turnover was 23% in 2001, 14% in 2002 and 23% in 2003

(Kabenge, et al., 2005, p. 28). Critically, the vast majority of Meenu's management team left the organisation by 2004, including Meenu herself, which hindered the OD process having a lasting impact, as will be evident as I continue with the story of ActionAid Uganda.

In sum, considerable time, expense, effort and energy went into the organisational reform processes instituted by Meenu. These processes, in promoting a learning culture and greater responsiveness and flexibility of staff members, could have laid the groundwork for ActionAid Uganda to improve its downward accountability. But my findings show that the OD process had significant shortcomings, notably a disconnection with the field level and a seeming lack of awareness of the impact of job insecurity on staff.

Yet, despite these shortcomings, the literature above praising the efforts as "transformative" demonstrates that a myth developed, particularly at ActionAid international level, about the effectiveness of the processes in Uganda. I came to hear and read about this myth when I began my research, in fact, this myth led to my initial interest in studying Uganda as a 'best case' example. While I found during my research that serious efforts were indeed made and that, as one of my interviewees said, "something special" happened in ActionAid Uganda at that time, I found that the descriptions at international level, as cited above, were misleading. The OD consultants themselves, in their final report, added serious caveats about the process having a lasting impact, not least, its failure to reach the field level. Nevertheless the articles above, written mostly by international staff or consultants⁵⁶, do not mention these important caveats in their brief descriptions of the process, and talk about "results" being "transformational" and "success" being demonstrated leading to the 'idealised conception' or myth. I return to this theme of myth in the discussion chapter. I now continue with the story of ActionAid Uganda, after Meenu Vadera's departure in 2003,

⁵⁶ The Okwaare and Chapman (2006) article is different to the others in two ways. Firstly, Sarah Okwaare was a staff member of ActionAid Uganda at the time of writing the article, although my data suggests that she was not very involved in the OD process, as she worked on an ActionAid International action research project during that time. Secondly, this article is the most detailed account of the OD and Kanambut processes, the other references above being no more than a few lines as quoted, with authors not having strong links to ActionAid Uganda.

which assists in understanding how developments under Meenu's leadership manifested themselves over time in terms of accountability to intended beneficiaries.

5.8 ActionAid Uganda Flounders: 2003-4

Meenu Vadera left ActionAid in mid-2003 and, until mid-2004, there was a vacancy in the post of country director. John Bulega, a member of the management team was selected as Acting Country Director. A long-time ActionAid employee, John was apparently selected among other management staff primarily as he did not have ambitions to become the country director. Two of his colleagues on the management team were applying for the post. John faced many challenges during what was a turbulent period within ActionAid Uganda.

After Meenu's departure, many staff members left the organisation; turnover was 23% in 2003 and 24% in 2004 from a staff of 90-100 (Kabenge, et al., 2005, p. 28). Interviewees report that uncertainty about the organisation's direction was the main factor contributing to turnover; the organisation was said to flounder and lose direction. Some believe that earlier progress on transforming the organisation was lost during this period (Okwaare & Chapman, 2006).

This was also a period when significant partner fraud⁵⁷ began to be uncovered. The annual report in 2003 noted that "working with partners has posed enormous challenges in the area of accountability for funds" (ActionAid Uganda, 2004, p. 47). It was estimated by one staff member working in finance at the time that fraud reached £50,000 (sterling) per year in the early 2000s. The 2005 evaluation of the country programme spoke of "rampant" fraud during the period 1999-2004 (Kabenge, et al., p. 39). This fraud is attributed to the large and rapid scale up in partnership during Meenu's time. The initial process of partner selection was described in the evaluation:

⁵⁷ A subset of corruption, fraud is defined as "wrongful or criminal deception intended to result in financial or personal gain" (OED, 2013b). Fraud is not unusual in Uganda. In 2012, Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index gave Uganda a score of 29 out of 100, ranking it Uganda 130 out of 176 countries worldwide - with 1 being the country with the least perceived corruption (Transparency International, 2013). This index is based on the public sector, but documentation on NGOs in Uganda is clear that corruption is also an issue for NGOs (DENIVA, 2006, p. 55).

At the rollout of [Country Strategy Paper] CSP II, there was a rush to find partners to work with. Disbursement of funds was priority over putting in place appropriate mechanisms for partnership. Success was measured by how many partners and how much money was disbursed. The rush to find partners ignored the need to appraise partners before entering into partnerships. There was no sufficient guidance on how to enter these partnerships. The partnership guidelines were not yet in place and in the effort to start on the implementation of CSP II [ActionAid International Uganda] AAIU staff just took on partners using their discretion. (p. 15)

One staff member interviewed similarly commented:

Things got crippled in a way. Partners were not fully groomed. They were rushed into partnership. One [LRP] might have 15, 20 or 25 partners, it was a total mess. There were few staff [*sic*] and no guidance on how to work in partnership, for how long or how many partners.

Interviewees reported that many of the initial partners were created simply to receive funds from ActionAid, rather than being pre-existing organisations representing poor people.

Before Meenu Vadera left ActionAid Uganda, she had recommended two members of her management team as potential candidates for country director, one of whom was Charles Businge (later Country Director between 2008 and 2012). Meenu felt that either of the two individuals could continue and consolidate the reform process she had begun, and be effective leaders for the organisation. However both of these candidates were rejected by ActionAid International after a drawn-out recruitment process. It appeared that the organisation, its Chief Executive Salil Shetty in particular, was looking for ‘something else’. Apparently, when in Uganda during this period, Salil went to see some women leaders speak at a campaigning event and this confirmed his view that the country director of ActionAid Uganda needed different attributes to those of the candidates within the country team, specifically more advocacy and campaigning skills. Subsequently Amanda Sserumaga was recruited internationally. In the next section, I describe Amanda’s impact on the country programme.

5.9 Troubled Times in ActionAid Uganda: 2004-7

A Canadian lawyer of Ugandan origin, Amanda Sserumaga⁵⁸ appeared, on the surface, to be an appropriate candidate to champion ActionAid Uganda's new human rights-based strategy, particularly given the focus on women's rights. Interviewees referred to Amanda as a skilled orator. It was observed by some that ActionAid's national profile and its profile within ActionAid were raised during the period of Amanda's leadership, as the organisation engaged in more high-level advocacy, linking in with global ActionAid campaigns. The first formal board of trustees of ActionAid Uganda was instituted in 2005, in line with the new governance structure at country level which was emerging with internationalisation. However, there is little other evidence of positive developments during Amanda's tenure, which was almost universally viewed negatively by stakeholders interviewed⁵⁹.

According to interviewees, Amanda's primary weakness was management. She imposed decisions and inspired fear in most staff members, although a few reported appreciating her frank style. In a Ugandan context, in which politeness and gentle ways of talking are the norm within organisations such as ActionAid⁶⁰, Amanda was seen as extremely confrontational and often rude. One staff member expressed similar recollections to most interviewees:

She was harassing, was unrealistically bossy and had bad manners. She would greet you and then wash her hands. . . . Everything like staff management was peripheral. She was also very detrimental for external relations as everybody feared her. Also with partners and communities. People will stop caring if they are not cared about. National partners in particular were isolated . . . She was definitely against the values of ActionAid. She didn't respect anyone and would shout at people in public which was very difficult for senior managers. However, some people who were pushed out during that time deserved to go . . . Turnover was very high Amanda's first year.

⁵⁸ It should be noted that Amanda Sserumaga did not respond to requests to be interviewed for this research.

⁵⁹ Two interviewees had particularly positive feedback on Amanda's tenure while three others recognised that she had some strengths as well as weaknesses, but the vast majority of interviewees were predominantly negative on her tenure.

⁶⁰ This generalisation is based on interviews and also my experience with ActionAid Uganda and working and liaising with other NGOs in Uganda since 2001.

Several staff members resigned, in some cases blatantly pushed out by Amanda. For instance, one former senior staff member who had been with ActionAid for over 15 years, recalled “I loved ActionAid, Amanda influenced me leaving. She would say ‘You’re here too long, why don’t you leave?’”

As well as alienating staff, Amanda was seen to alienate external stakeholders, such as some partners and donors. For instance, it was reported by staff members that Development Cooperation Ireland (now Irish Aid) was considering funding ActionAid but that they were turned off when Amanda “barked” at a partner during a meeting.

Interviewees reported that learning mechanisms instituted by Meenu, participatory approaches, follow-up to the OD process and generally implementation of ALPS/*Kanambut* were all neglected during Amanda’s tenure. An international staff member commented, “Under the next CD-Amanda Sserumaga-there was huge roll back. Forums for cross geography learning and exchange were shut down, participatory process was little valued and undermined, and ALPS lost a great deal of traction.” Similarly, a staff member noted:

What went wrong? With Amanda the value on leadership etc. stopped, it was chopped, cut. She made those who stayed long feel inadequate. Many left. Those who remained stayed quiet. So it was cut off, building on such things from the OD process.

The mid-term review of the country programme in 2008 was largely negative on the period of Amanda’s leadership citing:

weak leadership and management of the CP [country programme]; high staff turn-over and erratic handling of partners and [LRPs]. The CP was seen as increasingly less transparent especially in decision making (financial allocation) and human resource management. The CP had also grown surprisingly more hierarchical and spent inordinately more on itself than on programmes. (Lubaale, 2008, p. xii)

Interestingly, it does not appear that it was these management issues or external relations problems that led to Amanda reportedly being requested to resign by the regional office in 2007. Rather, the issue was apparently her poor financial oversight which led to over-expenditure of the country programme and a collapse in the staff welfare scheme. These occurrences led to a financial crisis within ActionAid Uganda which caused the closure of programmes, heightened staff turnover and major job

insecurity for remaining staff. As one interviewee put it, ActionAid Uganda was “on its knees”. My interviews demonstrated that staff members were still deeply affected by this period four years on. In the next section, I discuss the tenure of Charles Businge, who brought much needed stability to the country programme.

5.10 Stabilisation and Strengthening of ActionAid Uganda: 2008-2012

After Amanda resigned in 2007, a new recruitment process was launched under the acting leadership of Joan Sawe from ActionAid International. Charles Businge, a former ActionAid staff member, who had failed to get the country director post in 2003/4, was recruited and held the post until early 2012. Charles was tasked with fixing the significant problems in the country programme left by the country director who was hired instead of him, not least the financial crisis.

By all accounts, Charles is thought to have made significant progress as country director, most notably in strengthening the financial systems within ActionAid Uganda to provide assurances to donors and sponsors. The most recent external evaluation rated the organisation’s financial management system highly (Kithinji, Nabachwa, & Wagubi, 2010, p. 36).

A major focus of the tenure of Charles was action against fraud. He instituted a strong internal audit function and staff and partners were held to account for fraud with a ‘zero tolerance’ principle. During my field work, fraud and subsequent disciplining for fraud were common and ongoing with respect to ActionAid staff and even more so with partners. With regards to staff, a staff member was fired in one of the LRPs I visited for the misappropriation of small amounts of funds designated for programme activities (specifically money for tea). In another LRP I visited, a previous LRP coordinator had been fired in recent years for infractions involving a conflict of interest in using a private business to provide services for the organisation (ActionAid Uganda, 2009a, p. 6). Several partners in the LRPs I visited were effectively suspended due to audit queries, which may or may not be fraud. For instance, four out of the nine partners in one LRP were suspended at the time of my visit. I discuss partner fraud further below. Even though losses from fraud were reported to be minimal by interviewees working in finance, in part as ActionAid requires reimbursement of all losses by the partner

organisation, all cases were dealt with using the zero tolerance principle and hence taken seriously irrespective of the amount.

During Charles's tenure, the role of the board and the general assembly was consolidated in line with ActionAid's internationalisation process, with regular board meetings, active board sub-committees, and annual general assemblies. ActionAid Uganda also achieved 'affiliate' status in 2009, the highest status a country programme can reach in terms of autonomy within the global federation.

Staff satisfaction increased significantly under Charles Businge's leadership, while some issues still remain, particularly around perceived rigidity and a lack of trust of staff, as is discussed further in the discussion chapter. The increased satisfaction is evidenced by the Uganda-level staff 'climate surveys'. ALPS includes a requirement for a 'staff climate survey' at country level and international level and two have taken place in recent years (Hewitt Associates, 2007, 2010a, 2010b). Overall, the 2010 Climate Survey for Uganda is a significant improvement on that of 2007. In particular, 52% of staff said that it would take "a lot" for them to consider leaving ActionAid—compared to a striking seven per cent in 2007 during Amanda Sserumaga's tenure (Hewitt Associates, 2010b).

Another area of focus for Charles has been monitoring and evaluation (M&E) although progress in this area has not been significant. The 2010 evaluation found "the absence of a well designed and functioning M&E system which undermines tracking the effectiveness of programme monitoring in the long run" (Kithinji, et al., p. 7). M&E systems in Uganda, as in general in ActionAid, are viewed to need significant improvement, and this is a major focus of the new strategy for Uganda: *Embracing Rights, Improving Lives 2012-17* (ActionAid Uganda, 2011b, p. 20).

Charles is credited with having made improvements on issues around participation and transparency during his tenure, as is discussed further below. There has been resurgence (or in some cases emergence) of ALPS processes such as community-level PRRPs and transparency boards since 2008/9, and some training took place for staff on participatory methodologies in 2011. Implementation of community accountability mechanisms is now a requirement as per ActionAid's contracts with partners (Kithinji, et al., 2010, p. 40). On the negative side, arguably, some aspects of

the way in which ActionAid Uganda works militate against accountability to beneficiaries. For instance, internal procedures which are viewed as heavy, time-consuming and inflexible are seen to take much staff time away from other activities. These issues are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

On the whole, Charles Businge's leadership was rated very positively by ActionAid staff, trustees and partners. In 2010, the evaluation of the country strategy concluded that:

AAIU delivered what it promised in CSP III. AAIU is a well managed, transparent and accountable organisation making a contribution to the developmental process in Uganda and to AAI's international governance and global developmental processes. (Kithinji, et al., p. 7)

In 2011, the year of my field work, Action Aid spent £3,949,000 (sterling) in Uganda, directly reaching 548,192 people with programmes in education, food rights, women's rights, HIV&ADS, governance and emergencies, working with 71 partners (ActionAid Uganda, 2012d).

Having provided an introduction to ActionAid Uganda and its principal shifts since the late 1990s, the next section details the findings of my research with respect to the organisation's downward accountability to communities and partners.

5.11 Overview Findings on ActionAid Uganda and Accountability

In this section, I provide an overview of findings on ActionAid Uganda and its downward accountability as per the standards set in ALPS. Firstly, it is perhaps useful to clarify that while *Kanambut* or more commonly 'ALPS/*Kanambut*' is still very occasionally seen in some documentation, my field work demonstrated that *Kanambut* has not been used in ActionAid Uganda in any substantive manner since its early years and thus, my focus in the remainder of this chapter is primarily on the standards and principles of ALPS, as in the previous chapter.

There have been four external reviews of ActionAid Uganda since the launch of ALPS/*Kanambut*, but none had a significant focus on downward accountability. The 2005 evaluation of the period 2001-5 did not comment at all on downward accountability to intended beneficiaries, although it was critical of ActionAid's support

to partners and notes that the learning mechanisms in *Kanambut* were not being implemented (Kabenge, et al., 2005). The 2006 Peer Review of the same period, involving international ActionAid staff and a trustee, briefly noted that there was a need to strengthen downward accountability, and specified in particular the need for the sharing of financial information with communities (Kaleeba, Mushi, Igbuzor, Baral, & Sang, 2006, p. 13). The 2008 mid-term review of the 2006-2011 strategy had very little focus on downward accountability but did note that the *Reflect* participatory methodology, which had been the “flagship” of the country programme, was in “steady decline” (Lubaale, 2008, p. 37). Finally, the 2010 evaluation of the 2006-11 strategy cited an increase in mechanisms such as transparency boards and the promotion of participatory approaches, but also noted the fact that staff lacked time to implement these approaches (Kithinji, et al., 2010, p. 22). I return to the issue of staff time below.

This brief summary suggests that, as at the international level, downward accountability is not a major focus for review in ActionAid, which may suggest something about the extent to which it is prioritised. When ALPS processes are mentioned in reviews, there is usually no mention of the quality of the processes. As at the international level, there appear, at times, to be assumptions made that ActionAid’s mechanisms are functioning as intended. This is suggested by the only sentence on ‘accountability to beneficiaries’ in the 2010 evaluation of ActionAid Uganda: “The PRRPS, social audits, transparency boards and partners’ [Annual General Meetings] are the main channels of ensuring accountability to the beneficiaries” (Kithinji, et al., 2010, p. 22)⁶¹. They may indeed be the ‘main channels’, but the question remains, are they ‘ensuring accountability’?

A similar approach appears in ActionAid Uganda’s Self-Review for *Taking Stock 3* (ActionAid Uganda, 2010, p. 2). In this document, ActionAid Uganda cited its second most important success in the strategy period as its accountability processes: “We deepened accountability through community Participatory Review and Reflection Processes, Transparency Boards, Annual Reports, Board Governance Review, Audit, Participatory Planning among others”. Under the heading ‘Key Factors’ which led to

⁶¹ The rest of the section entitled “Accountability to Beneficiaries” is about how ActionAid assists communities to hold government accountable.

these successes ActionAid wrote, “The use of participatory methods which involved rights-holders in defining priorities; and supported learning and empowerment of the poor and marginalised persons/groups.” These are fairly typical examples of brochure talk that demonstrate an assumption that accountability processes taking place in the country programme are of adequate quality.

My principal finding from my direct observation, interviews and document review is that this assumption does not bear out. The realities of implementation of downward accountability in the Uganda country programme generally do not come close to measuring up to the standards and principles that ActionAid has set for itself within ALPS. There is a significant disjuncture. On the whole, it appears that ActionAid Uganda has not managed to transform the direction of its accountabilities as planned in ALPS. What was powerfully apparent during observation of field offices, and when probing this issue in subsequent interviews, was that much time and attention of ActionAid staff still goes to upward accountability, particularly with respect to meeting sponsorship requirements, and internal accountability in terms of organisational procedures. In practice, despite principles, attitudes and behaviours being at the core of the original ALPS document, in many cases, ALPS in Uganda seems to have been stripped down to its procedures; the tangible, ‘checklist’ aspects such as appraisals, reviews and so on.

Thus, the situation on the ground in Uganda is largely at odds with ActionAid’s stated intentions, and yet the brochure talk around ALPS as presented in some internal documents continues. The situation therefore largely mirrors the findings on downward accountability as described in the previous chapter on ActionAid International.

Having provided this brief overview, I now describe in more detail the findings with respect to accountability to intended beneficiaries at community level. As in the previous chapter, I use participation and transparency as the two windows into ActionAid Uganda’s ALPS practice at community level with respect to accountability to intended beneficiaries. As noted in the methodology chapter, in the course of my field work, I interviewed 98 community members in eight groups in Katakwi and Pallisa LRPs, within operational areas of ActionAid and its partners. Data from these interviews, as well as interviews with staff, former staff and partners, documentation and

my observation at community level, particularly my attendance at six community-level PRRPs, inform the findings below.

5.12 Participation in ActionAid Uganda

In his book describing the actor-oriented approach, Long (2001, pp. 186-188) talks of the “paradox of participatory strategies” as he describes the “managerialist and interventionist undertones inherent in participatory methods; that is, they tend to evoke the image of ‘more knowledgeable and powerful outsiders’ helping ‘the powerless and less discerning local folk’”. He stresses the complexity of such processes, which supports the need for an actor-oriented approach to study them with a field methodology geared to “developing theory ‘from below’”. Indeed, I found much complexity in the arena of participation within ActionAid Uganda, with different perspectives emerging from the combination of methods I used: interviews, documentation and ethnographic observation. In this section, PRRPs are discussed as the key participatory process in ALPS. I start by giving a brief introduction to participation within the country programme before discussing my observations from PRRPs. I conclude the section on participation with a reflection on the value of PRRPs from different perspectives.

Participatory processes are considered, both internally and externally, to be a strength of ActionAid practice in Uganda (ActionAid Uganda, 2010). Uganda was one of the pilot countries for the much-lauded participatory methodology *Reflect* in the 1990s. However, my data show that participatory approaches, including *Reflect* weakened in ActionAid Uganda from the early 2000s. The 2010 evaluation found that the participatory methodologies within the country programme declined between approximately the years 2000 and 2007, and that efforts are being made to reverse this trend but that these efforts are facing obstacles, such as lack of staff time, which I return to below (p. 19). For instance, this decline included a lack of support to *Reflect* facilitators, such as refresher training. The mid-term review of the country programme in 2008 spoke of *Reflect* circles being “marginalised” (ActionAid Uganda, 2010; Lubaale, p. xi). When I visited Pallisa LRP in 2011, it was reported that 12 out of 28 *Reflect* groups were defunct.

A mapping survey on participatory approaches in ActionAid during Amanda's time cited insufficient leadership commitment as a reason for poor practice of methodologies⁶² (ActionAid Uganda, 2005b). Indeed, there was a wide consensus among interviewees that during Meenu and Amanda's tenures, the organisational policy was for service delivery to be de-prioritised in favour of advocacy and policy work, and that this led to a decreased focus on community level work and participatory approaches. As one interviewee recalled, "During the early days of advocacy work, there used to be a slogan, we no longer shake hands with the poor. . . . Reflect sort of died in AA during the policy time. It was as though anything to do with community you had to leave it". Speaking of Meenu's time, one staff member similarly commented, "while initially [*Reflect*] was promoted . . . generally participatory methodologies became a crime if you were found dealing with them. . . There was a new breed of people, a cross-organisational wave of activists". Another staff member commented, "Under Amanda, participation was devalued, ALPS declined."

It is interesting that the decline of participation includes the tenure of Meenu Vadera, as there is also evidence that the PRRP process was taken seriously, particularly in documentation from 2001 and 2002. However, there is ambiguity on what 'PRRP' has meant within the Uganda country programme over the years, as the term has been used for staff-only reflection sessions, as well as sessions between staff and partners, and community-based PRRPs as I describe below. The evidence suggests that there was more of a focus on internal staff reflection and reflection with partners than on community processes during Meenu Vadera's time. Having given this brief introduction to participation in the country programme, I now discuss my observation of PRRPs.

5.12.1 Observation of PRRPs

As noted earlier, according to ALPS, PRRPs are intended to be periodic meetings with community members, partners and other stakeholders whereby consultation and learning takes place in a manner which is empowering for community members and which increases ActionAid's accountability and transparency to these groups. According to the

⁶² High staff turnover was also said to have been a factor here (ActionAid Uganda, 2005b).

ALPS principles, these sessions should also promote an analysis of power and work towards a transformation of power dynamics to give priority to poor and marginalised people, particularly women (ActionAid, 2006a, p. 27).

In practice in Uganda, since being rejuvenated under Charles Businge's leadership, community-level PRRPs are taking place on a regular basis in the LRPs, at least once a year, often twice. From my observation of six community-level PRRPs in two different LRPs, these were occasions during which partners and community members and, often but not always, ActionAid staff, discussed issues related to ongoing programming and often, but not always, discussed plans for the future. Thus, they provided a forum for consultation and transparency, and an opportunity for views of community members to feed into decisions of ActionAid and partners.

However, I invariably observed that the quality of these PRRPs was low as compared with the intention. In retrospect, it was vital that I observed the PRRPs myself as many of the below issues did not emerge in descriptions of PRRP sessions in interviews or documentation, and yet these issues formed the basis of discussing PRRPs with different actors after the fact. Interviewing ActionAid staff after I had observed the PRRPs seemed to lead to more frankness and openness, with interviewees perhaps recognising that they would not be 'exposing' the organisation with their criticism. In this way, I think that observing PRRPs led to more depth in interviews than might otherwise have been the case. As is illustrated below, in terms of the ALPS principles of addressing power and women's rights, transparency and learning, the PRRPs were weak. To explore this in more depth, I describe two elements of the PRRPs I attended: the organisation and facilitation of the PRRPs, and the content.

In terms of organisation and facilitation, all of the PRRPs which I attended had been scheduled on the request of, and paid for by ActionAid. In three of the six PRRPs, there were complaints by participants about the short notice and unsuitability of timing. For instance, in Buseeta in Pallisa LRP, participants said that, due to the agricultural season, most of the 200 community members involved with ActionAid could not make the PRRP, particularly as they had only learnt about the session the previous day. Photograph 5.1 below shows approximately half of the group of participants in Buseeta. After waiting almost two hours, 16 people had arrived and the session began. The

scheduling issue raises questions about whether sufficient attention is being paid to the ALPS attitudes and behaviours. For instance, ALPS calls on staff to “Behav[e] in a way that genuinely supports those who are excluded to fully participate, bringing poor and excluded people into the heart of decision-making, rather than simply informing and consulting them” (ActionAid, 2006a, p. 9).

Photograph 5.1 : Participants at PRRP in Buseeta, Pallisa LRP. 14th July 2011.



In terms of facilitation, one notable issue, which also relates to power, was the set-up of the rooms in which the PRRPs took place. In each of the PRRPs I attended, the set up was similar to a school setting with ActionAid and the partner representatives seeming like ‘teachers’ at the top of the room, and the community members as

‘students’. The below photographs, Photographs 5.2 and 5.3, from two PRRPs in Katakwi LRP illustrate this set-up. Three of the six PRRPs which I attended did, in fact, take place in school buildings, but in no case was there any attempt by ActionAid or the partner to make any adjustments to the room set up in order to create a more egalitarian arrangement. Rather, the set up facilitated a hierarchical atmosphere.

Photograph 5.2: Participants at PRRP in Acanga, Katakwi LRP. 23rd July 2011.



Photograph 5.3: Facilitators at PRRP in Kapujan, Katakwi LRP. 25th July 2011.



The facilitation of PRRPs was led by ActionAid or the partner organisation. On two occasions, facilitation was led by ActionAid despite the presence of the partner organisation. In one case, no ActionAid staff member was present. Generally, the facilitation of ActionAid or the partner was friendly and polite. However, there was an exception with regards to a partner's facilitation in the case of a PRRP in Kapujan in Katakwi LRP - Photograph 5.3 above and Photograph 5.4 below. This facilitation was harsh and commanding. The physical distance between the partner and ActionAid staff, and the members of the community, as can be seen in Photograph 5.4 below, also has metaphorical significance as it represents the lack of connection and empathy between the partner and the community members that was evident throughout the session. For instance, the partner representative spent a lot of time berating community members for

their poor attendance, to which they responded that there was a funeral taking place in the next village. This type of facilitation obviously militates against the PRRP as a learning or empowering process. It goes against the guideline in ALPS that “involvement of poor and excluded people along with donors and other stakeholders requires very sensitive facilitating so that all feel comfortable to contribute” (ActionAid, 2006a, p. 27). This observation helped me to add further questions to my interview template regarding relationships between partners and community members and how partners were originally selected.

Photograph 5.4: Participants at PRRP in Kapujan, Katakwi LRP. 25th July 2011.



Another hierarchical example was a partner-led PRRP in Acanga in Katakwi LRP, at which no ActionAid staff was present. The partner representative spent much of the time expounding on his personal views on a range of matters and, at times, lecturing the community members, rather than asking them questions about their views on the performance of the organisation. This is illustrated in Photograph 5.5 below, which also suggests some lack of attentiveness or boredom among some of the participants, although there were also indications at times that some participants were engaged in the session.

Photograph 5.5: Facilitation at PRRP in Acanga, Ngariam. 23rd July 2011.



The atmosphere of this PRRP did not suggest that the partner organisation was driven by the views of this community, or that the partner organisation was in any way a 'representative' of this community. Within its partner classification table in its annual reports, ActionAid Uganda terms its community-based partners as "Representative Structures of the Poor and Excluded People and Right Holders" but my observation data raised many questions about this. The impression given in this particular PRRP was more of what is often termed in Africa a 'big man' in a hierarchical relationship over community members. This kind of power dynamic can conflict with aspirations of NGOs such as ActionAid to address power dynamics in their work.

Generally, with respect to power dynamics, the ActionAid or partner staff present did not appear to make any attempt to ensure that the voices of the apparently less powerful were reflected in the PRRPs. Notably, there did not appear to be significant efforts in any of the PRRPs to ensure that women's voices were included, and in some cases the sessions were dominated by male participants. In only one PRRP, in Gogonyo, did I note an encouragement by an ActionAid staff member for women to contribute to the discussion. However, that PRRP was nevertheless mainly male voices, even though one of the two partner organisations involved in the PRRP was a women's organisation. Given the emphasis on women's rights as a principle in ALPS and in ActionAid more broadly, this lack of focus on the inclusion of women's voices is remarkable.

Another aspect of facilitation which militated against learning was time pressure. In two PRRPs in Pallisa LRP (Gogonyo and Buseeta), the PRRP sessions were primarily facilitated by ActionAid rather than the partner which was present. In one of these, in Buseeta, the ActionAid programme officer appeared to want to keep the PRRP as short as possible and hence it was very brief and rushed. This recalls the comment in the DA review on PRRPs which was quoted earlier:

In some cases, reviews are often precipitated because of a pressing need to feed into other strategic activities such as CSP review or affiliate review, and therefore tend to be either impromptu or not well-managed. Limited time allocated to cover both desk reviews and visits to communities can make the review a hasty exercise rather than a useful learning and planning tool. (ActionAid, 2010b, p. 6)

Some PRRPs ended quite suddenly when agenda points were not completed, possibly due to time pressure or possibly due to the sense that the PRRP is a 'box to tick'. As I wrote in my notes after the PRRP in Kapujan "there was no resolution". The facilitators started to wrap up the meeting before the pronounced agenda had been completed, for instance, challenges had not been discussed. This gives the impression of ritual implementation. Having discussed how PRRPs were organised and facilitated, I now discuss their content.

In terms of content, each PRRP that I attended included a component of review. In each case during the review section, there was an opportunity for community members to comment on the programming work to date. In general, the discussions that took place in the PRRPs revolved around the extent to which the partner organisation had delivered the inputs (for instance, agricultural inputs such as cassava cuttings or goats) as required and what was still lacking. There were frequent complaints, of not having received inputs, particularly by parents of sponsored children. This observation of PRRPs being centred around inputs was surprising for me the first time I witnessed a PRRP, as ActionAid documentation would tend to suggest that programming is largely 'rights-based' rather than direct service delivery. This observation therefore led to a new line of interview questions as I tried to understand the content of ActionAid's programming, and more broadly, this finding alerted me to possible 'brochure talk' in ActionAid documentation.

In four out of the six PRRPs that I attended, there was some discussion of budget figures; in two cases (Acanga and Kapujan) there was no mention of the budget, contrary to the transparency principle and the intention in ALPS that PRRPs should include a reflection on how budgets are being allocated and spent: "Funding patterns and grant decisions, as well as expenditure analyses, need to be shared openly" (ActionAid, 2006a, p. 27).

In terms of planning for the future, all but one of the PRRPs I attended (the Ngariam PRRP being the exception) included a discussion on what should happen in the future. Thus, the discussion generally covered what the community members felt should be provided by partners and ActionAid. In some cases, there was group work to come up with suggestions for future activities. Photograph 5.6 below shows a group work

exercise in Gogonyo in Pallisa LRP. This exercise quickly divided into the younger, more educated leaders of the partner organisation (standing) and community members (sitting). It appeared that the subsequent presentation comprised the views of the younger group. The ActionAid staff present did not comment in any way on this division - in fact, they appeared not to notice.

Photograph 5.6: Group work during PRRP in Gogonyo, Pallisa LRP. 13th July 2011.



In each PRRP in which future requests were presented, what emerged was a ‘shopping list’ of mostly agricultural inputs which community members felt that ActionAid should provide through its partners. In the case in Photograph 5.7 below

from Gogonyo, the partner's 'plan' became a list of 21 activities and inputs that the partner and community members wanted ActionAid to fund. For instance, the first three actions on the flipchart are requests for a grinding machine, sewing machines and training⁶³.

Photograph 5.7: Presentation at PRRP in Gogonyo, Pallisa LRP. 13th July 2011.



Similarly, Photograph 5.8 below shows the work plan of the partner in Gogonyo which includes purchase of seeds, uniforms for sponsored children, increased stipend for

⁶³ It was also noteworthy that the presenter in this case was a man, although the organisation, Nacwola, is a women's organisation. Apparently this was due to the short notice (the day before) given by ActionAid that prevented the head of the local Nacwola branch from attending.

Reflect facilitators, chairs for *Reflect* circles, a salary for a cleaner and a latrine for visitors.

Photograph 5.8: Presentation at PRRP in Gogonyo, Pallisa LRP. 25th July 2011.



In none of the six PRRPs I attended did ActionAid or the partner give any conclusive feedback to these requests or 'plans', nor was there any prioritisation done with community members. This aligns with one comment from the staff survey that poor people are not involved in analysis, as envisioned in ALPS. In each PRRP, the partner or ActionAid simply folded up the flipchart and concluded the session after the list of desired inputs was presented. I discuss the issue of whether/how PRRP outputs affect ActionAid's decision-making below.

In sum, from my direct observation, the quality of the PRRPs was generally poor in that the ALPS principles were largely not evident. As the examples above show, the PRRPs did not appear to be empowering, nor ‘taking action on power imbalances’. There was no real emphasis on women’s rights. The sessions were not focussed on learning or critical reflection. There was some transparency but not at the level intended. In the next section I discuss the apparent value or usefulness of PRRPs.

5.12.2 Perspectives on the Value of PRRPs

In this section, I discuss the extent to which PRRPs are feeding into ActionAid discussions and practice. Interestingly, despite the apparent shortcomings of the PRRPs as noted above, community members with whom I spoke were invariably positive about them. Generally, community members reported appreciating frequent interaction with ActionAid and the partner organisation and receiving information. For instance, in Toroma in Katakwi LRP, PRRPs were cited as opportunities to know the budget of the partner. Indeed, in each PRRP I witnessed, some information was shared and there was an opportunity for community feedback or seeking clarification on programming.

However, a critical question, when considering ActionAid’s working definition of accountability from ALPS, is the extent to which PRRPs are facilitating the ‘priorities and perspectives’ of beneficiaries to inform decision-making. One of my academic interviewees stressed that this is a crucial aspect of ALPS, the extent to which information from these processes circulates and affects decision-making and organisational learning.

As noted, feedback was not given to community members at the time of the PRRP. Action Aid or partners took the flipcharts away for further consideration. Thus, it was difficult to judge the extent to which PRRPs fed into decision-making. However, from interviews and documentation, it would appear that the question of the influence of PRRPs on decision-making and lesson learning can be answered on two levels: LRP level and national level. At LRP level, PRRPs appear to be referred to, at least to some extent, when ActionAid makes decisions on funding partners for particular service delivery activities. PRRP discussions should feed into proposals from partners to ActionAid.

At national level, there is some evidence from the early days of ALPS/Kanambut that efforts were made to analyse PRRPs to feed into lesson learning and decision-making. This is evident from 2001 to early 2003. Consultant Tina Wallace (2002) compiled a *PRRPs Reflections and Way Forward* document based on 2001 PRRPs. In 2003, John Bulega, when he was acting country director, organised a process whereby the 2002 annual report for Uganda would be based on PRRPs conducted. After this period, the data suggest that PRRPs involving community members died out until they were reinstated by Charles Businge in 2008. Despite the resurgence of PRRPs, there is no evidence to suggest that contemporary PRRPs are informing decision-making in the country programme in any significant way. My document review, including an in-depth analysis of documentation such as quarterly reports, plans and partner proposals from Katakwi, does not show any process by which PRRP outcomes are systematically reported ‘up the line’.

Another way in which decision making could be informed is by the participation of senior staff, such as national level management or programme staff, in community-level PRRPs. However, this was not apparent in my observation, and interviewees noted that it was not happening. An LRP coordinator was present at only one of the six PRRPs which I attended, but had to leave before it was complete. Three of the six PRRPs were attended by a temporary staff member from the LRP, acting as programme officer (PO) at the time, along with a sponsorship officer from Kampala. One PRRP had no ActionAid staff member present and one had a programme officer only. A senior staff member noted, with regards to PRRPs, “Many on the team see this as a process to go through.”

This notion of PRRPs as ‘a process go to through’ is supported by my observation that the atmosphere of the PRRPs and the way in which they were conducted gave the impression that this was a fairly rote ‘tick-the-box’ exercise from the perspective of ActionAid and partners. I wrote in my notes after my second PRRP, “seemed like a token process for AA’s benefit” and, after my fourth PRRP, “very quick process and shopping list, no interrogation, prioritisation, this was very token”. This recalls the experience of an international staff member who noted, after a visit to a community group in Uganda in 2009, “It felt a bit extractive, attendance was taken . . .it

had the feel of a ritual. The flipcharts were wheeled out but were all a year old or older. If you read the ALPS handbook, the processes are happening but the spirit was not there at all”. If indeed this is the case and PRRPs are just seen as “a process to go through”, this raises a possible symbolic value to PRRPs. I return to this notion of the symbolic value of ALPS in the discussion chapter.

It appears that one factor behind why PRRPs do not appear to be feeding into decision making in any significant way is the disconnect I observed between what the country programme sets out to do strategically at national level - implement a human rights-based approach - and what it actually does at local level, which tends to be more focussed on service delivery. My study did not focus on national level advocacy and policy work, which is a very significant part of ActionAid’s strategy. However, at the local level, discussions with community members and partners, including discussions during the PRRPs I attended, tended to be largely on the direct provision of benefits by ActionAid partners. Indeed, interviewees reported, and my observation concurred, that if ActionAid were to respond positively to community requests during participatory processes, its work would be focussed mainly on the provision of services and inputs, rather than policy or advocacy work, or engagement with government. This observation aligned with an important finding by a former staff member in a study on ActionAid International. Newman (2011, p. 3) finds that participation and the human rights-based approach actually appear to be incompatible in ActionAid: “rather than complementing and extending each other, rights and participation actually exist in tension. My findings suggest that the two approaches pull the organisation in opposite directions”

Newman’s striking finding has significant implications for prospects of downward accountability in ActionAid, whose strategy is firmly based on a human rights-based approach, with only limited provisions for service delivery⁶⁴. It implies that more downward accountability by ActionAid, in the form of the priorities and perspectives of intended beneficiaries feeding into decision-making, will tend to lead to a tension with the implementation of the organisation’s rights-based approach and

⁶⁴ While ActionAid’s position on its HRBA allows for service delivery, this is restricted to specific circumstances. For instance, “We should only deliver services when the state is incapable of providing them and we should never provide them in such a way that the state is allowed to shirk its responsibilities as a duty holder or divert its resources away from fulfilling the rights of people or community we work with” (ActionAid, 2008, p. 6).

associated strategies⁶⁵. This tension becomes one factor militating against participatory processes feeding into decision making, and is explored further in the later chapters. Having discussed the implementation of participation in ActionAid Uganda, I now discuss the second component of the accountability definition: transparency.

5.13 Transparency

As noted in the previous chapter, the aim of transparency in ALPS is to make information about the use of ActionAid funds available and understandable to community members. I have discussed above how the PRRPs which I attended contained some elements of transparency, but had limitations. The other key mechanism to implement this aim is transparency boards, which have been introduced (or in some cases re-introduced) into ActionAid Uganda since 2009 (Somajni, Jellema, Caplan, & Siddiqui, 2009). This section details my findings on transparency boards in Uganda looking at three criteria: physical accessibility, legibility and content. As at the international level, my observation showed that these transparency boards generally did not meet the expected standards and that observation data was at largely odds with what was presented in documents. Again, as in the case of PRRPs, staff members interviewed after my observation events seemed more likely to be critical when they knew that I had seen the ‘reality on the ground’.

The first ‘accessibility’ challenge was that, in some cases, transparency boards simply did not exist. In particular, the data would suggest that most of the time ActionAid at LRP level did not have a transparency board, whereas partners were expected to. Inconsistent use of transparency boards by ActionAid was one point highlighted in the staff survey: “Not all [LRPs] are transparent enough to make use of

⁶⁵ However, Newman, in email correspondence, questions whether community members will necessarily request service delivery during participatory processes. She raises the possibility that better quality and more consistent processes of engaging with communities might lead to different kinds of requests over time: “If the PRRP is done in isolation from an ongoing relationship it is never going to be a space for constructive discussion - you need a basis of understanding from which to reflect and develop together. So I don't think that participation necessarily leads to a desire for service delivery from community members, but irregular discussion and weak relationships will make it difficult to actively plan and agree work together - which is obviously difficult if there is a time commitment and skills issue, and basically if a long slow process isn't valued”. In other words, the tension between rights-based approach and service delivery, and rights-based approach and participatory processes, which Newman brings out in her study, may not be inevitable.

the boards. At times it is done once and the information on the transparency board is not updated.” In one case, the LRP in Masindi had its ‘transparency board’ inside the office.

A notable exception to non-existent or difficult to access ActionAid transparency boards was the up-to-date ActionAid notice board at the district government headquarters in Katakwi, which provided information on allocations to partners (as in Photograph 5.9 below) and also contained a summary of the then-recent evaluation of AAU. The board was not easily legible unless the reader is well-educated and fluent in English, being in small font with dense information. However, it was appreciated by the district government officials interviewed.

Photograph 5.9: Transparency Board in Katakwi LRP. July 2011.

| No. | Name of Partner | Length of Relationship | Area of operation | Representative Structure | Number of individuals | Value of funding 2011 | |
|-----|--|------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| | | | | | | UG SHS | £ |
| 1 | Family Life Survival –Katakwi (FALISU) | 08 years | Magoro county | sub | 1100 members (770 women and 330 men) | 30,000,000 | 10,000,000 |
| 2 | Kapujan Sub County Dev't Ass. (KASCDS) | 08 years | Kapujan county | sub | 80 members (45 men and 35 women) | 50,000,000 | 10,000,000 |
| 3 | Toroma Partnership Project (TPP) | 09 year | Toroma county | sub | 65 members (17 men and 48 women) | 30,000,000 | 10,000,000 |
| 4 | Omodoi P A Steering Committee | 08 months | Omodoi county | sub | 400 men & women) | 30,000,000 | 10,000,000 |
| 5 | Teso Anticorruption Coalition (TAC) | 01 year | Kapujan, Omodoi Magoro counties | and sub | | | |
| 6 | Ngariam Sub County Dev't Ass. (NSCDA) | 8 years | Ngariam county | sub | 250 members (190 women and 60 men) | 84,039,406 | ... |
| | | | | | | 30,000,000 | 10,000,000 |

Partner transparency boards appear to be more common, although there are still significant shortcomings. Some partners interviewed did not have any kind of transparency board, but most reported that they did. However, I did not see a single instance where a transparency board met the criteria of being both easily accessible for viewing, and having useful content that is legible to the average community member.

In terms of the physical accessibility of the partners' transparency boards, there were major shortcomings. Some were not accessible to the public, rather defying the purpose. As with ActionAid in Masindi, it was quite common practice with ActionAid partners to store their 'transparency board' inside or just outside their office. I saw two examples of this in Katakwi LRP. In one of these cases, in Ngariam, the transparency board was, in principle, placed outside during office hours, however on the day of my visit it was inside. In another case, in Masindi, when I asked a partner about transparency boards, the staff searched through a bunch of used flipchart papers within their office and showed me one with budget figures from the first half of 2010 (this was in April 2011) which they said constituted their "transparency board". It was interesting that, while these flipcharts contained old information and were not remotely 'transparent' to outsiders the way in which they were stored, the partner was familiar with the terminology and produced something called a 'transparency board' on demand, suggesting a 'tick-box' approach to the process and again the 'brochure talk' which can obscure the disjuncture between stated intentions and practices. I return to this theme in the discussion chapter. Photograph 5.10 below illustrates.

Photograph 5.10: Partner Transparency Board in Masindi LRP. April 2011.

| BOMIDO FIRST HALF OF THE YEAR 2010 | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| AMOUNT RECEIVED | | 23,000,000= | | |
| S/N | Planned Activity | RECEIVED Activity Budget | Actual Expenditure | |
| | Purchase of seeds i.e. Onion Green papper watermelon carrot Spinarcy Cabbage Diera Tomatoes Sukuma wiki | 2,500,000= | 2,250,000 | 50 families |
| | Purchase of fungicide | 1,022,500= | 960,000 | |
| | Purchase of pesticide | 200,000= | 540,000= | 12 families |
| | Purchase of a hand tractor trailer transporter | 2,000,000= | 2,000,000= | 6 families |
| | Purchase of a solar drier | 300,000= | 415,000= | 40 families |
| | Purchase of a juice/honey extractor. | 1,000,000= | 800,000= | 12 groups |
| | | 2,000,000= | 0,000,000= | |

In terms of the content of transparency boards and their legibility to the average community member, there were also major deficiencies. There were certainly some instances of partner transparency boards from which local government staff and some well-educated community members could gain information about partners' expenditure. For example, a transparency board at the sub-county office in Gogonyo, Pallisa LRP is shown in Photograph 5.11 below. While in English on a rather complex budget sheet, with small font, this 'board' was nonetheless a step towards transparency, as it contained information about what funds the partner, Goreda, had received that year, 2011, from ActionAid. For an educated, English speaker, such as a sub-county administrator, this might provide useful information.

Photograph 5.11: Partner Transparency Board in Gogonyo, Pallisa LRP. July 2011.

GOREDO CASH FLOW - 2011

BUDGET CALCULATION SHEET FOR THE YEAR 2011
DATE & TIME: 27/09/2010 13:30

SHEET NUMBER: 2
ACCOUNT CODE No: 111
CODE DESCRIPTION: REPORTABLE GRANTS TO PARTNERS

| DESCRIPTION | UNIT OF MEASURE | QUANTITY | T1 | | T2 | | T4 | | T5 | | COMMENTS |
|---|-----------------|----------|---------|-----------|----------|-------------------|-----------|-------------------|--------|---|---|
| | | | PROJECT | FUNCTION | LOCATION | DONOR | SECTOR | MONTH | MONTH | MONTH | |
| | | | EXPEND | EXPEND | EXPEND | EXPEND | TOTAL | AMOUNT | AMOUNT | AMOUNT | AMOUNT |
| PSL 01 Support the partner Prisons make seed and distribute it to 250 beneficiaries for purposes of community seed multiplication | people | 2040 | | | 2,500 | | 5,100,000 | | feb | July | Each beneficiary get 10kg |
| Support the partner Prisons around nuts seed and distribute it to 25 beneficiaries for purposes of community seed multiplication | people | 50 | | 80,000 | | 4,500,000 | | feb | July | Each beneficiary gets 1 bag One extra bag for Alupo | |
| PSL 02 Support Arrian points derived from the select circle members and community meetings on alternative sources of livelihood | | | | 9,400,000 | | | 3,100,000 | | feb | July | |
| Purchase of for Bags and Treatment of seeds | Seeds | 100 | | 5,000 | | 500,000 | | Feb | | | |
| T5 REFLECT facilities | month | 204 | | 30,000 | | 6,120,000 | | monthly | | | One extra facilitator for Alupos Circle |
| Distriher (seeds) of facilities in REFLECT (full board) | People | 85 | | 40,000 | | 3,400,000 | | feb | | | This will be a contribution to a centrally organised training |
| Transport related | people | 11 | | 10,000 | | 170,000 | | | | | |
| Out of pocket | people | 10 | | 10,000 | | 800,000 | | | | | |
| Facilitator | people | 7 | | 100,000 | | 700,000 | | 6,120,000 | | | |
| Training in Works management and records keeping | Full board | 20 | | 40,000 | | 800,000 | | feb | | | |
| Transport related | People | 10 | | 10,000 | | 100,000 | | | | | |
| Out of pocket | People | 20 | | 10,000 | | 200,000 | | | | | This is meant to strengthen internal controls and monitor the seed revolving scheme. 10 rep |
| Facilitator | People | 2 | | 200,000 | | 400,000 | | 1,600,000 | | | |
| Transportation of stores | Blockad | 1 | | 2,800,000 | | 2,600,000 | | Feb | | | |
| SUPPORT COSTS OF PARTNERS | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Assigned accounts books | book | 1 | | 350,000 | | 350,000 | | Feb | | | This will include GRN, SRN, JVs, Bank vouchers etc to enhance accounting systems |
| Office stationery | set | 1 | | 600,000 | | 600,000 | | Feb | | | |
| Digital camera | set | 1 | | 750,000 | | 750,000 | | Feb | | | To have records of what we have done |
| Printing costs | set | 1 | | 200,000 | | 200,000 | | Feb | | | This meant to be used for making seed at the store |
| Staff salaries | month | 1 | | 800,000 | | 800,000 | | July | | | This is 2% of Grant plus some facilitation items of transport for the auditors |
| Annual General Meeting | Assorted | 1 | | 1,800,000 | | 1,800,000 | | July | | | This will cover for the organisation of the AGM |
| Cell phone | month | 12 | | 50,000 | | 600,000 | | monthly | | | Transport to and from Buseba on official work |
| Bank charges | month | 12 | | 40,000 | | 480,000 | | monthly | | | costs of stationery for office use for 12 months |
| Stationery | month | 12 | | 30,000 | | 360,000 | | monthly | | | bank charges for 12 months @ 50,000 |
| Printing/typography setting | month | 12 | | 40,000 | | 480,000 | | monthly | | | SECURITY services, typesetting and printing specialty reports |
| Communication | month | 12 | | 40,000 | | 480,000 | | monthly | | | This will cover for printing |
| Supervision and follow up | month | 12 | | 180,000 | | 2,160,000 | | monthly | | | This will be used to monitor program activities and will involve motorcycle hire |
| Insurance other | month | 12 | | 200,000 | | 2,400,000 | | monthly | | | |
| TOTAL BUDGET | | | | | | 40,000,000 | | 11,460,000 | | | This money will be released in two instalments |

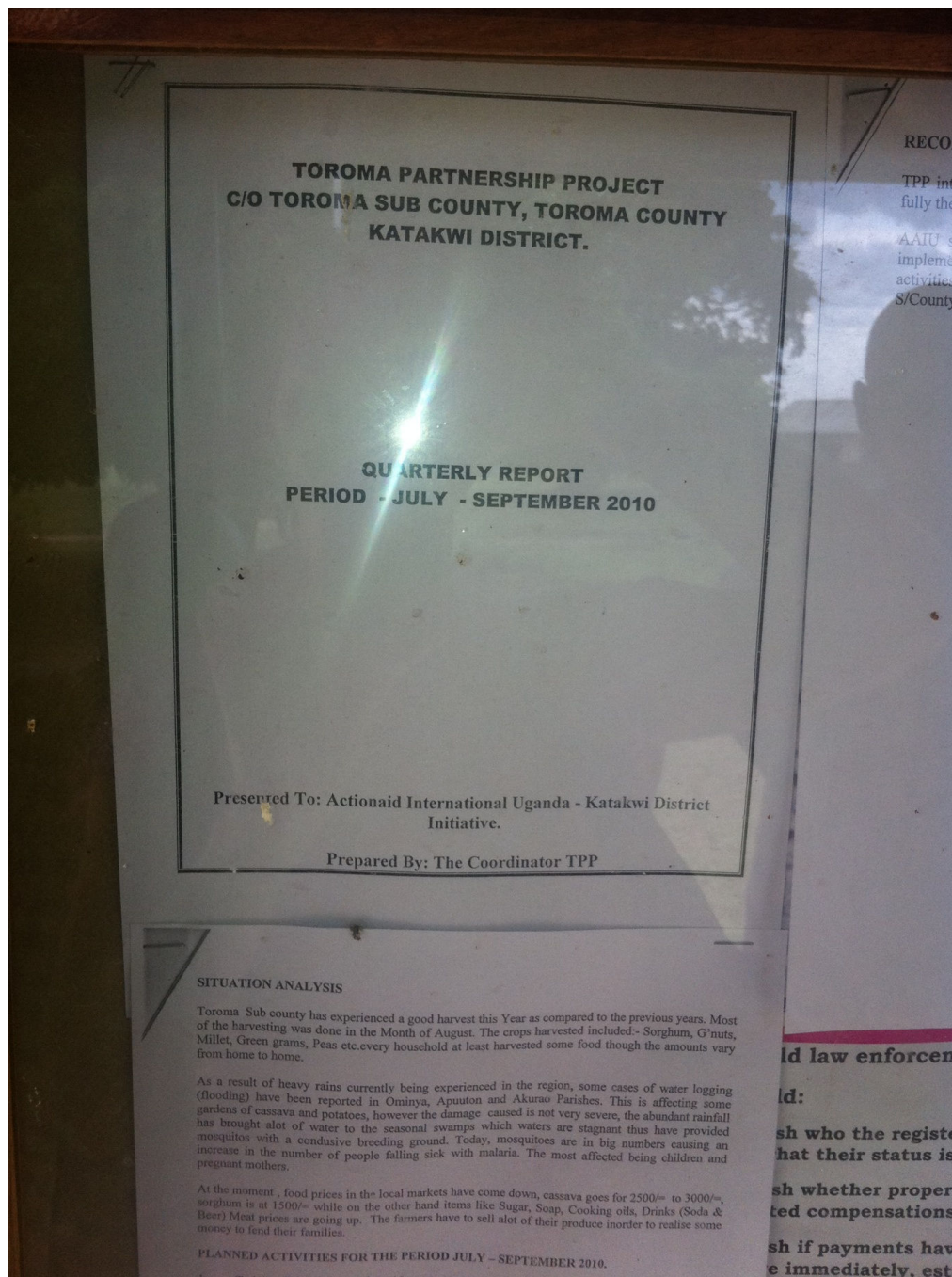
PREPARED BY: DANIEL BHWETTE
BUDGET HOLDER: CAROLINE ODOO

| MONTH EXPENDITURES (000) | JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUNE | JULY | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| EXPENDITURES | 1,690,000 | 18,860,000 | 1,090,000 | 1,090,000 | 1,090,000 | 1,090,000 | 1,090,000 | 1,090,000 | 1,090,000 | 1,090,000 | 1,090,000 |

CHECK ERROR

A more problematic example that I came across was a transparency board about the partner Toroma Partnership Project on the sub-county notice board in Toroma, Katakwi. While it contained quite extensive information, the most recent information, as of July 2011, was a quarterly report from September 2010 and a half year budget from January –June 2010. Even allowing for the fact that delayed disbursement to partners from ActionAid meant that 2011 activities were likely not on track, much more recent information could have been placed on this board at the sub-county headquarters, which was a mere few hundred metres from the Toroma Partnership Project office. Once again, this information, even had it been in date, was not tailored to community members in terms of legibility. Photographs 5.12 and 5.13 below illustrate.

Photograph 5.12: Partner Transparency Board in Toroma, Katakwi LRP. July 2011.



Photograph 5.13: Partner Transparency Board in Toroma, Katakwi LRP. July 2011.

| TOROMA PARTNERSHIP PROJECT (TPP) | | | |
|--|---|-----------|----------|
| TEL:0782981832/0775349743. | | | |
| FIRST HALF BUBGET AND WORK PLAN 2010(JAN-JUNE) | | | |
| NO | ACTIVITY | AMOUNT | PERIOD |
| | Mobilize & sensitization of farmers on sustainable farmer groups, IGAs & ROSCAS on identification & management of viable Enterprise | 287,000 | April |
| | Procure 1000budded orange seedlings for 15 women groups in 4 parishes | 2,140,000 | March |
| | Procurement of seeds to 4 primary schools | 698,000 | March |
| | Executive committee allowances | 1,548,000 | Jan-June |

The main weaknesses in transparency boards, therefore, are that they sometimes do not exist, and when they do, they are invariably either not easily accessible or not legible to the average community member and/or they are out of date. In this sense, the situation in Uganda appears to mirror that in Kenya as described in the previous chapter: the process exists, to some extent, but the spirit behind the process appears to have been lost⁶⁶.

⁶⁶ It should be also noted that, despite the significant shortcomings of transparency boards in ActionAid Uganda, when combined with other forms of transparency, such as PRRPs, ongoing information-sharing with the government and so on, ActionAid did appear to be ahead of its peers in the areas studied in terms of sharing information. However, similar to the PRRPs, these transparency boards stop far short of the standards ActionAid has set for itself, even if they surpass other NGOs.

In sum, both aspects of downward accountability to communities in ActionAid Uganda, participation and transparency, fall significantly short of ActionAid's intentions, despite brochure talk that sometimes emerges around them. In the next section, I review downward accountability through ActionAid's governance system.

5.14 ActionAid's Accountability through Its Governance System

As seen in the previous chapter, major reforms to Action Aid's global governance system have taken place in recent years with significant implications for accountability. In this section, I discuss the extent to which ActionAid's governance structure, its board and its general assembly, enhances accountability to intended beneficiaries. I interviewed four current and two former board members, as well as two General Assembly (GA) members from non-partner organisations, and three from partner organisations. I also observed a national-level strategy meeting which included GA members.

My research found that the AAU board is strong, that it provides more oversight than existed before its establishment in 2005 and that it has helped AAU become more legitimate and more "Ugandan" as one interviewee put it, by bringing in strong Ugandan professionals from different sectors that play a role in decision-making for the country programme. The board is generally highly regarded by all stakeholders. One contentious issue that emerged is that the board is voluntary, and thus some board members and former board members, during documented annual reviews, reported that the amount of work required made their voluntary participation difficult or impossible from a livelihood perspective. Given this voluntary nature of the board and the need for special skills in law, finance, human resources and so on, it is unsurprising that the board is largely made up of upper middle-class urban professionals, including some senior activists. Thus I found that the board does not play much of a role in directly enhancing accountability to intended beneficiaries by including poor people as members⁶⁷. This is apparently more the role of the General Assembly.

⁶⁷ Naturally, this does not prevent individual board members from consulting poor and marginalized groups to inform their work with ActionAid, and many board members are social activists in different ways.

The evaluation of the country programme in 2010 was very positive of the GA's role in enhancing downward accountability:

The fact that partners have a stake in AAIU has therefore been a positive influence in the participation of AAIU's General Assembly members. That way AAIU has become more accountable to communities it works with. For example, the members of the General Assembly actively interrogate the Board on expenditure during the AGM as well as follow through on previous plans that have been implemented. (Kithinji, et al., 2010, p. 32)

An article co-written by a trustee and a staff member gave a similarly glowing review, interestingly in the early days of the ActionAid Uganda General Assembly:

The GA has increased the participation of the people - for whom ActionAid exists - in making policy decisions, receiving structured feedback and demanding accountability on the way the organisation is run. . . The high level participation in the GA and clear sense of purpose have injected into the organisation an increased responsibility to making responsibility to ensure that each stakeholder works efficiently and effectively in a transparent manner to attain our strategic objectives. We see the GA as the cornerstone of stakeholder participation that deepens accountability. . . The inclusion of the voices of the poor and excluded in governance of the organisation is key to increasing AA Uganda's accountability and its mandate for engaging in rights-based work. We have deliberately ensured that the majority of the members of the GA are the poor and excluded people and their organisations. The [National Governance Board] and management are therefore held accountable by the people that we exist for. (Ovonji-Odida & Ogwal, 2009, pp. 26,28)

However, my data suggest a different interpretation to this⁶⁸view of the General Assembly, suggesting that it might be brochure talk. In order to analyse the data on the General Assembly, I return to the working definition of accountability as transparency and participation. On the transparency criteria, GA members interviewed were unanimous that ActionAid Uganda was strong at providing them with timely and detailed documentation about the organisation. The other question on downward accountability relates to participation of intended beneficiaries influencing decision making. To analyse this, I sought to determine who participates in the GA and who they

⁶⁸ It is noteworthy that the methodology of the evaluation did not specifically include General Assembly members, although it is possible that the evaluation team met partners who were also GA members (Kithinji, et al., 2010, pp. 9-10).

represent, what decisions the GA makes, and how much influence do different participants have within the GA.

In terms of who attends the GA, there is an effort made to include “poor and marginalized” people, as per the goals of internationalisation (Ebrahim & Gordon, 2011, p. 6). According to my interviewees, partner representatives generally fill this role, making up half of the GA’s 40 members. The partner GA members I interviewed attended the Assembly and engaged in open discussions on relevant topics such as the ActionAid strategies. Ostensibly, the partners on the GA are supposed to represent all partners in their LRP with their GA participation, but my partner interviewees all said that this is not happening. As I elaborate on further below, there is also a serious question over whether partners are representative of their own constituencies.

Regarding the second issue of what the GA decides, the perspectives of interviewees were more negative. Some partners complain that the GA is merely a ‘rubber-stamping body’ which does not go into the necessary level of detail on programming. One partner GA member commented:

The GA doesn’t have power, we are not approving plans and budgets but receiving post-mortems like the annual accounts without the work plans. Things are over and we are only looking at one side. There were no plans so we couldn’t feed into what money should be spent on x and y.

Finally, on the third issue of how much influence partner members have within the GA, one issue that emerged was that partners often lacked the capacity to participate fully in the proceedings as they are from small, weak organisations and lack skills and experience to interact in such fora. One board member said, “The partners are reserved in the GA, they are not speaking out, they fear management more than the board. They are on their Sunday best. They don’t want to jeopardise their relationship with AA”. Some interviewees think that a once-per-year GA meeting, as per the current schedule, is simply too infrequent, particularly given the different levels of capacity. ActionAid Uganda has recognised this capacity issue and is seeking ways to build capacity of GA members (Ojiambo, 2012, p. 7).

In sum, while the board generally gets excellent reviews, it does not appear to be enhancing downward accountability to intended beneficiaries in any direct way. The

GA has more potential to involve beneficiaries or their representatives in decision-making, but is hindered by infrequent meetings, low capacity of many partners and, some partners feel, an inappropriate level of discussion at the GA. As is expanded on below, another obstacle is that partners are not necessarily themselves representative of any 'constituency', neither a constituency of ActionAid partners, nor constituencies at community level.

Having discussed my field data on ActionAid's downward accountability, in the final section of this chapter, I expand on the key obstacles to downward accountability that have emerged from my data.

5.15 Key Issues Affecting ActionAid Uganda's Downward Accountability

As has been illustrated, there are various shortcomings in ActionAid Uganda's accountability to communities, particularly the low quality of processes, such as PRRPs and transparency boards. My research question asks why such deficiencies exist. I identified four causes of this disjuncture between aims and practices, as illustrated in Figure 5.1 below. Although there are some differences of emphasis within the headings, the Uganda level operational obstacles mirror those at the international level in the previous chapter. These causes are: quantity of staff time available, quality of staff, prioritisation of donor requirements, and leadership.

Figure 5.1: Operational Obstacles to Downward Accountability



The main difference between the international and Uganda levels is that, whereas institutional donor demands are the key ‘donor’ issue at the international level, country-level stakeholders identified problems with ‘individual donors’, otherwise known as sponsors. I now elaborate on these obstacles.

5.15.1 Quantity of Staff Time Available

In this section I discuss how the quantity of staff time affects prospects for downward accountability in ActionAid Uganda. I look at areas to which sufficient time is apparently not being allocated, such as participatory processes and partner support, and areas to which time is being allocated, particularly to administrative and sponsorship tasks.

It was commonly stated that participatory processes suffer due to the lack of time of ActionAid staff. One staff member commented in relation to PRRPs:

Staff are [*sic*] completely stretched. We are killing the processes and intentions by being stretched. . . . There are guidelines for PRRPs, these are on the Hive, a preparation document, but people will say when do I

have the time to look at this? It is supposed to help the thinking through, there is potential for creativity with pictures etc. but with lack of preparation it doesn't happen.

Similarly, the 2010 evaluation of ActionAid Uganda commented that staff members were too busy for empowerment work: "AAIU staff seem to be busy with activities and routine work that they may not be able to spend adequate time on facilitating Reflect circles empowerment and transformation processes" (Kithinji, et al., p. 19). This was a point very much supported by my direct observation.

Lack of time of ActionAid staff to support or monitor partners, including around their use of participatory approaches, was one of the key complaints of partner organisations. One partner commented, "The AA staff are [*sic*] all the time engaged. The programme officers are engaged. Monitoring partners is secondary". Another said:

AA has a lean/skeleton staff. . . . They have lots of activities, meetings, planning, they are here and there, there are a lot of gaps. Every individual gets stressed. [The programme officer] is out, [LRP manager] is in and out. They don't have time to support partners, they are stretched. They can't deliver on time.

Indeed, this point has been consistently raised in the documentation since 2000. For instance, in an internal audit of Katakwi LRP in 2006, the auditors noted, "Programme Officers rarely make support visits to the partners and at times they do not visit partners at all." The aim, at that time, was to visit each partner twice per month, but the audit data showed that, at best, one partner was visited every two to three months, and that one partner was not visited at all in 18 months (ActionAid Uganda, 2006a, p. 7). The issue of "weak support to partners" was also raised in the Peer Review report in 2009 which assessed ActionAid Uganda for affiliation (Somajni, et al., 2009, p. 3). As has been noted above, during Meenu's time there was a vast reduction in staff numbers, along with a vast increase in partners. This staff reduction was envisioned to support a shift to partners undertaking the implementation of programmes directly with communities, but some interviewees reported that it effectively led to a reduction of staff capacity to engage in support to partners. This was a problem as so many of the partners were nascent and weak.

In terms of which activities are being prioritised and taking up staff time, two areas stand out from the data: internal administrative tasks and sponsorship. The 2010 evaluators noted, “there are too many systems and policies in place, slowing down implementation sometimes and increasing staff support costs. AAIU has become over bureaucratic” (Kithinji, et al., 2010, p. 68). As has been mentioned above, the focus on these administrative tasks has emerged from a significant number of instances of fraud among staff and partners over the years. My data strongly suggest a significant amount of staff time is spent on administrative tasks. One staff member commented:

[LRP] managers complain about overwork but it seems be mostly on administrative work, not programme work. They are not analysing data or making projections. They are doing accountabilities and preparing for the auditor.

Another interviewee, an LRP staff member, commented, “The two things that take time are sponsorship and procedures. You spend so much time on procedures, not mindful of outcome.” Community-level work seemed consistently to be either rushed, such as the PRRPs I attended, or neglected. Here again, interviews aligned strongly with my observation. Interestingly, I observed that within the PRRPs, the procedure of filling in attendance sheets, on which the customary soda and biscuit distribution was based, was a high priority that took a lot of staff and participant attention away from the PRRP proceedings. Similarly, one partner spoke of ActionAid staff spending all their time on field visits “filling vouchers”.

I also observed in my time at LRP level that a significant amount of priority is given to fulfilling child sponsorship requirements, such as photos of children and letters. On one field visit with a programme officer, I noticed that the PO appeared far more concerned with ensuring that photos were taken of particular sponsored children than with the quality of the subsequent PRRP. Staff constantly spoke of the burdensome child sponsorship requirements. One staff member commented, “Sponsorship and fundraising takes a lot of time. This is the first priority and there is a lot of admin.”

Thus, some tasks are being prioritised and some are not being adequately carried out. This may also relate to the performance of staff in the organisation⁶⁹. However, the data strongly indicate that at least part of the issue here is excess workload. Overload of ActionAid staff was constantly mentioned by interviewees, both inside and outside of the organisation. It was also a major theme throughout my observation in ActionAid Uganda. At one point, sitting in a management team meeting in Kampala, I wrote in my notes, “TIME, TIME, TIME, PRESSURE, PRESSURE, DEADLINES, DEADLINES”. Work-life balance received a score of only 26% in the 2010 Staff Climate Survey in Uganda (Hewitt Associates, 2010b, p. 10).

Therefore it would appear that a shortage of staff time, in part due to overload and in part due to de-prioritisation of community-related activities, appears to be one of the factors leading to weaker than intended downward accountability. I now discuss issues around how the quality of staff and partners affects accountability to beneficiaries and partners, beginning with the type of staff recruited and partners selected.

5.15.2 Quality of Staff and Partners

Another factor in the weaknesses in downward accountability, according to the data, is the quality of staff and partners. This can be related to the type of staff recruited and partners selected at LRP level, as well as to the induction and training which they receive. In this section, I look at each issue in turn.

In terms of staff, programme officers at LRP level have the primary responsibility for liaising with communities and with partner organisations, a critical role for an organisation prioritising downward accountability. However, from what I observed, which was consistent with interviews, POs are not always well-placed for this role which, in part, relates how they are recruited and the nature of their jobs and in part, as is discussed below, how they are trained within ActionAid.

⁶⁹ However, one senior staff interviewee was sceptical that ActionAid Uganda staff lacked time and said that the issue was more how they utilised their time: “This needs to be considered when people talk about workload. We really need to think about performance management. What are people supposed to be doing, are they doing it or are others covering for them.”

In 2001, under Meenu Vadera's leadership, it was stated that, in order to align with ActionAid's strategy of increasing learning and accountability at field level:

we have deliberately moved away from recruiting field staff who are graduates, familiar with computer skills, articulate in English and so on, as that by definition ruled out the possibility to recruiting local women and men who have the more important skills of mobilising and engaging with people. (ActionAid Uganda, 2001b, p. 4)

In 2011, this recruitment strategy was clearly not in place and, in fact, there was no indication in my data that it ever had been. All POs with whom I interacted were graduates, spoke fluent English and spent significant amounts of their working life on computers. The current job description for a programme officer requires the following qualifications and experience:

- A Bachelors degree in Development studies or Social sciences from a recognized institution
- Certificate in project planning and management is an added advantage.
- At least 1-2 years of relevant working experience from a recognized institution, preferably an NGO
- Good understanding and knowledge of;
 - HRBA programming
 - Monitoring and Evaluation
 - Governance accountability and community empowerment
 - Fundraising and resource mobilization
 - Donor contract management (ActionAid Uganda, 2012a).

This list is indicative of the wide range of tasks for which programme officers are currently responsible. One staff member commented that programme officers:

have to do [human resources], procurement, the monthly financial report. Audit, sponsorship work. In one head there are many small things. For projects there will be proposals. It's not about capacity, it's about demands. All have high importance. There's [Impact Assessment and Shared Learning], finance, accountabilities. . . .At the [LRP] level, there's finance, admin, [human resources], communication, [information communication technology], sponsorship grants, partnership, audit, programme development manager. Then there are demands from the government and the community. . . . There may be donor visits, there are meetings. You can't think straight. You'll have to do a contract for this. With all of this then you have your family, and meetings with the district.

While the point that this staff member was making related to an overload of demands in terms of time, it is easy to see how an organisation might struggle to recruit for these diverse tasks in terms of skills. Inevitably, in the recruitment process for such a wide array of tasks, prioritisation is needed. The list of qualifications above suggests that priority will be given to education, as there is no community-related experience required.

Indeed, some interviewees raised the issue of the lack of facilitation skills of ActionAid Uganda staff and felt that the organisation was prioritising the recruitment of individuals who could write reports over those who might relate better at a community level. An illustration of this may be the fact that the PO in one of the LRPs I visited did not speak the regional language, which was the main language of the communities to which they were assigned. This suggests that prioritisation is given more to non-community related tasks.

However, while there were concerns about the type of staff recruited in terms of skills and attitudes, my data were even stronger regarding how the type of partners selected was militating against downward accountability. As noted above, ActionAid entered into a large number of new partnerships in the early 2000s. This shift to partnership could have had the effect of being conducive to downward accountability, in that it could have reduced the distance between ActionAid and its beneficiaries by bringing in locally representative organisations to amplify the voices of community members. However, it would appear that the way in which partnership evolved within ActionAid Uganda has, in many cases, had the opposite effect of working against downward accountability. A key point here is the questionable constituencies of partners.

My data strongly demonstrated that the accountability of a significant number of the partners studied, to the entirety of communities in which they work, is highly questionable. One former staff member noted, “Partners are not very accountable [to communities]. They are dealing with survival thinking how can ActionAid fund me.” Issues of who partners serve and who they represent are critical for accountability discussions, and will obviously affect whose ‘priorities and perspectives’ these partners listen to and to whom they are transparent. While partners were positive about PRRPs,

the sessions appeared to be dependent on ActionAid providing a specific budget for them, which had apparently been an obstacle to PRRPs taking place in the recent years since these processes were rejuvenated under Charles Businge. The same issue of budget emerged regarding board meetings. One partner staff member in Katakwi complained that without allowances, even the organisation's board members do not show up for meetings:

People don't come to meetings if they don't think there'll be food and transport refund. [The chairperson] tried to hold the meeting but few people showed up. They expect an allowance. When there was a meeting in March only 6 members came from 23.

In areas with high poverty levels in which ActionAid works, this is perhaps not surprising. However, it does not lend credence to claims of 'representative people's organisations'.

Another example of 'questionable constituencies' relates to the wider membership of partner organisations. There was evidence in the PRRPs and in some documents that some partners were providing benefits, funded by ActionAid, predominantly to members of their organisation, often fee-paying members. This was an area of concern also raised in the 2010 evaluation of ActionAid Uganda (Kithinji, et al., 2010, p. 22). Moreover, it was evident from my meetings with some groups of community members that they were often not clear about how to become a member of 'their' local organisation, even as they acknowledged that members received more benefits.

Thus, the evidence points to very limited representativeness of some partner organisations. In response to a question in the staff survey on participation of poor people in reviews and planning⁷⁰, while most staff members were fairly positive on ActionAid's performance (the average score being 6.6 out of 10)⁷¹, one commented:

⁷⁰ The heading in the survey was 'Accountability' and the criterion (drawn from ALPS) was: "Poor to participate in All implementation, reviews, planning, research, monitoring, analysis, advocacy and recruitment of frontline staff". In responses to this question, there was a consensus that poor people do not participate in the recruitment of frontline staff.

⁷¹ Survey participants were asked to give scores out of ten on the implementation, within ActionAid Uganda, of the five ALPS principles. The average score for Accountability (6.6), Power Analysis (6.7), Learning (6.7) and Transparency (6.5) was almost identical, but Women's Rights was significantly higher at 8.1.

participation of the poor is limited to partner organisation level while the expectation is for them to consult further, this doesn't in reality happens [*sic*]. If does, its [*sic*] still those who're well off and influence whose opinions are sought.

The finding was similar in partner self-assessments conducted in 2005 which found that 90% of partners only do participation with leaders (ActionAid Uganda, 2005a). Thus, my data are very negative on the breadth of constituencies of LRP partners. Another key issue with respect to partners' accountability and transparency is that of fraud, which I return to in the discussion chapter.

In sum, the fact that ActionAid Uganda has struggled with the after-effects of poor partner appraisal and selection leading to unrepresentative partners was starkly illustrated by my data. There emerged significant shortcomings in some partners' accountability to community members. Having discussed how ActionAid Uganda's recruitment of staff and selection of partners has been an obstacle to downward accountability, I now discuss a second aspect relating to quality of staff and partners: induction and training.

The 'other side of the coin' of the recruitment and selection of staff and partners is their induction and training on approaches and skill-sets related to downward accountability. My observation of PRRPs, as noted above, showed clear weaknesses in either the skills and/or the will of ActionAid and partners to facilitate quality participatory processes.

As noted earlier in this chapter, the major staff investment on leadership and learning which took place during the OD process did not reach field staff. More broadly, investment in capacities for participation was said to have declined with the shift to HRBA. It is notable that the skills gap in participatory approaches was recognised by the organisation which led to a two-week training course in January 2011 for ActionAid staff. During this training course, staff expressed the need for considerable further trainings. However, up to August 2011 when my field work period ended, there was reportedly no follow-up to this training, which appeared to relate to the issue of workload, and perhaps specifically the multiple processes that were going on in

the country programme relating to the new strategy, but could also relate to the issue of prioritisation.

A major problem that arose relating to the issue of staff quality for downward accountability is that of turnover, which erodes the value of trainings done and any work done on staff attitudes and behaviours. I return to the issue of turnover in the discussion chapter.

With respect to partners, as with staff, a lack of skills or appropriate attitude of partners for participatory processes was evident in the PRRPs I attended, for instance, the harsh facilitation style of the partner in the PRRP in Kapujan. As noted above, the data point to significant shortcomings in support for partners due to staff time shortages. Having said that, some partners praise the training they receive from ActionAid. My in-depth review of documentation on Katakwi, since the late 1990s, points to several phases of assessments and capacity building initiatives for partners. For instance, some partners were part of the 'Transform' capacity building programme on participation and accountability conducted by Community Development Resource Network in 2003, and there were organisational development initiatives in 2004-5 (ActionAid Uganda, 2004; Kabenge, et al., 2005, p. 9). However, interviewees make the point that ActionAid support to partners tends to be centred on finance and audit issues, rather than programming. One staff member noted, "Partners get financial and non-financial support. On the non-financial side there is compliance and programme. Compliance is often at the cost of programme effectiveness. We need to strike a balance". Many staff members complain about the persistent low quality of partners, despite many years of capacity building, which returns to the point about selection of partners.

Thus, it is clear that challenges in the recruitment of staff, in the selection of partners and in the induction and training of staff and partners have contributed to weaknesses in ActionAid's downward accountability. In the next section, I move on to the impact of donor and sponsor requirements.

5.15.3 Prioritisation of Donor Requirements

As noted in the previous chapter, institutional donors were seen to be a significant obstacle to downward accountability in ActionAid International. In the Ugandan

context, issues emerged more around individual donors, known more commonly as sponsors. Both are discussed in this section. ActionAid Uganda's income in 2011 was 55% from sponsorship – from approximately 19,000 individual sponsors - and 45% from institutional donors (ActionAid Uganda, 2012d).

As noted in the literature review chapter, Wallace, Bornstein and Chapman (2007), discuss how the requirements of institutional donors for rigid planning and reporting in Uganda and South Africa adversely affect recipient NGOs. Interestingly, while this was a major theme in the literature, and arose at the ActionAid International level, institutional donors hardly featured at all in discussions with ActionAid Uganda staff on factors negatively affecting downward accountability. A few interviewees mentioned stringent donor requirements, but the vast majority said that there were no major issues to mention on the topic. Thus, accountability to donors is generally seen as relatively unproblematic by staff and partners in the day-to-day sense.

This surprising finding may be, in part, a reflection of the fact that Action Aid is less dependent on institutional donors than many of its peer international NGOs. While the proportion of donor funds is quite significant at 45%, this is largely due to a recent merger with Danish organisation, Mellemlfolkeligt Samvirke (MS), which brought with it significant Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA) funds. DANIDA is generally reputed to be one of the more flexible donors in the sector and its reporting requirements are not considered to be onerous.

A second possible explanation for the absence of discussion of institutional donors by interviewees arose after I had presented this finding to ActionAid Uganda senior staff in February 2012. It was commented by a senior staff member that institutional donors shape the aid sector in Uganda significantly in ways that can include the hindering of downward accountability, but that this impact might not be obvious to many non-senior staff members or partners in ActionAid Uganda, as they are not engaged in these sector-wide discussions. This comment may point to indirect but nevertheless powerful impacts of managerialism and results-based management in the broader NGO sector, a point I return to in the discussion chapter.

A third possible explanation for why donor funding was not considered burdensome is that staff in interviews often rated the management of donor funds as

preferable to the management of sponsorship funds, which was generally considered to be onerous and time-consuming. It is likely, therefore, that institutional donor requirements looked particularly manageable in relative terms. I now discuss how the management of sponsorship funds appeared to negatively impact on downward accountability, which was a significant theme in my interviews.

My findings demonstrated that child sponsorship negatively affects prospects for downward accountability in two ways, in terms of prioritisation of sponsorship over other tasks, and in terms of methodologies of implementing sponsorship. The first point of high prioritisation has already been discussed above. Sponsorship requirements are seen as time-consuming and contributing to an excessive workload at LRP level. One interviewee noted, “Child sponsorship is non-negotiable. If there are queries you have to drop everything else”.

Secondly, there is the issue of ActionAid’s global rules and ways of working around sponsorship and their knock on effects on accountability to partners and communities. ActionAid applies certain methodologies in its work in terms of its use of child sponsorship funds. These methodologies aim to ensure effective use of sponsorship funds, but can have unintended negative impacts. For instance, ratios which ActionAid has decided to apply to sponsorship funds to restrict administration and support costs could have the impact of putting pressure on staff and partner staff numbers. The example I highlight in this section, which emerged frequently in my data, is the practice of working in LRPs for ten years or more.

There has been a general practice of ActionAid working in sponsorship communities for approximately ten years - generally equivalent to the time a sponsored child would need to finish school⁷². The need to administer sponsorship and provide letters, case studies and photos to show the child’s progress for this period of time has largely restricted, in effect, the selection of partners by ActionAid Uganda to

⁷² The 2010 global Internal Audit DA Review notes: “One of the key features of the child sponsorship/DA format is that a particular community can benefit from an income stream which is virtually “guaranteed” over a very long, but finite, period (normally ten years)” (ActionAid, p. 4). The management response to this report (contained in the same document) does, however, speak of a possible change in this process: “Management has reviewed timing of phase out to delink from the 10 year imposed through the child sponsorship process. A DA phase out policy has been developed for approval by the Board in September 2010. It proposes that non-forced phase out will happen only against substantial accomplishment of DA strategic plans” (p. 7).

organisations based in sponsorship communities. However, the partner organisations with which ActionAid works at local level, as noted above, are often weak⁷³ and not widely representative (ActionAid Uganda, 2008, p. 2). Many staff expressed frustration about being “tied” to certain communities and partners for such long periods. One staff member commented, “If we could work with a couple of strategic partners it would be better but because of sponsorship we are tied to these communities.”

One example of this ‘tying’ of ActionAid to particular communities was the practice whereby groups of parents in two of the LRPs I visited had established their own associations to take over from partner organisations who they said were not meeting their needs. ActionAid subsequently began funding these parent groups. Staff members were frustrated by this kind of hold that sponsored parents had over ActionAid. One said:

It’s much easier to deal with donor money. The [LRP] takes certain decisions due to sponsorship and certain partners are tied to sponsorship. You can’t antagonise these partners. With donor money you can do the work that’s supposed to be done in the way it’s supposed to be done.

As noted above, part of the frustration of staff stemmed from the fact that these community-based partners generally want to engage in service delivery rather than working within a human rights-based approach.

In sum, while institutional donors are not thought to lead directly to the problems in downward accountability in ActionAid Uganda, child sponsorship is seen to militate against accountability to beneficiaries. This is due to the significant time needed to administer sponsorship procedures, and also due to the fact that the methodologies through which sponsorship is being implemented have, in effect, limited the selection of partners, which then impacts the quality of participatory and transparency processes. I now discuss the final obstacle at operational level: leadership.

⁷³ However, some interviewees noted that the ‘requirement’ to work with CBOs based in sponsorship communities, a practice from Meenu’s time, was not actually a requirement. In some cases, ActionAid has begun to work in sponsorship communities with partner organisations based outside these communities.

5.15.4 Leadership

The final operational obstacle, which clearly has a significant impact on several of the other obstacles mentioned, is leadership. Leadership was constantly mentioned by interviewees in Uganda as a key factor affecting ALPS implementation. The sections above on the different leaders have discussed the changes which they introduced in some detail, thus this section briefly highlights the accountability-related changes.

As noted in the previous chapter, due to the perceived lack of leadership at the international level to implement ALPS, it was widely stated by interviewees that ALPS implementation depends largely on the initiative of individuals at country level (David & Mancini, 2004; IASL, 2009b, p. 2; ul Islam, 2009, p. 74). In the early 2000s, country directors in Brazil, Kenya and Burundi were commended for their leadership on ALPS, but, even more so, the role of Meenu Vadera in Uganda as a champion of ALPS was highlighted.

However, as described above, the role of Meenu in ALPS implementation is quite complex when explored in-depth at country-level, and is not the straightforward 'championing' role as was portrayed in the international literature or by international interviewees. The major shifts under Meenu were the introduction of the human rights-based approach, the vast increase in partners and consequent reduction in staff, the organisational development process and the initiation of learning mechanisms for staff. Some of these changes contained potential for enhancing downward accountability. However, ultimately, it appears that these changes largely worked against downward accountability by, in effect, decreasing the ActionAid staff focus on participatory approaches and community level work, in the context of weak and sometimes fraudulent community-level partners.

Under Amanda's Sserumaga's leadership in Uganda (2004-7), the focus was again on the human rights-based approach, but using a higher level policy advocacy approach. During this time, staff reported that participatory methodologies suffered and that the learning mechanisms introduced by Meenu were quashed. Another impact of Amanda Sserumaga's leadership was that she was seen to alienate many ActionAid staff, leading to high turnover and to distraction from work for those who did not leave, but who frequently felt fearful of their jobs. The negative impact of this kind of

leadership on staff performance and, consequently, on ActionAid's work is discussed further in the next chapter, when concerns and stresses on staff are considered.

During the leadership of Charles Businge (2008-2012), there was a recognition that participatory approaches and transparency at community-level were insufficiently practiced and poor quality and actions were taken to remedy this through institutionalising or increasing PRRPs and transparency boards and through training staff. On the other hand, as mentioned, the procedures and financial controls that Charles introduced were seen by interviewees to be tight and time-consuming, which can potentially have the effect of distracting time and energies of field practitioners away from participatory approaches.

Thus, it is very clear that each change of leadership in ActionAid Uganda has had major but different impacts on prospects for downward accountability. Some of these impacts were positive, but most were negative. Having discussed the operational obstacles to downward accountability, I now move to the chapter's conclusion.

5.16 Conclusion

While there is plenty of literature expounding on what should be happening in terms of downward accountability at implementation level, this chapter provides a rare look at what actually is happening and what has happened over the past 15 years in ActionAid Uganda, from my direct observation and from the perspectives of various actors.

My findings show a significant disjuncture between the stated intentions about ActionAid Uganda's downward accountability, and what I saw and heard. While processes are ongoing, they are generally not being carried out in line with the ALPS principles. Reconstructing the history of ActionAid Uganda brings out operational challenges to the organisation improving its downward accountability, such as limitations of staffing, partnership, sponsorship requirements and leadership. These findings roughly align with the findings on ActionAid International in the previous chapter. Despite this poor quality practice, the brochure talk on ALPS persists.

In the discussion chapter, I look beyond the operational obstacles identified in this and the last chapter to identify underlying obstacles which make accountability to intended beneficiaries improbable. I also look further at what enables the powerful myth

of ALPS and its brochure talk to sustain over time despite the disjuncture between intentions and practice.

6. NGO Accountability Obstacles: What Lies beneath?

6.1 Introduction

A key finding of my research thus far is that, despite significant efforts made by ActionAid to implement the ALPS system since 2000, there is a major difference between ActionAid's stated intentions and the realities of implementation as I perceived them, via my use of the actor-oriented approach and my combination of methods. While ALPS processes, such as processes for the planning and review of programmes, are in evidence, the quality of these processes, as measured by the ALPS goals of participation and transparency, is generally poor. Thus, the major goal of ALPS from a values perspective, downward accountability to intended beneficiaries, is not being realised in most cases. Nevertheless, the myth of ALPS and its associated brochure talk continue to be strong on the achievement of downward accountability, particularly at international level, despite evidence of weak practice. Hence the concept of disjuncture has become central to my study. This chapter explores and elaborates this concept of disjuncture between what is claimed and represented, and what is implemented in the name of accountability, and also looks at how these instances of disjuncture emerge and function. This analysis has value, not simply for discussions of accountability but also for understanding other areas of NGO practice.

This discussion chapter serves two purposes for my dissertation. Firstly, it looks beyond these operational obstacles to downward accountability presented in the data chapters to identify fundamental obstacles that are militating against this goal. These obstacles are explanations of why the first level of disjuncture between ActionAid's intentions and its practices exists. Secondly, this chapter takes a close look at the second level of disjuncture, building on the discussion in the literature review chapter. Here I explore why the myth of ALPS has persisted, and hence why the disjuncture between aims and practices lasts over time. Once again, I use the concept of disjuncture as necessary and inevitable in managerialist contexts.

To analyse the issues in this chapter, I link back to wider theories and debates, recalling some of the themes in my literature review chapter and the conceptual framework I proposed to explain disjuncture. This discussion chapter lays the groundwork for the conclusions of my research in the next and final chapter.

6.2 Structure of This Chapter

The first half of this chapter explores four obstacles leading to the first level of disjuncture between the intentions and the practice of downward accountability within ActionAid: power dynamics between NGOs and communities, the tendency of NGOs to rapidly change approaches, pressures and interests of individual staff members, and the desire of NGOs to retain control over programming. In the second half of the chapter, I move to the second level of disjuncture which helps explain why the myth of ALPS still persists, despite the shortcomings in accountability practice that are well-recognised. Adapting my earlier framework, I propose that there are two causal factors that allow this second level of disjuncture between the intentions and realities of downward accountability to continue: benefits to the external legitimacy and benefits to the internal legitimacy of the organisation. Furthermore, I propose three enabling factors or mechanisms which aid the continuation of the disjuncture. These are language, discontinuity, and organisational hierarchy.

I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how this second level of disjuncture or, in other words, the utility of the myth of downward accountability, then effectively becomes one more obstacle to implementation of the stated intentions of accountability to intended beneficiaries. This is because important symbolic objectives can be met even with poor implementation, thus reducing the incentive for realisation of the stated aims. In other words, image can serve an even more important purpose than reality.

6.3 Framework of Obstacles to NGO Accountability to Intended Beneficiaries

At both the international and Uganda levels, I found operational obstacles to downward accountability around the quantity of staff time available, the quality of staff and partners, the prioritisation of donor requirements, and leadership. As noted in the literature review chapter, it is often suggested that NGOs need to ‘try harder’ to improve

their accountabilities. Indeed, these operational obstacles could potentially be ameliorated to some extent by an NGO ‘trying harder’, for instance, making more investments in staff and partners. But I also found more fundamental obstacles that pose deeper challenges for NGOs. Using my data and theories and concepts from the literature, I propose a framework of these obstacles which are militating against NGO accountability to intended beneficiaries.

In this framework, illustrated as Figure 6.1 below, I contend that there are four obstacles which combine to make accountability to beneficiaries improbable: power dynamics at community level, the NGO tendency to ‘jump’ between trends, individual staff members’ pressures and interests, and NGOs’ desire for the retention of control. In the following sections, I expand on these obstacles.

Figure 6.1: Obstacles to NGO Accountability to Beneficiaries



6.3.1 Power Dynamics at Community-Level

Power is central to accountability. While Weberian models of accountability, including some neo-liberal approaches, place a strong focus on structures and technical issues for accountability (Morrison, 1995; Weber, 1978), authors such as Brett (1999), raise the importance of issues around context and power. Along similar lines, Lewis (2007a, p. 144), in the aforementioned case study of a Bangladeshi NGO, points to context and culture as key to understanding accountability issues within NGO as, “NGO structures, activities and relationships are socially embedded within institutions and power structures at both local and international levels”. Later in this chapter, power is discussed in relation to ActionAid’s relationships with its donors and partners. This section focuses on observable power dynamics between ActionAid and its partner organisations, and intended beneficiaries at community level.

Recalling discussions in the literature review chapter on the actor-oriented approaches taken by Long (2001) and Hilhorst (2003) regarding the agency of beneficiaries and the ‘real world of NGOs’, it cannot be assumed that power relationships are always observable, or that development projects or processes are progressing only as they are seen at face value. It is possible that some of the intended beneficiaries who seemed not to have much power vis-à-vis ActionAid or partners actually exercised powers in different ways and different fora that I did not see. As Mosse (2005, p. 239) notes, “it is easy to assume too much about the direction of power in development.” Recognising this inherent limitation, this section is drawn from what I could observe and what emerged from interviews and documentation on power dynamics at community level. I begin by outlining ActionAid’s recognition of the problematic power dynamics inherent in its work at community level. I then recall some theory from the literature review chapter which cautions about the inherent difficulty of transforming power relationships. I describe my findings on the extent to which ActionAid managed to achieve its intended power transformations which I summarise as firstly, the voluntary reversal of hierarchy by staff and partners, and secondly, the community demand for accountability. In both cases, my findings are negative, suggesting that power dynamics at community level are a significant obstacle to accountability to beneficiaries.

There is a clear recognition of power dynamics within ALPS; power is one of its five principles and ALPS processes are supposed to include a power analysis. Empowerment of poor and excluded people is central to ActionAid's Human Rights-Based Approach (HRBA) (ActionAid, 2010a). ActionAid has also recognised the difficulties in transforming power to achieve the goal of downward accountability in ALPS. For instance, David and Mancini (2003, p. 7) noted in a conference presentation on ALPS that:

ActionAid is a large International NGO which is changing constantly, which has a huge power vis-à-vis many of its partners and which (in places) has a very dominant hierarchy. As such, there is an inherent contradiction when ActionAid is trying to open up space for honest feedback and criticism.

In 2001, soon after the launch of ALPS, an internal workshop on power was held in Dhaka. Participants included ActionAid senior management and trustees. The report of the workshop shows a high-level of awareness within ActionAid of the journey that is needed to achieve the kinds of power transformations foreseen in ALPS:

Participatory methodologies must no longer be reduced to tools and techniques, which can be used in manipulative, extractive, inequitable and damaging ways. All our work (in our respective areas of influence) should be critically analysed with a consciousness of power and a willingness to challenge and be challenged by the poor, by partners, and by each other. (ActionAid, 2001b, p. 24)

This perspective aligns with the scepticisms of authors, such as Najam (1996), Cooke and Kothari (2001) and Williams (2010), regarding the effectiveness of participatory mechanisms in the context of power imbalances between NGOs and beneficiaries. However, despite this awareness existing within ActionAid, my research shows that power dynamics at community level are still a serious obstacle to its downward accountability.

One of the tenets of ALPS is that its processes should be used to promote awareness and confidence in community members to hold ActionAid and its partners to account, and that this will help to transform power relationships (ActionAid, 2006a, p. 8). However, Ebrahim and Weisband (2007, p. 19) point out that, in practice, accountability processes will, in fact, tend to reinforce existing power dynamics:

“Accountability is a social phenomenon, reflective of relationships of power in society. One can thus expect the instruments of accountability to reproduce those relationships rather than overturn them”. This recalls Bourdieu’s concept of ‘habitus’ from the literature review chapter. Bourdieu highlights the extreme challenges to attempts to overturn established social relationships and hierarchies, and thus the unlikelihood of success, certainly in the short-term, of the power transformations foreseen by ALPS as these transformations go against the ‘habitus’ of most actors (cited in 2003b, pp. 16-17).

My data supports what is suggested by Bourdieu’s work, that power dynamics between ActionAid and its partners, and community members are deep-rooted and generally unfavourable to prospects of downward accountability. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, my observation at field level showed a hierarchical relationship between ActionAid and community members, with little evident challenge of the organisation. Both the 2004 and 2007 global ALPS reviews were critical of ActionAid’s progress on the power principle. The 2007 review notes that “Analysing and acting on power imbalances is something that we have far to go on, both internally and externally (ref: Partnership review, Organisational Climate Survey, Africa review, etc)” (ActionAid, p. 9).

The downward accountability envisioned in ALPS requires two power transformations. Firstly, ActionAid staff members and partners should voluntarily ‘reverse’ their relationships of power vis-à-vis community members (Chambers, 1996). Secondly, community members should simultaneously demand greater levels of accountability from ActionAid staff and partners. Neither of these two transformations was apparent in my case study to any significant degree. I found that both transformations are extremely challenging and go against the status quo in countries such as Uganda, where educated and higher status persons, and particularly those who are responsible for resources such as NGO workers, are automatically deferred to within society. In addition, these people often act in a way that ‘befits their status’.

In terms of the first aspect of ‘voluntary reversal’, there are some processes which aim to address this, such as PRRPs with communities which provide opportunities for feedback, and transparency boards being displayed publicly. However, as my findings on PRRPs and transparency boards at Uganda level and at the international

level suggest, the quality of these processes is often poor. Rather than the vibrant processes envisioned by ALPS, what I observed was fairly ritualistic processes of consultation wherein community members were asked for input on desired project activities, which was then taken away for ActionAid and the partner to decide upon at a later stage. I did not observe any staff member or any partner staff member attempting to behave with community members in a manner that overturned power relationships, or attempting to facilitate processes to this end. On the contrary, all, more or less, played into their expected roles as per the natural hierarchy. A telling indication of this hierarchy was a discussion which took place during a PRRP in Pallisa. The community-based partner organisation requested funds to hire a cleaner for a store, which led the ActionAid staff to ask why the partner's programme officer could not do the cleaning, which was apparently a minor job given the small size of the store in question. The response was that the programme officer was 'too big a man' for that. This suggests that 'Representative Structures of the Poor and Excluded People and Right Holders', as ActionAid term these partner organisations, are not exceptions when it comes to dynamics of hierarchy.

There were some poor examples of behaviour of ActionAid and partners towards community members as I have discussed, for instance, when some partners openly lectured community members during PRRPs, and when staff members inconvenienced community members by organising meetings at short notice. However, in most cases relationships between staff, partners and community members appeared cordial and respectful. Yet despite largely friendly relationships, the prevalent hierarchy was maintained without any evident major efforts to change it. The first step to power transformations, as outlined in ALPS, is supposed to be a power analysis (ActionAid, 2006a). Guijt in her 2004 review of ALPS heavily emphasised this point: "The need for more on [rights-based approach], power and gender analysis, and facilitation cannot be stressed enough" (p. 30). However, the participatory processes which I attended in Uganda gave no indication that ActionAid staff and partners were working on the basis of a power analysis, as required in ALPS. The narrative responses on this question in the staff survey suggested that this analysis was not always carried out, and there was no evidence of it in documentation that I read.

My data also suggest that the second intended power transformation, community members demanding accountability, was not being achieved. During participatory processes, despite the fact that complaints were often made that community members had not received particular inputs, or that inputs had arrived too late, I did not observe any real challenge to ActionAid or partners. Recalling Bourdieu's concept of habitus, one interviewee in Uganda commented, "It's a reflection of Ugandan culture which is to never question your parents, your teacher, (generally) the president." When I asked community members in Katakwi whether they ever asked other NGOs to share budget information with them, such as the information they had received from the ActionAid partner during a PRRP, the response was "No". One man added, "The vulnerable we don't have power, we fear that assistance will be withdrawn". This echoes the finding of the case study of Agyemang et al (2009, p. 30) from the literature review which found that the poverty and vulnerability of beneficiaries in Ghana creates a fear which prevents them from questioning the NGO. The same point was raised by an interviewee with respect to partners' participation in the ActionAid Uganda General Assembly being constrained by their fear of management, such that they are on their "Sunday best".

A striking example of this lack of questioning of ActionAid, from the international dimension of my case study, is that of social audit in Nepal. As noted earlier, social audit has been much praised by international reviewers. Yet reports in ActionAid Nepal note that community members are not asking critical questions of ActionAid within the process, which is at the very heart of what the process is supposed to comprise. As an ActionAid Nepal study of ALPS in three districts found, community members "hardly recall a moment when they questioned the rationale or the relevance of any particular programme or budget allocated to them" (ActionAid Nepal, 2006, p. 9). A similar finding was noted with respect to the transparency boards in Kenya not leading to critical engagement. Taking a broader perspective on participatory approaches in Africa, Imam (2010, p. 12) notes in the *Taking Stock 3* review that:

many of those AA works with would simply not wish to 'bite the hand that feeds' as they see AA as a provider, rather than a partner with which they have an equal and mutually beneficial relationship. In addition, many (especially at [LRP] level) likened AA to a parent – in many African cultures it is simply not done to criticise parents openly and to their faces.

Participatory techniques need to be very carefully understood and used if they are to address these issues and engage in real reflection and analysis.

Thus, the reluctance to challenge ActionAid or its partners was evident at international level, as well as in my study of Uganda, and belies hopes of communities demanding accountability.

Given the extreme challenges evidently facing these types of power transformations, it would appear that an enormous effort would be required to make progress on transforming power relationships to promote accountability of ActionAid to its beneficiaries. Yet, it does not appear that ActionAid is currently well-set up to promote the intended power transformations. The kinds of operational obstacles that emerged in my data chapters such as overloaded staff, weak partners, and prioritisation of administrative procedures and sponsorship work, militate against the intensive and long-term processes that would appear to be needed to work on these deep-seated power issues. One interviewee spoke of the “impatience” of ActionAid, as opposed to the long time periods needed for real change to occur. One example of not being well-set up for power transformations is the seemingly unrealistic expectations of the role of the ActionAid programme officers in Uganda, as evidenced by the qualification requirements and tasks cited in the previous chapter. This recalls the earlier quotation from the IASL Self Review for *Taking Stock 3*: “We do not have enough capacity at local level to really build the capacity of partners or community leaders to deal with difficult issues of power that come up around transparency and accountability, except in a few countries” (IASL, 2010, p. 5).

There is also a more fundamental question about whether ActionAid really wants to be led by community priorities, not least because, as noted, community priorities in Uganda often lead the organisation away from rights-based work which is the core of ActionAid’s strategy. I return to this point in the section on control below.

In sum, I found that the power dynamics in the contexts and cultures of NGO work in my study militate strongly against accountability to community members, and that there is little evidence that ActionAid has managed to transform these dynamics in a significant way, or that it is well-placed to do so. Thus, in practice, power dynamics at community level emerge as a major barrier to NGO accountability to intended

beneficiaries. I now turn to a second obstacle, the tendency for NGOs to rapidly change approaches.

6.3.2 NGO Tendency for Trend-Jumping

The data I gathered using the actor-oriented approach has illustrated the tendency of ActionAid leaders to introduce new approaches and strategies on a regular basis. One of my interviewees in Uganda used the term ‘trend-jumping’ to describe this tendency within ActionAid. In this section, I do not discuss the content of the changes, as this was discussed in the previous chapters. Rather I focus on how the very fact of the constantly changing trends affects the success of initiatives such as ALPS. I begin this section by demonstrating the extent of changing trends within ActionAid internationally and in Uganda. I then discuss two characteristics of trend-jumping: high staff turnover and the dismissal of the work of predecessors. I conclude this section by discussing three aspects of trend-jumping within ActionAid that make it problematic for initiatives like ALPS: the disconnection with the field level when initiatives are being created, the tendency to pay insufficient attention to what is needed for the implementation of approaches, and the failure to grapple with thorny issues which arise during implementation.

At the international level in ActionAid, interviewees spoke, usually critically, of the organisation’s constant shifts of approach. Newman (2011, p. 104), in her study of ActionAid’s approach to rights and participation, cites an interviewee who, when asked to describe ActionAid in less than five words based on her experience with the organisation in the 1990s, said, “Continuously restructuring and restructuring”. This recalls a comment made by a World Vision staff member in Zimbabwe, cited by Bornstein (2005, p. 70) in her ethnography of the organisation, “the only thing constant here [in World Vision] is change.” In ActionAid’s external stakeholder review for *Taking Stock 3*, one respondent noted that the organisation was “high on initiatives, low on follow through. Too many flavour-of-season management initiatives” (Leach, 2010, p. 20). A quotation from ActionAid’s Hive intranet site from December 2012 illustrates the volume of contemporary changes within the organisation:

Since July we've all been working on “**operationalising the strategy**” through the exciting HRBA 2.0 process, creation of a campaigns portfolio, creation of an international communications framework, strengthening of governance initiative, rolling out fundraising plans, remodelling our child sponsorship, improving our financial systems, restructuring the Secretariat, establishing our organisational development priorities and so much more. (ActionAid, 2012b, emphasis in original)

Similarly, it is evident that many change processes have taken place in ActionAid Uganda since 1998, including the organisational development process, the shift to partnership and the human rights-based approach, new strategies with new themes and campaigns, changes in the governance structure, a new monitoring framework, and innovations in sponsorship to name a few. Many interviewees in Uganda were critical of what they viewed as changes due to “fads” and “repackaging”, particularly in relation to what were seen as the sudden shifts to partnership and the human rights-based approach. One interviewee complained, “The speed in AA is too much. A pilot can be a success but AA has lost interest and is now looking for a newer model. There is no grounding it.”

This notion of ‘trend jumping’ features in the broader NGO literature. As discussed in the literature review chapter, authors writing about managerialist practices within NGOs stress that there is a tendency toward new fads and trends, encouraged by a regular turn-over of staff. The tendency towards fads is referred to by Sogge (1996, p. 16) as the “continuity of discontinuity”. This is accompanied by what Lewis (2013, p. 117) describes as the propensity of new staff to dismiss the work of their predecessors and start afresh in order to make their mark, hence reducing the prospects for organisational learning. Indeed, these two enabling factors of staff turnover and the dismissal of predecessors’ work came out strongly in my data in Uganda as I now describe.

High staff turnover within ActionAid was cited extremely frequently by my interviewees at international level and in reviews of ActionAid. Various contributing factors were mentioned by interviewees including low salaries and weak career progression. The level of turnover was viewed as deeply problematic for the organisation; one current ActionAid staff member described it as “a huge problem,

enormous". The *Taking Stock 3 Africa* review raised the issue and also mentioned the ensuing problems of institutional memory being lost and the need for constant re-training and re-building of teams (Imam, 2010, p. 15). The reviewer notes:

Staff turnover seems to be large in Africa, both within the sub-regional offices and within country programmes. Many staff had been in place for less than a year in both Nigeria and Sierra Leone, as well as in [West and Central Africa] and [East and Southern Africa].

One example given is that there was a 50% turnover in Heads of Finance in African country programmes (of which there are approximately 20) in one 15 month period (Emerton, Callaghan, & Amao, 2010, p. 2).

Similarly in Uganda, turnover was an issue constantly raised by interviewees and in documentation. It was noted in the 2011 Internal Audit report of the country programme that turnover in ActionAid Uganda in 2011 was 25% from a staff of 78 (ActionAid Uganda, 2012c, p. 26). The report further noted that:

AAU has had considerable staff turnover in 2011, including some of the most senior positions in the organisation. In the past 12 months there have been three different Internal Audit Managers and three different Programme Directors. The longest serving CMT [Country Management Team] members have been on the CMT for only two years. (p. 9)

Turnover is not a new issue in ActionAid Uganda. Wallace, in the final report of the OD consultancy in 2003 noted that "The constant need to recruit and induct new senior staff has had a negative effect on the energy and motivation available for doing the work needed to transform AAU" (Wallace & Kaplan, p. 23). Interviewees made similar points in 2011. While different causes of turnover were posited by interviewees⁷⁴, there is a consensus in the data that the consistently high rate of turnover over the years in ActionAid Uganda has had huge implications for programme quality including learning and relationships with partners and governments. High turnover is also seen to erode the value of trainings and any work done on staff attitudes and

⁷⁴ Interviewees related turnover in ActionAid Uganda to issues such as low recognition of performance, poor career development opportunities, heavy workload leading to stress, and relatively low salaries - inflation of approximately 30% in Uganda in 2011 was mentioned as playing a role here (ActionAid Uganda, 2012c, p. 26). On the positive side, many interviewees noted that ActionAid staff members are considered to be well-trained within the sector, which enables them to get better jobs. However, a few interviewees felt that more opportunities for training and further education of individuals should be provided and that this would aid staff retention.

behaviours. Thus, initiatives such as ALPS are bound to suffer the consequences of high staff turnover.

The second factor in my data that accompanies trend-jumping is the tendency of country directors to abandon the approaches of their predecessors without sufficient consideration. This was a strong theme in my interviews in Uganda⁷⁵. It was noted by one former senior staff member:

From Anthony to Meenu there was a change, from Meenu to Amanda via John there was also a change. Amanda didn't believe. Meenu saw a lot of things were wrong when she came. She would say "Who on earth could have done that? The right way to do it is this". Staff were [*sic*] seen as criminals. In the review of 2005 there was rubbishing of what Meenu had done. In the review in Meenu's time it was the same. Amanda thought that what Meenu had done was not right.

This dismissal of predecessors' work, what this interviewee refers to as "rubbishing", is facilitated by the centralisation of power in the position of the country director within ActionAid, as discussed in the previous chapter. This 'rubbishing' was mentioned frequently as contributing to the sudden shifts in approach referred to above, such as the shifts to partnership and the human rights-based approach⁷⁶, and also as having a negative impact on institutional memory. One former staff member commented:

New directors tend to delete what older ones have done. Amanda deleted what Meenu did. She didn't want to accept. . . It comes back to institutional memory. Did Meenu take from Anthony? Subsequent people abandon process. Is this in development discourse for NGOs to discard the old? They have a big problem acknowledging. People don't want to acknowledge. . . People insist on climbing a new ladder.

Having discussed the extent of trend-jumping and the related characteristics of staff turnover and 'rubbishing' of predecessors, I now highlight three characteristics of the trend-jumping that arose in my study and that hindered the implementation of initiatives such as ALPS.

⁷⁵ This issue did not arise with respect to Chief Executives at international level, but interviewees were generally of the view that Ramesh Singh was Salil Shetty's nominated successor which may be relevant here.

⁷⁶ In terms of the perceived 'imposition' of the shifts to partnership and HRBA, there are other possible factors here which are outside the scope of my study. For instance, it was expressed by a senior staff member that some ActionAid staff prefer to do direct service delivery because it is easier in various ways and provides more job security for ActionAid staff, but that this is not a sustainable approach. Therefore strong leadership was needed to try to convince staff to work in more sustainable ways, such as through partnership and an HRBA.

The first characteristic of trend-jumping is that initiatives are often created with insufficient reference to the field level. It was demonstrated in the previous chapter that this was one of the factors which led to the decline of the OD process in Uganda. A disconnection of policy-makers or creators of initiatives from the field level can lead to over-idealism and over-ambition. As I discuss later in this chapter, it also leads to myths that idealise, but do not reflect, actual practice. At international level, an example of this disconnection from the field level was noted by Newman (2011, p. 163) in relation to the 2008 paper which defined ActionAid's human rights-based approach for the first time:

The paper was produced through discussions between senior international staff. Thus, this organisational understanding of rights and a rights-based approach was developed by those working at an abstract policy level, focussed on international programming, and did not include staff engaged in local development work. The paper was offered as a way of sharing understanding of rights to staff across the organisation, but did not build from the reflections and experiences of programme staff.

The team which created ALPS⁷⁷ was not much different, with only one team member out of six working at country level, the Gender Policy Analyst from Pakistan, and nobody from the sub-national level. One former staff member who was part of the team spoke of the lack of focus on implementation at field level:

Our ideas were simplistic, that ActionAid would get feedback from people we work with, it was a comforting, simple idea. . . We didn't think through implementing reflection and review processes in many different AA programmes, with power issues etc. . . . We were quite naïve at the time. We expected local staff to figure this out, re. local power structures.

Similarly, a staff member in Uganda commented that changes of approach are instituted at the national and international levels and "at [these] higher levels people think things can move fast. The lower you go, the slower things go." Thus, there is a risk that this disconnection from the field level leads to staff members at this level, who may not have the appropriate skills or much time, being left to implement new initiatives without sufficient guidance. This can mean that changes which have taken much

⁷⁷ David and Mancini (2004, p. 7) list the team that created ALPS as: Ephraim Dhlembeu (the Africa Programme Coordinator), Lubna Ehsan (Pakistan Gender Policy Analyst), Colin Williams (Africa Director), Nigel Saxby-Soffe (Director of Finance), Robert Chambers (Trustee) and Rosalind David (Head of Impact Assessment Unit).

internal reflection time at national or international levels do not have much impact on, or relevance to the lives of intended beneficiaries. This is sometimes referred to as the danger of ‘navel-gazing’ by organisations and taking an actor-oriented approach including different levels of staff and community members is important to detect these kinds of dynamics.

My interviews with community members in Uganda supported the notion that there is questionable relevance to intended beneficiaries of some of the changes which have taken place within ActionAid Uganda. Many of the community members with whom I spoke had collaborated with ActionAid since the late 1990s. Yet there was a striking lack of mention in my interviews with them of the myriad of changes that had occurred in ActionAid Uganda over the years. My questions about changes in the way that ActionAid worked invariably elicited responses about the type of inputs provided to the community, for instance, that there were less cassava cuttings than before, that they now received goats instead of bicycles. The shift to partnership, the rights-based approach leading to more work with government and capacity-building of communities to demand services, changes in participatory methodologies, new campaigns and so on were not mentioned, except sometimes after considerable probing and, even then, usually only partnership was mentioned. It would seem that this is either because the changes are not known about, or because they are not considered to be of sufficient importance to community members. Either way, these discussions supports the contention that there has been a disconnection between organisational initiatives and field level realities in ActionAid Uganda. One man in Katakwi, who had known ActionAid’s work since they entered his community in the late 1990s, said, “I have heard there have been changes in ActionAid Uganda and ActionAid International but there is no impact at this level.”

A second and related problem with changing approaches in ActionAid is that, despite the considerable profile and effort that often accompanies the introduction of new initiatives, there is insufficient time and effort put into ensuring that the approaches are then implemented properly. This imbalance was evident in my findings in general terms, as well as specifically in relation to ALPS. The *Taking Stock 3* review team noted the tendency of ActionAid to set “very ambitious” goals, strategies which are

significant departures from the past, and a variety of associated themes and priorities, but then noted a tendency to “flounder” as not enough attention was paid to implementation, including piloting testing, providing guidance to staff and monitoring (L. David Brown, 2010, p. 26). The example is given of the human rights-based approach:

country visits found widespread confusion about what implementing the rights-based approach required in the field. AAI has now created an implementation manual for rights-based work on the ground—but it has not yet been published, nearly six years after the strategy was announced. The tools for program monitoring and evaluation are also only becoming available now. Systematically developing plans, pilot tests, manuals and monitoring and evaluation tools prior to adoption of new strategies could dramatically reduce “flounder” time and enhance effective implementation.

Similarly, an interviewee in Uganda noted:

For programme staff and indeed some other staff, ActionAid and ActionAid Uganda policies are hard to implement. The steps to implementation are not in place, often ideas have not been tested in practice and translating them into ways of working is very difficult.

This lack of attention to implementation after introducing a new system was frequently noted in relation to ALPS. As mentioned in the chapter on ActionAid International, a proposal for a training and induction process for staff in country programmes was rejected by senior management, citing the view that countries should seek their own support at national and regional levels, to avoid ALPS becoming an ActionAid UK-driven process. A former staff member, who had been part of the team which created ALPS, reflected that he is conscious now that implementation is a science in its own right, and needs considerable effort and continuous reinforcement of messages. His view is that this was not done for ALPS. Another interviewee, a former staff member, noted:

I think a major problem is that there has been an unwillingness to define ALPS practically, it has remained such an idealised theory that people (especially overloaded local workers who are poorly valued within the AA hierarchy) have struggled to know how to translate it into their practice.

Similarly, at country-level, Scott-Villiers (2002, p. 432) cites a comment by a staff member in Ethiopia after the launch of ALPS:

We never get time to review and evaluate any change we make, before a new one takes its place. Anyway it takes time to implement new procedures, it requires so many people to understand them and adjust. We have to hold workshops and pilots, all at the same time as fulfilling so many other plans.

David and Mancini's learning paper on ALPS (2004, p. 25) concluded, "The key lesson here is that putting the system in place is nowhere near enough to achieve real change." Yet, considerable profile is often given to new initiatives such as ALPS before implementation has really begun, which can lead to the creation of myths, as I discuss further later in this chapter. This imbalance of attention between the creation of initiatives and their implementation is noted by Mosse (2005, p. 237) as a characteristic of managerialism which "privileges policy over practice":

More than ever, international development is about generating consensus on approaches and framing models that link investment to outcomes, rather than implementation modalities (Quarles van Ufford et al, 2003:9). Questions of implementation are somebody else's problem.

The combination of the actor-oriented approach and the ethnographic of participant observation helps to confront precisely these questions of implementation.

Adding to the disconnection from the field level, and the lack of attention to implementation, the third problem with frequently changing approaches suggested by my data is a lack of focus on resolving difficult issues which arise during implementation. My research found that some issues in ActionAid Uganda and ActionAid International came up continuously in reviews but never appeared to get resolved. For instance, in ActionAid Uganda, the issue of partner organisations at local level lacking constituencies or a commitment to poverty reduction, which I discussed in the previous chapter, was often raised in documents over the 15 year period of my document review (ActionAid Uganda, 2005c, p. 33). I now illustrate this example in more detail.

Partners lacking constituencies is particularly an issue as these organisations are supposed to be representative structures of the poor, as per ActionAid's partnership approach, and hence should be key vehicles of accountability to community members. When the issue was raised in the documentation, the subsequent action plan usually

revolved around ‘capacity building’. One example of this was the ActionAid International peer review report of ActionAid Uganda in 2006 in which the team noted, “Some CBOs and NGOs did not demonstrate commitment to poverty eradication neither were they transparent and accountable to AAI Uganda with respect to funding sources other than those provided by AAI Uganda” (Kaleeba, et al., 2006, p. 6). However, despite this fairly damning statement, the review did not recommend terminating any partnerships but rather noted that the partners “would require significant technical and financial support in organizational development before they can be effective catalysts of change with regards to eradicating poverty in Uganda”. Yet capacity building appears unlikely to be an appropriate solution for an organisation which lacks commitment. This appears to be another example of brochure talk. Some of ActionAid’s partner organisations may simply be the wrong partners and, from my interviews, it is clear that ActionAid staff members are acutely aware of this. Nevertheless, staff members have collaborated in capacity building programmes for partners over the years, in which they will privately admit they have no faith. This relates to the issue of organisational hierarchy which I return to below.

My document review on Katakwi shows multiple different capacity building initiatives over the course of approximately ten years, but I did not find any frank ‘stocktake’ anywhere in the documentation as to why the same problems sometimes persisted with partners year after year, and whether more radical solutions, such as partner termination, might be more appropriate in some cases. This focus on capacity building also resonates with a point made by Lewis (Forthcoming) on the managerial tendency of NGOs to use “standard technical ‘organizational development’ approaches to improving organizational performance and accountability”, given “rationalist models of organizations that stress only technical factors.”

Examples at the international level relating to ALPS show a similar tendency for fundamental and structural issues hindering implementation to be side-stepped. The ALPS review in 2004, as part of *Taking Stock 2*, made twenty-one recommendations to address the “critical gaps” in ALPS. These recommendations included issues around conceptual clarity, training and support, learning and quality control (Guijt, 2004). However, the management response to the overall *Taking Stock 2* report did not appear

to address these recommendations in any direct or substantive way⁷⁸, although it made five references to a new version of ALPS which would help address various issues. Subsequently, many of the issues identified in the 2004 review, such as those around power dynamics, organisational culture, and attitudes and behaviours, were present in the 2007 ALPS review and, as my data illustrate, are still problematic. This is unsurprising, as these fundamental issues from the 2004 review were not likely to be resolved simply with the production of a new set of ALPS guidelines. Yet, when I was concluding my field work in 2011, the third iteration of ALPS since 2000 was released, with the fourth iteration being planned. This leads to an impression that changes in approaches, new approaches and generally ‘trend-jumping’ can be, in part, a way to avoid dealing with difficult issues of implementation.

Thus, I conclude that the continuous processes of change within ActionAid serve to distract from the reality that the organisation is coming across fundamental blockages in some of its work that require serious structural shifts, that the organisation may not be able or willing to make. ActionAid’s responses to problematic issues tend to place a lot of faith in solutions in the future, usually assisted by new processes, guidelines or approaches. As one staff member put it in relation to discussion on a possible new strategy for accountability, “Why a new strategy? Need to look at why the old one wasn’t implemented. It wasn’t about the lack of documents”. However, as Lewis (Forthcoming) notes, “people are keen to leave behind the failed expectations or disappointments of earlier periods so that they can engage with the ‘next big thing’”⁷⁹. This recalls Sogge (1996, p. 16) speaking of the possibility for development workers to “escape into the future.”

Thus, ALPS has been affected by each of these components of trend-jumping: high staff-turnover, the tendency of new staff to dismiss of the work of predecessors, the disconnection of new initiatives from the field level, the focus on creation of initiatives rather than their implementation, and the avoidance of difficult implementation issues.

⁷⁸ Interestingly the management response’s five references to how a ‘revised version of ALPS’ would contribute to solving other issues did not relate to the issues in the ALPS review but other issues around partnership, leadership, programme quality, planning and learning (ActionAid, 2004b). This illustrates significant faith in what a set of guidelines can do.

⁷⁹ Lewis (2010) is also cited here.

Collectively, these components lead to trend-jumping constituting a serious obstacle to prospects of ALPS succeeding in enhancing ActionAid's accountability to beneficiaries. I now discuss how pressures on and interests of individual staff members

6.3.3 Individual Staff Members' Pressures and Interests

As discussed in the literature review chapter, the emotional realm of organisations, considering issues such as the preferences and constraints of individual NGO workers, does not often arise in the development NGO literature. The impression that is given, often by default, is of NGO workers without their own agendas who automatically agree with and follow organisational strategies and whose personal lives never interfere with their work. However, the actor-oriented approach encourages a focus on NGO staff as having particular histories, agendas, biases, and, critically, "room for manoeuvre" (Long, p. 26). Hilhorst (2003, p. 24) notes that "Staff members bring their social networks and concerns to their NGO work", and these form part of powerful "everyday discourses" which run alongside the official discourses, but which are invisible in NGO reports and public statements. Similarly, Smith and Jenkins (2012, p. 643), in an article on Indian NGO activists as 'strategic cosmopolitans' which explores how local-level activists are influenced by global discourses, recommend "conceptualising NGOs as made up of individuals with particular histories, commitments and allegiances, rather than monolithic and unified entities". In this section, I discuss pressures on, and interests of individual development practitioners and how these negatively impact on ActionAid's downward accountability. In this discussion, I recall the sources of stress on staff from the ActionAid Uganda chapter. I then turn to interests of staff which conflict with the organisation's goals, using the example of fraud of staff and partners in ActionAid Uganda.

In literature on organisations in recent years, increasing attention has been given to individuals' emotions within organisational life. This was noted, for instance, in the earlier discussion of Ashkanasy's (2003) 'affective events theory'. There is no question that significant "affective events" occurred in ActionAid Uganda during the period of my study. The main sources were: the OD process under Meenu Vadera, Amanda Sserumaga's leadership, the tight atmosphere under Charles Businge, and generally

overwork in ActionAid Uganda. In particular, as discussed in the previous chapter, livelihood concerns were a major consideration for ActionAid staff, not surprisingly in a developing country which has high unemployment rates, where staff members may have very limited job alternatives and where their salaries may be supporting many family members. While not often recognised in the NGO literature, livelihood concerns significantly shape staff members' perceptions of their work and hence shape their behaviour.

The issue of livelihood concerns helps to explain how I got two very different perspectives on the OD process under Meenu Vadera's leadership: the largely positive international perspective of strong and admirable attempts to transform an organisation in line with its values, and the national-level perspective of a period of great job insecurity. Scott-Villiers (2002, p. 434), in her article on organisational change and the creation of ALPS, notes that:

For many individuals, change is very risky, particularly for those at the bottom of a hierarchy. They may have spent years understanding the system and working out strategies for making the best of it. There are many frontline workers in ActionAid who worry a great deal about keeping their jobs, who are not in a position to change radically. Confident people, comfortable with power, will often be those to embrace change with most enthusiasm.

The objectives of the OD process around collective leadership and organisational learning could have been transformative for ActionAid's relationships with communities, had they been achieved, but a failure to recognise the concerns of individuals was one factor which militated against this impact.

A second example of an instance in which emotions and livelihood concerns came to the fore in ActionAid Uganda was during the period 2005-7. As noted earlier, most interviewees recall this as a period of great stress due to the harsh management style of the country director, Amanda Sserumaga. Within the affective events theory, Ashkanasy (p. 31) describes the importance of the atmosphere created by top management:

At the highest level of the model are organizational policies, climate, and culture. These encompass the emotional atmosphere that De Rivera (1992) asserts can be "palpably sensed" within organizations. Driven by top

management, this dimension can include positive climate as well as a “climate of fear”.

Indeed, interviewees spoke of “hiding under desks” to avoid Amanda. One former staff member who had joined ActionAid in the mid-90s recalls:

For the first time since I had been with ActionAid, the [Country Director’s] office couldn’t be accessed. You had to make an appointment two days in advance. Nobody ever made an appointment. The little space that was there after Meenu’s time was shut down. . . . I would have to report back on conferences and Amanda would blast me. Sometimes I would say let me send an email because if she blasts me on email it won’t be so bad. When people would see her car in the car park they would scatter.

This atmosphere clearly created distractions from work. A key distraction was said to be the need to look for new jobs and many staff left the organisation. One staff member who did not leave spoke of the negative impact of the time period on the performance of the staff that stayed: “A job is a prerequisite for your living - any threats on this makes you think twice. Those who remained became cautious - they didn’t want to admit mistakes or that they didn’t know things”. The same staff member spoke of being demoralised as well as distracted by the turnover happening within the organisation:

You think you are not competent enough to leave. You lack confidence. . . . The question is what has my colleague seen? Have they seen a problem that I can’t see? So it has an effect on staff morale. Instead of thinking about work, you think about this.

Thus, Amanda’s leadership caused significant stress on staff. In this case, the impact lasted beyond the tenure of the country director. When Charles Businge took over as Country Director in 2008, the challenges of resolving the many issues caused by Amanda Sserumaga’s leadership led to him being briefly hospitalised for stress. Thus, in addition to the loss of skills and institutional memory when unstable times in organisations led to significant turnover, the turbulence of the turnover is likely to also affect the morale and hence performance of those staff members who stay, and thus the quality of the organisation’s work across the board, which would include initiatives such as ALPS.

While there is no question that interviewees rated Charles Businge’s leadership as considerably less problematic than that of Amanda, staff did nevertheless speak of

considerable stress caused by work overload, and also caused by what was described as a “tight”, sometimes suspicious, atmosphere which relates to what many see as overly bureaucratic administrative procedures to help prevent fraud. While all interviewees agreed that there is ample evidence that the risk of staff fraud is real, some staff complained of being unfairly “tarred with the same brush” as offending staff. It was my observation during staff meetings and retreats that there did appear to be, at times, a suggestion of blame that was not sufficiently targeted to wrongdoers. I also observed, and interviewees confirmed, that this atmosphere had a negative effect on staff morale.

This issue of suspicion around fraud appears to affect the extent to which staff members feel they can speak openly within the organisation. Generally, staff members reported that ActionAid Uganda is an open organisation when it comes to listening to feedback and complaints. For instance, the climate surveys introduced with ALPS are an excellent way to identify staff concerns and track them over time. I also observed openness to feedback in staff meetings in ActionAid Uganda. One meeting stood out in this regard during which Kampala-based staff complained vehemently about senior staff members getting the office lunch delivered to their offices, while junior staff members had to stand in a queue. Such frank discussions suggest a willingness to challenge hierarchy in the organisation and suggest that the ‘climate of fear’ from Amanda’s time is long gone.

However, interviewees also commented that there was somewhat of a difficult situation when it came to complaining about the perceived ‘policing’ atmosphere with respect to the administrative procedures, as it may then appear that the staff member who complained wanted the rules relaxed so that they themselves could commit fraud. Indeed, this point was made in the 2010 evaluation of the country programme. In a section on fraud, the evaluators noted, “Most of the employees appreciate ‘tough’ measures and closing of all loopholes, while the motives of few who strongly resent it may be questionable” (Kithinji, et al., 2010, p. 36). In a widely-cited case study on the accountability of a US-based international NGO, Fry (1995, p. 181) cautions that an approach to accountability that is overly-based on compliance runs the risk of having negative psychological effects on staff, leading them to feel threatened, constrained, suspicious or guilty. Thus, there is a risk that ActionAid’s procedures may cause low

morale, which can lead to turnover or distraction from work, and hence can negatively impact the quality of ActionAid's work, including accountability-related work.

A final source of significant stress in ActionAid Uganda, as discussed earlier, was excess workload. This issue was palpable during my observation of daily life within the national office and within LRP offices. Even during programme 'retreats', staff would often be busy on their laptops with other work. One staff member expressed common sentiments:

The organisation knows about the overload but it's a 'Catch 22', it closes its eyes so it does not see it. Like someone is sick and the manager says, "I'm so sorry you're sick and by the way, how about that report?" Things just get added. There is poor management, deafness and blindness to workload. . . . Families suffer. I am missing in the world in action. I'm active on Facebook to fill a gap to catch up with peers because I'm not there but I wish them happy birthday on Facebook and hope that they don't notice. Families suffer because you're at home but still working.

Excess workload is not a new issue in ActionAid Uganda and the stress that it causes is constantly mentioned in documentation. For instance, the 2000 annual report spoke of overwork, poor work-life balance and the anxiety that this causes (ActionAid Uganda, 2001a).

Thus it can be seen that stress and pressure on staff have been significant over the years in ActionAid Uganda. This has had a negative impact on performance in terms of distraction from work and poor staff morale. It has also increased turnover which has impacts on the country programme in terms of loss of institutional memory and also relationships with external stakeholders. All of this will inevitably have an impact on the quality of the work of the country programme, including work relating to accountability to intended beneficiaries.

Similarly, at international level, internal management problems and work overload were a major theme in my interviews as causing stress to staff and leading to turnover. Both the 2004 and 2007 ALPS reviews pointed to these issues as obstacles to the implementation of ALPS. These stresses and pressures do not receive sufficient attention in the NGO literature, and yet clearly have profound effects on NGO work and the prospects of NGOs reaching their objectives.

Apart from pressures on staff, a significant issue also arose with respect to interests of individual development practitioners, which can conflict with the organisation's aims of downward accountability. The example which emerged strongly in my research was the significant fraud by development practitioners in Uganda. I argue below that fraud has two negative impacts on downward accountability prospects. Firstly, it constitutes self-serving behaviour which is unlikely to bode well for accountability to intended beneficiaries and, secondly, it has led to the restrictive administrative procedures as noted earlier, which take the time of practitioners away from other work, such as community engagement.

As noted in the previous chapter, fraud was a major theme during my field work. Interestingly, fraud and corruption in NGOs are not major themes in the literature, even the accountability literature. When they are mentioned, it is usually in passing, as part of a larger list of problems with NGOs that result in the need for better accountability practices (for instance Bendell, 2006; L.David Brown, 2008; DENIVA, 2006). The strongest emphasis on fraud is within the US literature, as particular non-profit scandals in the US catalysed much literature, as noted earlier. However, this literature tends to use the frauds in question as a 'jumping off' point for broader non-profit accountability discussions. For instance, Chisolm (1995) and Irvin (2005) speak of the dangers of suddenly increasing government regulation of non-profits with a view to increasing accountability, as this may also hamper the sector in its operations.

Fraud was not a strong theme in my case study at international level. The *Taking Stock 3* evaluation on finance rated fraud as low (Bortcosh, 2010, p. 14). The Internal Audit DA Review gave examples of eight countries in which there were instances of "financial mismanagement at the partner, potentially leading to: disputes with partner, poor relationships with the community, financial loss, delay to activities", but this was not a major theme of the DA Review (ActionAid, 2010b, p. 30).

Yet my field work demonstrated that fraud is a part of everyday life in ActionAid Uganda. Fraud is also reflected in the NGO literature specific to Uganda (Burger, 2012). My interviewees saw NGO fraud as a reflection of fraud and corruption in the wider society. One interviewee noted:

You have to look at the history of the country, people have seen it all. They have no exposure to successful social movements. The focus is on the welfare of the family. So eating money⁸⁰ is surviving. There is no way to survive normally. If you are not corrupt as a government official, you will be seen as a non-performer, you won't be able to meet expectations of the community and your family.

As noted earlier, staff members and, even more frequently, partners are regularly being investigated for fraudulent practices in ActionAid Uganda, and there are a significant number of cases of staff and partner terminations as a result. During my field work, there were partnerships suspended due to cases of misappropriation by partner staff members of project inputs, including funds, for personal gain. This fraud took different forms. Sometimes, individual staff members had stolen organisational assets and absconded. For instance, in Katawki, one partner staff member was reported to have taken a camera, a computer, the organisation's stamp and a generator. In other instances, unauthorised payments were made with ActionAid funds which were seen to be for the personal gain of partner staff. Fraudulent actions suggest that the practitioners involved are primarily self-serving rather than concerned with serving intended beneficiaries. While it is not impossible that fraudulent practitioners can simultaneously promote a culture of downward accountability, it appears unlikely. This is the first reason why fraud is problematic for downward accountability.

The second reason is that, as noted earlier in this section, as a result of the perceived high risk of fraud, there is a very strong emphasis on internal audit⁸¹ within ActionAid Uganda and I found that strict and time-consuming administrative procedures are a central feature of the work of staff members and that these affect time available for other activities. These controls are defended by some on the basis of the high prevalence of corruption:

without controls, AA would have gone under. Controls have to remain. It depends on culture. People can work as a team to be corrupt. If you

⁸⁰“Eating money” is a common expression in Uganda for people diverting official money for personal use.

⁸¹ Many fraud cases are brought to light by ActionAid's active internal audit unit. This unit maintains an 'audit query matrix' which, for instance, contained 613 audit queries for 2011, the vast majority relating to partners, of which 304 were resolved during the year (ActionAid Uganda, 2011a). These queries may be due to weak capacity rather than fraud. 'Whistle-blowing' is another mechanism which exposes fraud and led, for instance, to five cases being investigated in 2008 (ActionAid Uganda, 2009b, pp. 44-45).

remove one control . . . In the environment people survive by stealing, there needs to be a strong deterrent.

Whether the controls are justified or not, the data are very clear that the procedures take up much staff time, in a context where staff time is already seen to be extremely limited.

In sum, I posit that fraud has two negative impacts on downward accountability. Firstly, it constitutes self-serving behaviour by development practitioners, and hence would appear not to lend itself to downward accountability by the same practitioners. Secondly, the strong focus on administrative procedures and audit within ActionAid Uganda as a result of fraud reduces the time available for other activities, such as, for instance, participatory work with communities. More broadly, this section has discussed the significant ways in which individual staff pressures and interests impact on downward accountability. An actor-oriented approach facilitates this analysis as staff members at all levels are viewed, in this approach, as vital stakeholders whose views and interests matter for NGO implementation. I now move on to the final obstacle which concerns the impact of NGOs' retention of control on their downward accountability attempts.

6.3.4 NGOs' Retention of Control

The obstacles to accountability to beneficiaries mentioned thus far are formidable. However, during my field work I kept coming back to one even more fundamental question: to what extent does ActionAid really want to be accountable to its intended beneficiaries? What struck me continuously in Uganda was that, even if ActionAid had well-implemented participatory and transparency processes, with well-informed community members empowered to challenge the organisation, it would still appear to be unlikely that ActionAid would have the flexibility to act, to any large degree, upon findings that clash with what the organisation has already decided to do. It emerges strongly from my data in Uganda that ActionAid seems to be firmly in control of decision-making on programme work, despite the shift to partnership and the commitments in ALPS that the priorities of community members would be central to decision-making. The organisation was not generally seen as flexible. This issue also arises at international level. David, Mancini and Guijt (2006, p. 141) note that "much of

the difficulties [*sic*] that ActionAid experienced in translating ALPS into reality was to do with control over resources and activities—not wanting to let go of control, and fear of what would happen if we did”. In this section, I demonstrate that ActionAid retains much control over its programming and that its control manifests itself in ways that are problematic for its downward accountability. I also discuss what leads to this need to retain control. I attribute this need to three factors: funding pressures linked to a desire for growth and competition within the sector, restrictions of the current managerial system affecting NGOs, and the fact that ActionAid has its own set of goals which may not align with what community members may request.

One of my findings in Uganda was that ActionAid dominates its partnership relationships at LRP level. This aligns with the findings of a study by Elbers and Schulpen (2011) on the partnerships of three international NGOs, ActionAid, Interchurch Organization for Development Cooperation and Christian Aid, in three countries, Nicaragua, Ghana and India. This study showed that ActionAid was the most intimately involved with its partners on project design and implementation and had the strictest rules. The study also showed that ActionAid tended to work with more dependant community-based partners, a point also noted by other authors and said to be particularly the case in Africa (ActionAid, 2010b, p. 12; 2011; Imam, 2010, p. 14).

This dominance was evident in ActionAid Uganda where there was very much a ‘parent-child’ dynamic between ActionAid and partners - interestingly this language was used by many partners themselves to describe the relationship. The external evaluation of ActionAid Uganda in 2011 referred to the ActionAid-partner relationship as “headmaster-pupil” (Kithinji, et al., 2010, p. 70). Partners interviewed generally noted that they had good opportunities to provide feedback to ActionAid, for instance, through partner PRRPs, but that this did not usually lead to change. This was corroborated by staff. One staff member noted:

Partners used to be shy but then they would point out what is wrongThen discussion was a strong learning tool, but to what extent did ActionAid accept feedback? ActionAid needed mechanisms to react and respond. It became a formality over time, to document it etc. But what about implementation? How many people were held responsible? Was there any discipline? It became routine. If you read the PRRP reports you will see the same issues in each report.

One example of this was the issue of late disbursement of funds by ActionAid to partners, which was mentioned in almost every interview I conducted with partners. Documents show that this issue has been constantly raised by partners over the years, but that ActionAid has been unable to resolve it (ActionAid Uganda, 2007; KASDA, 2005; TPP, 2011).

Some partners interviewed felt that one reflection of ActionAid's controlling engagement in its partnerships is the fact that, despite working with partners at LRP level, ActionAid still maintains offices at that level. In fact, there were attempts in ActionAid Uganda in previous years to have partners manage sponsorship directly, thus potentially 'untying' ActionAid from being based at local level. However, initial attempts were not successful as partners failed to fulfil sponsorship requirements adequately, thus jeopardising the continuation of sponsors' commitments. The 2005 evaluation recommended that "Given that it is AAIU's cash cow, a change process should be developed to regain control of sponsorship management by AAIU staff rather than through partners and individuals not employed by AAIU" (Kabenge, et al., p. 43). ActionAid implemented this recommendation and now, with the exception of one partner, sponsorship is managed by ActionAid. This development illustrates that a major reason for ActionAid Uganda's perceived need to retain control over partners and programming at the local level is its sponsorship funding. Keeping sponsors, sponsored children and their parents happy to maintain the flow of letters, photographs and money is a key concern for ActionAid, as the high prioritisation of meeting sponsorship requirements in the country programme illustrated.

In addition to its strongly influential role with respect to partners, my data illustrate that ActionAid Uganda exerts a significant degree of control over the activities which are carried out at community level. As noted in my findings on PRRPs, while community members were asked to give a 'wish list' of desired activities, prioritisation was not left to communities - the flipcharts from the PRRPs were taken away by ActionAid or the partner. Furthermore, it was clear from partner interviewees that ActionAid always has the final say on the budget and how it should be allocated in its review process of partners' proposals.

However, it is important to note that ActionAid's sponsorship funding, while it creates incentives for ActionAid to keep control over 'reporting' (including photos, case studies, and child letters), does not actually restrict the type of work that is done or how it is done. Sponsorship funding leaves considerable scope for ActionAid to make decisions on programming, as was noted in interviews and in meetings I attended in Uganda. As Newman (2011, p. 121) notes:

The organisational management systems emerged to ensure that ActionAid would 'give account' to the individual sponsor, based on the deliverables agreed when contracts were signed. But the sponsors had minimal expectations of holding ActionAid to account. This gave the organisation great flexibility to be experimental or dramatically change direction; and many people whom I interviewed noted that it was this broad and dispersed funding base that enabled ActionAid to embrace the rights-based approach to such an extent.

There is also mention of the flexibility of sponsorship in the broader NGO literature. In the study on Indian NGOs implementing empowerment programmes, Kilby (2004a, p. 217) noted that among the most successful was an organisation with long-term sponsorship funds due to the flexibility of such funding. Yet, as noted above, ActionAid is considered relatively inflexible and controlling. Thus, the fact that ActionAid receives sponsorship funding does not explain why it retains so much control over the work which is done. A second possible explanation for ActionAid's retention of control is its institutional donor funding.

A common theme in the NGO literature is that institutional donors are increasingly requesting results to be predicted in advance and creating incentives for NGOs to keep control over programming, rather than handing this over to local partners or communities. Considerable literature focuses on how donors restrict NGOs' downward accountability. Mosse (2005, p. 161), in his case study in India, discusses the acclaim the project received for its participatory processes. However, Mosse notes that, despite appearances, "The delivery of these programmes was, however, far too important to be left to participatory (i.e. farmer-managed) processes; hence the strong vertical control of activities and implementation." Indeed, the NGO literature suggests that organisations which are using a results-based management approach tend to have strong incentives for control and for predictable outcomes, despite perhaps claiming in

their communications that they are working in a participatory manner. Kilby (2004a, p. 218), in his study of Indian NGOs discussed earlier, speaks of the same issue of NGOs being reluctant to cede control:

The findings also point to fundamental limitations of development agencies as empowerment agents. . . . Joshi and Moore, for example, are “skeptical of the capacity or willingness of any but the most exceptional organizations to encourage or even tolerate the autonomous and potentially antagonistic mobilization of their own client groups” (2000, p. 49). Skepticism is likely to be even more warranted if a development agency such as a contractor has a formal contractual relationship with a donor who has prescribed the expected outcomes and approaches to be taken in managing these development programs, something often required in results-based frameworks.

As Kilby (2004a, p. 209) notes, “The core problem remains—the application of results-based management to the management of development projects leaves little space for a role of the beneficiary in project design, planning, or even implementation.”

Given that ActionAid has traditionally been largely child sponsorship funded, it would not have been seen to be as vulnerable to the demands of results-based management, as some of its peers. However, as noted earlier, ActionAid’s dependence on institutional donors has increased since 2002 and moreover, it is actively seeking more institutional funding. Official donors such as DfID and DANIDA comprised 31% of global income in 2011, compared with 48% which was from child sponsorship (ActionAid, 2012a, p. 4). The proportion of institutional donor funding in Uganda was even higher in 2011 at 45% (ActionAid Uganda, 2012d). Nevertheless, ActionAid interviewees at the international level were critical of ActionAid’s acceptance of results-based management demands of donors, particularly DfID, noting that ActionAid had resisted these requirements when they were first introduced around the year 2000 (Eyben, 2006, pp. 8-14). For instance, ActionAid engages with DfID in a Partnership Programme Agreement which has required the creation of a logical framework, a requirement ActionAid initially resisted.

In terms of why ActionAid is prioritising institutional donor funding and adapting to its requirements, I discussed earlier how resource dependency theory can provide explanations for NGO behaviour. According to this theory, organisations make

decisions based on institutional survival and growth concerns (2010, p. 7; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Given that ActionAid was widely viewed by my interviewees to have a relatively stable, long-term sponsorship base, the issue of institutional survival did not seem to be a major concern. However, the evidence suggests that the organisation does feel under pressure for funding, and that this has much to do with the desire for organisational growth and, related to this, competition in the NGO sector.

Growth, linked to the goals of greater influence and impact, is a major ambition for ActionAid and a key goal of the internationalization process (Jayawickrama & Ebrahim, 2013). David and Mancini (2011, p. 246), in a discussion of the negative impact of the results-based management culture on the kind of changes attempted by ALPS, note that “The big elephant in the room is the imperative for institutional growth, with large [International] NGOS driven to work in more countries and sectors.”

Some staff members expressed that the organisation’s desire for growth had negative implications for ALPS implementation in particular. One staff member stated that “We cannot fully reach ALPS purposes within the current dynamics of the organisation. Actually, if there is a problem, I think it is not in ALPS per se but in our current programmatic ambition and sometimes, dispersion”. Kilby’s study, similarly, notes a reluctance of some of the NGOs in India to be accountable to beneficiaries because of their desire for growth: “These NGOs felt that direct accountability mechanisms to the constituency might in some ways compromise them institutionally, and limit their capacity for expansion or dealing with other stakeholders such as donors” (2004a, p. 218).

Related to the desire for growth, another key factor influencing the funding pressure ActionAid feels is competition with peer NGOs. ActionAid’s 2011 Financial Report spoke of “increased competition for reducing development aid budgets” (Lynch-Bell, 2012, p. 13). Many other documents speak of the pressure ActionAid feels from increased competition within the sector, particularly in the context of the economic recession in Western Europe, and how this leads to the need to maintain a certain profile (ActionAid, 2010f; Bertin, 2004). Authors outside ActionAid also point to the increasingly corporate and competitive fundraising culture which calls for evidence of an international NGO’s distinctiveness and ‘value-added’ (Shutt, 2009). As I explore

further later in this chapter, this need to maintain a certain profile helps to explain why the myth of ALPS persists, as it enhances ActionAid's external legitimacy.

Apart from funding pressures for growth and from competition, another possible explanation for why ActionAid feels the need to retain a high level of control over its partnerships and programming is that it is influenced by managerialist pressures which promote the retention of control. This recalls the discussion of managerialism in the literature review chapter. Authors note that the desire to maintain and retain control is central to the "technical-rational" assumptions of managerialism (Harding, 2013, p. 131). While often linked with results-based management approaches to development and institutional donor funding, Harding (p. 133) notes that the desire for control can be seen more broadly as a characteristic of the "modern bureaucratic institution" in which "control over work and control out into the world are primary drivers". Similarly, Wallace and Chapman (2004, p. 25) cite the argument of moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre that "it is a modern bureaucratic managerial illusion that people or organisations have the ability to control and shape events. Yet the belief lies at the heart of the new public management".

While ActionAid is still not receiving a high proportion of its funds from the institutional donors thought to be more engaged in results-based management agendas, it appears that it is quite influenced by the managerialist tendencies within the sector⁸². Wallace and Chapman (2004, p. 27), in their study of policies and procedures of aid disbursement from the UK to Uganda and South Africa, which included ActionAid, observe that:

It had initially been thought that agencies with significant amounts of untied funding (from the public for example) would be freer to shape their own systems and procedures. However, it became clear, during the first phase of the research, that they were heavily influenced by the new public management agenda through their trustees, and sometimes their [Chief Executive Officers] formerly of the business sector. They were also influenced by their close relations with key donors.

⁸² Newman (2011, p. 222), on the other hand, finds that ActionAid has largely rejected the management discourse with its neo-liberal assumptions. One point of note as Newman points out in this discussion is that, unlike some of its peers in the UK, ActionAid has not yet recruited a Chief Executive from the private sector.

In addition, it would seem likely, given the movement of staff within the sector and other interactions that some “institutional isomorphism” takes place whereby ActionAid comes to resemble its peers, some of which are under more severe managerial pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). This relates to a point made by a senior staff member in Uganda, after the presentation of my findings, that institutional donors may be affecting NGOs such as ActionAid indirectly, by having a dominant influence on the NGO sector as a whole and how it operates. In a conference presentation on ALPS, staff members David and Mancini (2003, p. 7) cautioned that “ActionAid needs to boldly challenge its own internal tendency to apply management-centred ‘logical’ and ‘linear’ thinking, as well as that imposed from outside.”

A third and final reason why NGOs such as ActionAid may not appear to be flexible to community priorities can be simply that the organisation has other competing priorities that are more important to it at a given point in time. This brings in the notion from the actor-oriented approach, that NGOs have ‘room for manoeuvre’, a point which is not often focussed on in the NGO accountability literature that tends to focus more on impacts of donor pressures on NGOs. The literature, at times, appears to blame donors, as though NGOs were bound to accept any funding under any conditions that a donor might impose, in order to ensure survival and growth.

Given this room for manoeuvre, NGOs may have a host of objectives and priorities to which they are committed, which may not align with what community members may request at any point in time. As Obrecht (2011, pp. 68, 76) notes, NGOs are set up with their own sets of goals. ActionAid, for instance, has many priorities, strategies and themes at international and Uganda levels, feeding into major ambitions to which the organisation wants to contribute. For example, ActionAid’s new strategic plan for 2012-17 sets out five “mission objectives” including ten “key change promises”, and seven organisational objectives, along with the organisation’s vision, mission, and theory of change (ActionAid, 2011c). Community priorities, whatever they might be, are by nature unpredictable, which interferes with NGO internal planning and fundraising methodologies. In addition, in some instances, specific community priorities can be problematic for NGOs, as was the case in ActionAid Uganda during my period of study when the organisation’s strategy was heavily centred on the rights-based approach,

whereas community members almost invariably requested the provision of inputs. As discussed earlier, while there is room for service delivery within ActionAid's human rights-based approach, this is limited. This tension between HRBA and participation is the core finding of the study by Newman (2011).

In sum, the data suggest that ActionAid's prioritisation of obtaining and retaining control, vis-à-vis communities and partners, militates against downward accountability and is likely to be caused by a combination of funding dynamics, sectoral managerialist pressures and the desire of ActionAid to fulfil other goals. Having discussed the four fundamental obstacles affecting ActionAid's downward accountability, I now move to a discussion of why, despite the evidence of poor accountability practice, the myth still persists that ActionAid is achieving accountability to its intended beneficiaries.

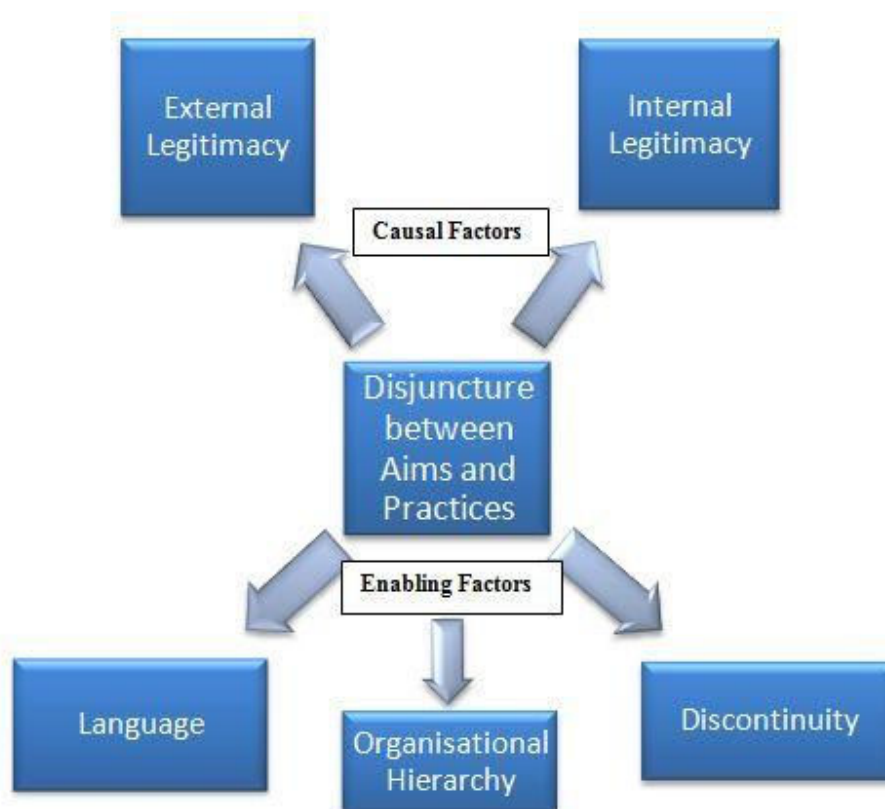
6.4 Persistence of Disjuncture between Intentions and Practice

At this point, my original research question has been answered. My study has found many obstacles to NGO attempts at downward accountability or, to put it another way, ample reasons both at operational and at a more fundamental level why the disjuncture between ActionAid's intentions and practice of accountability to beneficiaries exists. Power dynamics at community level, internal staff issues, NGOs' propensity to change approaches, and their desire to retain control, when added to the operational issues around quantity and quality of staff, donor requirements and leadership, present a formidable set of challenges to NGOs' attempts to be accountable to intended beneficiaries and a substantial response to my main research question.

However, what this response does not elucidate is why the brochure talk about downward accountability persists, in the face of evidence to the contrary. While most ActionAid interviewees indicated that they did not think the organisation was living up to its intentions, the myth that ALPS is achieving downward accountability nevertheless continues inside and outside the organisation. This evidence of myth was the key issue that led to the central focus of my study shifting from the concept of accountability to the concept of disjuncture. I found that what occurred within ActionAid in relation to accountability became one case study of a larger phenomenon of disjuncture within NGOs. In the remainder of this chapter, I look at why disjuncture emerges and how it

functions within NGOs, bringing together my data with my findings from the literature review chapter. I find that that an adaptation of my earlier framework, as below in Figure 6.2, helps explain why myth and hence the second level of disjuncture persist over time. Essentially, I propose in the framework below that there are legitimacy benefits to the organisation from both external and internal stakeholders which cause the disjuncture. The disjuncture is then enabled by some characteristics of the language used and by discontinuity within the development NGO sector, as in the earlier framework. Furthermore, my data suggest that organisational hierarchy also plays a role in assisting disjuncture to persist over time. These causal and enabling factors are elaborated in the sections below.

Figure 6.2: Causal and Enabling Factors of Disjuncture Regarding Accountability



6.5 Why Does Disjuncture Persist?

In this section, I provide two overarching reasons why the second level of disjuncture between the intentions and the practice of downward accountability continues. Similar to the earlier disjuncture framework on managerialism, I find that the disjuncture confers external legitimacy and internal legitimacy benefits on the organisation. As noted earlier, Suchman's (1995, p. 574) definition of legitimacy is being used here, of legitimacy as "a generalized perception that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions."

6.5.1 External Legitimacy

I contend in this section that ActionAid has gained significant legitimacy benefits from external stakeholders, such as donors and peers, as a result of the myth of ALPS, and particularly its downward accountability aspects.

There is considerable support for the link between accountability and legitimacy in the literature. In a paper which aims to empirically ground accountability, Dubnick and Justice (2004) speak of the many expectations of the word accountability, including a strong role providing legitimacy. The authors find that given that so much expectation has been placed on it, the word accountability can act as a "symbol" (or substitute) for other terms such as responsibility, an "indicator" of conditions such as ethical behaviour or responsiveness, and an "icon" that gives a stamp of legitimacy to initiatives which bears its name (p. 5). This notion of the 'stamp of legitimacy' recalls Power's (1997) study which discusses the massive increase in the perceived importance of audit in organisational life and the elevated expectations of audit as a guarantor of accountability. Within the development NGO sector specifically, Goddard and Assad (2006), as cited earlier, provide an example of accounting practices being used primarily to 'navigate legitimacy' in Tanzanian NGOs. In her case study of an NGO in the Philippines, Hilhorst (2003, p. 126) demonstrates how accountability is, in part, a process of legitimating NGO action. Thus, the notion that claims of accountability can enhance legitimacy is well-founded in the literature. ALPS can thus perhaps be looked

at as one of Meyer and Rowan's (1977, p. 352) "societally legitimated rationalized elements" which function as myths and hence help the organisation to gain legitimacy.

Recalling the myriad of publications which positively reference ALPS, as listed in the literature review chapter, it is clear that ALPS has been a major public relations coup for ActionAid. ActionAid is consistently the only organisation highlighted for its success in downward accountability. Apart from the many publications by external authors mentioning ALPS, there have been requests for book chapters on ALPS to be written by ActionAid staff. In addition, bi-lateral and multi-lateral donors, peer NGOs and networks have frequently requested presentations on ALPS at various conferences (David & Mancini, 2004, p. 17). Examples include the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Evaluation group, the Berlin Civil Society Centre and the British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND) network. At Uganda level, ActionAid's efforts in this regard are similarly well-known. For instance, the organisation has been asked to give presentations on ALPS to NGO network members (DENIVA, 2011) and it has been noted in a book on Ugandan NGOs as "exceptional" in terms of putting accountability to beneficiaries and empowerment ahead of its own institutional survival concerns (Namara, 2009, p. 48).

The perception of this success of ALPS increases the apparent coherence between ActionAid's human rights-based approach to programming, which has accountability at its core, and the organisation's internal processes. The myth of ALPS provides the impression that ActionAid is truly representative of poor and marginalised people, who direct its work. In this way, the perception of successful downward accountability practice increases the legitimacy of ActionAid's work. This increased legitimacy likely contributes positively to fundraising in that ActionAid focuses on its closeness to communities within its fundraising literature. For instance, the following statement from the organisation's website is illustrative:

We're not about giving handouts or telling people what to do, because in the long run we know that doesn't work. Instead, we use our resources, influence and experience to help people find their own solutions. We listen to what people really want and need. (ActionAid, 2013b)

Along the same lines, the logical framework which was designed by ActionAid in 2009 to receive Partnership Programme Arrangement funding from DfID states under the heading ‘Niche’:

Action Aid’s rights based approach is based on the primacy of rights holders as the key actors of change, claiming rights for themselves. To achieve this we commit to sustained, long term (minimum 7 years) work in partnership with communities, rights holders, and movements. . . This has led to particular effectiveness in achieving changes in policies and practices of governments through strengthening the agency and actions of rights holders themselves, linked from local to national. This has also led to our particularly strong emphasis on accountability to poor and excluded people – both pushing for this in the aid sector and holding ourselves to account. (ActionAid International, p. 1)

Thus, ActionAid’s reputation as being accountable to intended beneficiaries, a reputation, by all accounts, significantly strengthened by the multitude of public relations benefits of ALPS, helps it to raise funds from sponsors and institutional donors in the context of competition within the sector. This is not unique to ActionAid. In his case study in India, Mosse (2005, p. 162) points out that:

Participatory models and ideals of self-reliance are often more part of the way projects work as systems of representations, oriented upwards and outwards to wider policy goals and institutions that secure reputation and funding (or even inwards as self-representation), than part of their operational systems (Mosse 2003a).

Therefore it is clear that ALPS confers powerful external legitimacy benefits on ActionAid, from donors, peers and likely also members of the public. These returns help to explain why the ongoing second level of disjuncture between intentions and practice exists, since NGOs benefit from the ‘representation’ of their accountability practices as matching with their intentions, even if this does not reflect reality, as in the case of ALPS. Having described the external legitimacy benefits of claims of downward accountability, I now describe internal legitimacy benefits.

6.5.2 Internal Legitimacy

I contend that, for internal stakeholders, the maintenance of the disjuncture between intentions and practice also has benefits. The myth of downward accountability that

sustains the second level of disjuncture provides comfort to staff members who want or need to believe in the prospect of ActionAid's downward accountability matching its intentions, even if the evidence suggests otherwise. The myth is also used by some staff members as a powerful tool to motivate others for the implementation of ALPS.

My earlier literature review lends support to this notion that development NGO workers can accept a disjuncture between policy and practice, and even subconsciously assist in the maintenance of this disjuncture as it provides psychological comfort for them in some way. Hilhorst (2003, pp. 122-123) in her ethnography in the Philippines cites various reasons why development workers cling on to models that do not appear to work as they are intended. A key reason is the "symbolic role" of the model "in letting NGO workers believe that they were making progress towards an end goal". Meyer and Rowan (1977, p. 389) cite the increased commitment of internal stakeholders as one advantage of myths in an organisation. Goddard and Assad (2006), in their study of NGOs in Tanzania, speak of the benefits to staff, from a moral perspective, of internalising the myth of improved accounting practices. Mosse (2005, p. 164), in discussing the rural development project in India, celebrated for its participatory image, speaks of the "slogans, charts, wall hangings, banners or photo displays in the project offices." In addition to being materials to enhance external legitimacy, Mosse notes that these materials were also:

a means to build internal coherence among a diverse project team. Senior staff and managers worked hard (through meetings, events, displays) to foster a project culture and identity around its approach so as to hold staff together, to encourage loyalty, counter staff turnover and contend with the de facto contingency of staff action.

In a case study of humanitarian work in South Sudan, Marriage (2007) asks the question of how practitioners reconcile the vast gap between the claims of the aid work, and what actually occurs. She provides several examples of this gap, such as an 'income generation project' using expensive imported materials which could not generate income. Marriage (p. 498) speaks of the psychological well-being of aid staff that is maintained by the pretence of lofty humanitarian principles. The author (p. 490) quotes an article by Walkup (1997, p. 46) on the coping strategies of aid workers: "when it is no longer possible to conceal the inadequacies, aid workers create false illusions of success

to enable them to feel a sense of self-worth and accomplishment”. Thus, there is much support in the literature for the notion that development workers can benefit from the maintenance of a disjuncture between intentions and realities in terms of psychological comfort or well-being of staff.

As noted earlier, in her study of ActionAid, Eyben (2006, pp. 171-172) refers to ALPS as a “myth”, not in the sense that it is not true, but because it is emotionally resonant and aspirational. Citing the work of Sorel (1941), Eyben sees myths as “powerful as statements of aspiration and potential instruments for changed behaviour and attitudes. . . Believing in something can make it happen.” Her interpretation resonates closely with what I observed within ActionAid. The brochure talk around ALPS which clashed with my own observation of ALPS practices, was, in my view, not simply to create an impression for ActionAid’s external stakeholders that ActionAid was ‘walking the talk’, but also to create such an impression to the organisation’s own staff. This is evidenced by the fact that brochure talk was to be found in documents for both internal and external audiences, as noted in the data chapters. For instance, significant efforts have been made to compile good practice examples of ALPS for internal audiences, particularly the *Exchanges* newsletter. These examples are brief and usually positive, even when the ALPS process in question is being tried for the first time, suggesting that motivation, rather than learning might be the primary objective. As Eyben (p. 172) notes:

If the myths are sufficiently convincing, they may give the impression of power and relationship-sensitive practices already occurring inside the aid agency to a greater extent than may be the case. Thus, readers might come to believe that they are laggards and be stimulated to catch up with the (mythical) account presented.

When asked about the use of myth in ActionAid, one former staff member commented:

The idea of myth I think is in part due to a genuine desire in the sector to seek ways of working linked to values and principles - as the gulf widens between what organisations purport to stand for and what happens in practice the need for myths and stories persists to inspire and encourage those who want to work in different ways. That's certainly the case in ActionAid.

The majority of the 65 current or former ActionAid staff that I interviewed at international and Uganda levels acknowledged that there was a disjuncture between what ActionAid intends with ALPS and what actually happens. In fact, on many occasions, I heard both brochure talk on ALPS, and very critical comment emerging from the same individuals. However, despite their recognition of this disjuncture, for many staff members there was a sense of pride in ALPS and not one interviewee suggested ‘scrapping’ ALPS because it is not working as intended.

In fact, far from scrapping ALPS, during the time of my field work, ActionAid formulated a third ‘interim’ version of ALPS for 2011 and 2012, with a plan to release a fourth version for 2013 and beyond. If ALPS were merely a cynical public relations exercise for the majority of staff members within the organisation who recognise the disjuncture between aims and practices, there would be no need to try to actually achieve it by coming up with new versions of the system. Rather, from my in-depth interviews with staff, I would judge many of my interviewees to have a strong set of values around downward accountability. It was my observation that staff members generally wanted ALPS to work, wanted to believe that ALPS could work, and wanted to motivate others into implementing it better. This led to their participation in the creation and maintenance of the myth of ALPS, which fed the second level of disjuncture. The myth of ALPS may be idealised and exaggerated, but it is far less dispiriting than constantly discussing the often depressing realities on the ground.

Having discussed the external and internal legitimacy benefits that explain the persistence of the disjuncture between the aims and the realities of downward accountability, I now discuss the mechanisms which assist the continuation of this disjuncture.

6.6 What Enables Disjuncture to Function?

In this section, I look at the enabling factors of the second level of disjuncture and the mechanisms which allow it to persist on an ongoing basis. Similar to the earlier disjuncture framework, I identify language and discontinuity as two factors. From my analysis of the data, I also add a third factor that did not arise in the earlier literature review: organisational hierarchy.

6.6.1 Language

Authors such as Apthorpe, Cornwall and Brock, Mosse and Scott-Smith were cited in the literature review chapter discussing the use of language in the development sector as obscure, vague and misleading. This assists the continuation of disjuncture, as contentious issues and ideological differences are papered over with what Mosse (2005, p. 230) terms “mobilising metaphors.” Similarly, in my case study, language was a key factor in the continuation of the myth of downward accountability.

The role of language in sustaining the myth was evident in the use of brochure talk to describe ALPS and downward accountability, as has been noted throughout my findings, both in ActionAid International and in ActionAid Uganda. Despite most interviewees acknowledging that the practice of downward accountability had serious shortcomings, there was often a tendency to ‘talk up’ the practice, focussing more on the stated intentions than what staff members had seen in practice. I noted that ActionAid Uganda staff members, while exceptionally self-critical at times, are generally skilled in brochure talk. One of my international interviewees spoke of the tendency for ActionAid staff to “learn the language and rattle away. Another former staff member of ActionAid Uganda described ActionAid as “seduced by language and rhetoric”.

Two of the most striking examples of brochure talk involve transparency boards. For instance, in Uganda, the fact that flipchart paper containing out-of-date figures inside a partner’s office could be termed a “transparency board” was telling. Similarly, brochure talk can be seen in the statement of the ActionAid Kenya staff member on their transparency boards ‘ensuring accountability’ while, at the same time, he acknowledged significant shortcomings .

One further example from ActionAid Uganda illustrates the use of language to create an illusion about ALPS practice which is not accurate. A practice began in the early 2000s of referring to the country programme’s annual reports as ‘PRRPs’, presumably as, in principle, these should have emerged from participatory processes. For instance, the 2005 Annual Report was called *PRRP Report 2005* (ActionAid Uganda, 2006b). Yet actual PRRP sessions are not mentioned once in the ensuing annual report, and there is no indication in this or in other documents from that year that

the annual report was compiled from PRRP reports. In fact, in 2006, when this report was being prepared, the practice of PRRPs had apparently died out under Amanda Sserumaga, yet still the term ‘PRRP’ was used instead of ‘annual report.’ The practice of using this terminology of PRRP for standard reports continued until at least 2008 in Katakwi as evidenced by the “Participatory Review and Reflection Process (PRRP) Report Katakwi Jan-June 2008” (ActionAid Katakwi, 2008), which again is a half-yearly activity report which does not mention PRRPs or any participatory process of gathering information for the report. This is an example of how the language of ALPS outlasted the spirit of the process, but also how the language of ALPS could effectively obscure that this spirit had been lost.

Thus, the use of language is a central part of what enables the continuation of the myth of ALPS and sustains the second level of disjuncture between intentions and practice. I now discuss the second factor: discontinuity.

6.6.2 Discontinuity

Discontinuity within development agencies and its negative impacts on downward accountability have been discussed extensively in the ‘trend-jumping’ section above and in the literature review chapter. In this section, I briefly highlight three points from the earlier discussions which demonstrate how discontinuity also contributes to the persistence of the second level of disjuncture between aims and practices. These three points are: disconnection with the field level when creating initiatives, the failure to grapple with difficult issues and high staff turnover.

As I demonstrated above, discontinuity, as it manifests itself in the contemporary aid sector in ‘trend-jumping’, tends to lead to initiatives being created at higher levels which are divorced from the field level. This means that the disjuncture between aims and realities is likely to be greater than if initiatives were planned in close collaboration with field practitioners. This recalls the quotation from the member of the ALPS creation team above on how the team did not think through difficulties of implementation, such as power issues. Some interviewees made similar points on the OD process in Uganda.

Another point noted above was that discontinuity tends to lead to a failure to grapple with difficult issues of implementation, which will tend to encourage disjuncture between aims and realities. As Mosse (2005, p. 163) observes in his case study of a rural development project in India which received considerable external attention, “Inevitably perhaps, managers of successful projects find an emphasis on dissemination more rewarding than struggling with the contradictions of implementation.” The rural development project that Mosse describes widely disseminated its ‘mythical’ or idealised project model which “establishes precisely the causal link between participatory processes and efficient implementation that is absent (or difficult to establish) in practice” (p. 162).

ALPS implementation certainly seemed to suffer from shifting management attention at international level. It was clear from the data that other accountability issues, such as governance and monitoring and evaluation, have taken precedence over ALPS, as the earlier quote from IASL demonstrates: “although accountability and Alps in system, the exciting new accountability issue was governance (e.g. internationalisation/board development) so much of management attention went to that” (2010, p. 4). This decline in attention may help explain why ALPS was not reviewed in 2010 during *Taking Stock 3*.

While ALPS received much external profile over the years, the data show that attempts to deal with the fundamental issues hindering implementation were weak, as illustrated in the discussion above of the ALPS reviews in 2004 and 2007. There appear to be many deficiencies in implementation of recommendations of the reviews⁸³, as evidenced by my data. Yet, a new version of ALPS was created in 2011 with another new version planned for 2013. To the best of my knowledge, the new revision of the guidelines is not based on any in-depth review or study of practice, and thus its implementation runs the risk of suffering from the same issues that arose in the 2004 and 2007 reviews, such as power dynamics and staff attitudes and behaviours. It seems that the characteristic of discontinuity contributes to a focus on new versions of ALPS being

⁸³ The *Taking Stock 3* review found while that ActionAid conducts an extraordinary amount of reviews of its work, “it is less clear that the organization can extract value from that information” (L. David Brown, 2010, p. 26, emphasis in original).

created without a serious focus on resolving the difficult issues of implementation in order to try to bring the practices closer to what was intended.

Finally, it would appear that the high staff turnover, as discussed earlier, is a characteristic of discontinuity in the aid sector which will tend to promote disjuncture between aims and practice. Lewis (2013, p. 117) pointed out the tendency within the sector to appoint staff members for short-term contracts which limits learning. In addition to the gaps in knowledge, learning and experience at field level that may prevent staff members from challenging disjuncture, new staff members may also be less likely to feel emboldened in their early days to challenge myths within the organisation, even if they detect them. More broadly, the *Taking Stock 3* review makes the link between lack of learning and the presence of myths in ActionAid: “More emphasis on learning might also reduce the tendency to focus on internal anecdotes and assumptions as a reality test and so reduce the tendency to act on the basis of AAI myths rather than data-based assessments of options (L. David Brown, 2010, p. 35). In these ways, discontinuity can be seen to maintain the disjuncture between aims and practices. I now discuss the third and final element, organisational hierarchy.

6.6.3 Organisational Hierarchy

The third mechanism that assists disjuncture between aims and realities of ALPS is organisational hierarchy. In this section, I provide examples from the international level and from Uganda to illustrate that staff members have a tendency to ‘follow the leader’ regardless of their own views and beliefs⁸⁴. This is also strongly related to the livelihood concerns that I discussed earlier, which become more acute at lower levels of the organisation. Often it is these lower level staff, for example field staff, who are best placed to comment on the realities of practice, but they may be the least empowered to do so⁸⁵. I start by discussing some international examples of organisational hierarchy,

⁸⁴ Shah (2013) and Lewis (2013) note another possible motivation for action (or inaction): the desire of staff to enhance their career prospects within an organisation, which is often not helped by ‘rocking the boat’.

⁸⁵ Other literature, such as Mosse (2005), also highlights the hidden power and freedom that even junior staff can have, as long as they maintain the correct representations of the project for colleagues further up the hierarchy.

before discussing three particular initiatives in ActionAid Uganda in which this hierarchy was evident: the OD process, the introduction of HRBA and finally, ALPS.

Newman (2011, p. 253), in her study of ActionAid, found that the relationship between local staff and partners, and national staff members, tended to consist of a one-way, upward flow of information and noted that “Given this dynamic it is unlikely that local staff or those working in partner organisations would communicate local realities ‘up the system’ unless directly asked for input”. This resonates with one of Guijt’s findings in her 2004 ALPS review. She found that that lower level staff had very insightful critical views on ALPS but they were unable to turn their insights into improvements:

In several instances, lower level staff expressed considerable frustration with the lack of space to genuinely voice their concerns. Either the forums are not there or they are not taken seriously, and they are left feeling that no action is taken despite the talking. (p. 21)

My data suggested that a hierarchical culture within Uganda and within Ugandan NGOs has led to Action Aid staff tending to fall in line with the leadership on new approaches or system over the years, even if they did not agree. I term this tendency ‘follow the leader’. A former staff member commented, “There is also a Ugandan thing to sense the direction of leadership. When people don’t agree, they are not so candid, they don’t express reservations. If you voice concerns, it looks like you’re resisting change”.

The follow the leader tendency was a major focus of the organisational development process in Uganda in 2001-3. One of the consultants, Allan Kaplan, wrote of one OD workshop:

Another critical moment was when people were asked to draw pictures, do role-play or present in some visual form how they saw their roles in ActionAid Uganda. There were many strong images of being subservient, followers, unquestioning doers presented. But the strongest for me was the image of ActionAid Uganda staff as African cows following their leader in and out of the homestead every day, unquestioning, uncomplaining and obedient. (Wallace & Kaplan, 2003, p. 16)

One of the key successes of the OD process was said to be staff members breaking out of this tendency. However my data suggest that, rather ironically, some staff members

may have gone along with the OD process itself without expressing reservations which they held, and admitted to me in our interview. In other words, they may have followed the leader even when it meant pretending that they were no longer following the leader!

Another example of the disjuncture caused by the tendency to follow the leader was that some staff reported that they still did not fully believe in the human rights-based approach, but that they felt obliged to at least appear to implement it. My interview data suggested that many field staff had not believed in the HRBA from the beginning, but pledged to implement it, as there did not seem to be a choice. One interviewee said of the early 2000s:

HRBA [was] being introduced at international level and it was supposed to be rolled out at national level. At local level, people kept struggling. The skills base was not there. Service delivery staff didn't see anything tangible and thought that the organisation was making a mistake. In the organisation it was 'you believe or you're out' but some had no options so stayed even though they don't believe.

Several of my interviewees stated that the HRBA was still not being implemented at field level in practice in many cases in 2011, but that field staff 'repackaged' reports to make it appear that it was.

The same can be seen with respect to ALPS in ActionAid Uganda. While the quality of practices was weak, according to my observation, field staff did not appear to be exposing this fact. Most of them admitted it to me in interviews, although, as noted earlier, usually after they knew that I had already observed the practices myself. On the contrary, there was considerable brochure talk within ActionAid Uganda, including during the early parts of some of my interviews that suggested that ALPS was being implemented as planned. Given the fact that approaches such as HRBA and ALPS are mandatory within the organisation, frontline staff members have incentives to feed into the image that they are being implemented, rather than pointing out weaknesses. This can lead to the continuation of disjuncture between intentions and realities.

Thus far in this chapter, I have cited four fundamental obstacles to NGO accountability to intended beneficiaries. I have noted that the myth of accountability to intended beneficiaries persists despite evidence to the contrary, and have put forward causes and enabling factors of the persistence of the disjuncture between stated

intentions and realities which is fed by this myth. In the final section of this chapter, I bring together the discussions on obstacles and disjuncture and contend that the symbolic benefits from the appearance of NGO accountability may be more important in some instances than actually trying to achieve it, thus suggesting the addition of a fifth and final obstacle to the earlier framework.

6.7 Representations of NGO Work: More Important than Realities?

In this section, I discuss the notion that the appearance or representation of NGO accountability can be, at times, more important than its reality. Some authors writing in the broader NGO literature raise the point that NGO work can have significant symbolic benefits that may even exceed the benefit of the NGO's stated goals being achieved. As cited earlier, Lewis (Forthcoming), in an article on NGO failure, cites the work of Seibel (1999) who highlights instances in which organisations continue to function:

not because they are 'successful' in the conventional sense, but because they serve wider contextual political purposes - for example, they maintain the illusion that something is being done about an issue, they placate a potentially disruptive political constituency, or they serve a particular ideological purpose.

Another example in the literature is Marriage's aforementioned case study of NGOs in South Sudan, which includes the (non-income generating) income generation project. Marriage (2007) outlines some benefits to donors and NGOs of creating a discourse of 'humanitarianism', quite apart from its implementation:

There are benefits for donor countries in institutionalizing a political morality—framed by rights and principles — for providing assistance to civilians who are not important to geostrategic concerns. The calculated function of this political morality is to provide shared terminology for a perspective that serves the international hierarchy, including NGOs, which are funded and justified by it. This ensures the psychological well-being of aid staff and the political interests of the organizations. (p. 498)

Marriage further notes that while the projects themselves may not meet their stated objectives, the symbolic realm of the NGO projects is non-negotiable:

Whilst NGOs discard their objectives at implementation, they cannot abandon them in principle. NGOs do not enjoy the financial or operational independence they claim, but more significantly, the weight of donors'

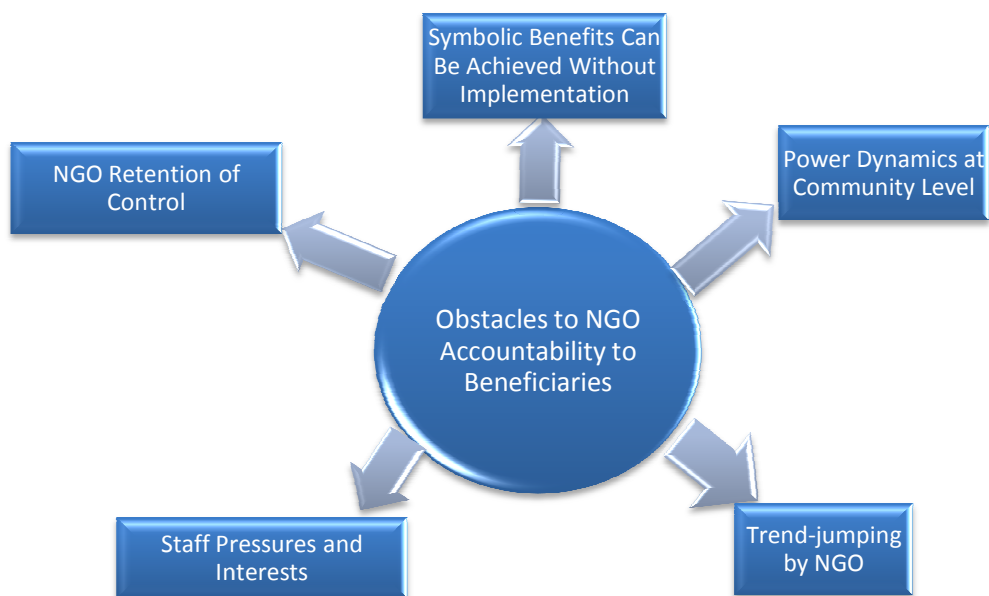
political morality means that NGOs do not retain conceptual independence either — to disavow ‘humanitarianism’ would be ideological blasphemy. (p. 494)

In other words, nobody expects the NGO project objectives to be reached in this case, but the language surrounding the non-viable efforts is important and serves other unstated objectives. The language may not be meaningful in terms of leading to any tangible results, but it keeps the ‘show’, of the international aid sector on the road. Thus, the appearance of doing something is important, even if the work is not having much, or any, impact.

This chapter has demonstrated the significant symbolic power of the myth of ALPS and downward accountability for ActionAid in terms of both external and internal legitimacy. The notion of symbolic benefit recalls Mosse’s discussion of project success and failure from my literature review chapter. Mosse (2005, p. 172) tells us, the ‘success’ of aid projects is socially produced, rather than objectively verifiable and in the case of the rural development project he studied in India, had much to do with how many project “believers” could be enrolled, rather than simply what progress was being made on the official project goals. Thus, projects can succeed (or fail) in different ways for different people. Even though ALPS appears, from my case study, to be ‘failing’ in terms of downward accountability, it appears to be succeeding in other symbolic ways, which may be even more important for the organisation.

Thus, returning to the diagram of obstacles to accountability to beneficiaries, Figure 6.1 above, it seems that another addition needs to be made. A final possible explanation for ActionAid’s shortcoming in implementing the downward accountability aspects of ALPS as planned is that, for some actors, perhaps subconsciously, the symbolic value of putting in place downward accountability systems may outweigh the ‘practical’ value. In other words, ALPS may be more important as a ‘representation’ than as an actual practice in terms of the internal and external legitimacy that the organisation reaps from it. Hence, the incentive to ensure actual implementation of the stated goals may diminish, since the benefits are already being achieved. I have added this obstacle into Figure 6.3 below. I now move to the chapter’s conclusion.

Figure 6.3: Obstacles to NGO Accountability to Beneficiaries (Complete)



6.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have responded to my main research question about obstacles to accountability to beneficiaries. Using my actor-oriented theoretical lens, I have argued that there are a number of significant obstacles militating against downward accountability in NGOs, in addition to the operational obstacles noted in the data chapters. There are significant power dynamics between NGOs, partners and community members which hinder prospects for downward accountability. The rapidly changing approaches of NGOs have a detrimental impact on downward accountability. The under-recognised stresses and pressures on staff also reduce the likelihood of NGO accountability to intended beneficiaries, as do some interests and agendas of staff which

conflict with organisational goals, such as fraud. Funding pressures, along with general managerial pressures on NGOs and NGOs' desires to meet their own goals lead to a tendency towards controlling the participation of partners and community members, and hence will also tend to work against downward accountability. Finally, the fact that there is so much to be gained from the appearance of downward accountability, in terms of external and internal legitimacy, may also reduce the incentive to actually make serious attempts towards downward accountability.

I have also proposed an explanation for why the myth of downward accountability persists despite evidence of poor practice. This brings out the central importance of the concept of disjuncture, both for my study of accountability and to understand how NGOs function more broadly. I adapted the framework used earlier to explain the second level of disjuncture in the context of managerialist pressures. I found that, as with the earlier framework, there were both internal and external legitimacy benefits to be gained from the maintenance of the myth of downward accountability, and hence the second level of disjuncture. This second level of disjuncture was again enabled by the language used in the development sector and the characteristic of discontinuity, but also, in this case, by organisational hierarchy.

Thus, a fairly pessimistic picture on the prospects for downward accountability emerges. In the final chapter, I discuss the conclusions of my research and some of the policy implications of my findings.

7. NGO Accountability: Where to from Here?

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to sum up my findings and broaden them out to look at implications for the development NGO sector. The previous three chapters have answered my research question. I have outlined the obstacles that hinder NGOs' accountability to their intended beneficiaries. In the data chapters, I brought out the day-to-day obstacles within ActionAid International and ActionAid Uganda, and in the discussion chapter I delved more deeply into what I identified as the underlying obstacles to NGO accountability. Despite evidence of a significant disjuncture between intentions and practice, I found a persistence of myth and brochure talk about ActionAid's practice of accountability. I constructed a framework in the previous chapter to explain why this disjuncture exists and how it functions. .

As noted earlier, my findings on disjuncture led to a shift in the focus of my study wherein disjuncture became the core phenomenon, rather than accountability. My findings and framework on disjuncture have implications for accountability but also for understanding other areas of NGO practice. These findings were only possible because I used an actor-oriented approach which required me to look beyond policy to different actors' interpretations of practice, including my own, using interviews, document review and ethnographic observation.

7.2 Structure of This Chapter

In this chapter, I start by briefly summarising my research journey and the answers to my research question. I then look at methodological and theoretical limitations of my study. Following this, I consider policy implications of my findings and recommendations for NGOs. I then reflect on how I think I have contributed to knowledge with this dissertation. This leads to a discussion on areas for future research. I then conclude this chapter and dissertation.

7.3 What I Learnt and How I Learnt It

When I began this study, like many practitioners working on NGO accountability at the time, I was concerned with the ‘how’. The viability of the goal itself was not something that I questioned. But every mechanism that I came across seemed to be not quite ‘hitting the spot’. Yet I discovered when I began to read the literature, that this striving for balanced accountability was not a new issue. So what was the problem? The literature was replete with exposés of the fact that NGOs’ accountability was skewed toward donors and away from intended beneficiaries. There were many ideas for how to solve it, but there were almost no studies of actually implementing these ideas. Was it indeed, what much of the literature suggested, that NGOs had not tried hard enough?

This question led me, inevitably, to ActionAid. ActionAid stood head and shoulders above other NGOs in terms of the plaudits it had won for its Accountability, Learning and Planning System from academics, peer organisations, donors and others. Presentations, book chapters, journal articles and films by ActionAid’s staff supported the impression of the organisation as the ‘best case’ in the sector. Within this literature, Uganda kept emerging as a country where ActionAid may have tried hardest of all. But despite this, initial discussions with people inside ActionAid were suggesting to me that all these efforts in Uganda may not have borne much fruit and that, generally, ALPS was not seen to be working that well in terms of ensuring accountability to intended beneficiaries. I decided to find out what had happened in Uganda, and more broadly, what had happened to ALPS.

To study ALPS, I chose to carry out a qualitative embedded case study, using an ethnographic approach, along with other mainstream qualitative methods. The most important rationale for my selection of this methodology can be summarised in three points. Firstly, I needed to allow for the fact that accountability is an often slippery and contested concept and that different people have different understandings, interests and agendas in discussions around accountability. Qualitative research within the theoretical framework of the actor-oriented approach was important to explore a complex topic such as accountability from different angles. Secondly, the ‘embedded’ nature of my case study allowed me to study two units of analysis: the ActionAid International context, from where a lot of the policy emerges, and ActionAid Uganda to take an in-

depth look at the practice. Thirdly, to find out what had happened to ALPS, it was vital for me to be able to look at practice on the ground to see to what extent it matched up with how ALPS was talked about. The ethnographic method of participant observation enabled me to do this.

My research question focussed on what obstacles ActionAid had come across in attempting to transform its accountabilities. I found obstacles at an operational level, as well as at a more fundamental level. Operational level obstacles at both ActionAid International and Uganda levels, presented in the data chapters, centred around four issues: availability of staff time for downward accountability processes, quality and skills of staff and partners for these processes, the prioritisation of donor requirements and leadership. It was clear that ActionAid is not 'well set-up' for downward accountability. These operational obstacles are issues on which ActionAid could potentially 'try harder'. On the other hand, the four underlying obstacles in the discussion chapter suggest a need for a serious rethink by NGOs on the realism of their plans to promote accountability to intended beneficiaries. I identified these underlying obstacles as: power dynamics between NGOs and intended beneficiaries at community level, the tendency of the organisation to rapidly change its approaches ('trend-jumping'), the under-recognised pressures on and interests of individual staff members, and finally the NGO desire to retain control over programming. The combination of these four obstacles paints a fairly bleak picture of prospects for goals of NGO downward accountability to be achieved.

This substantial set of obstacles highlights the differences between how ALPS has been described externally, and how it has actually been working on the ground. Nevertheless, I found a considerable amount of what I termed 'brochure talk'. This was when NGO practitioners talked in a way that created a positive image of ALPS practice as though its goals and principles were being met, even though the same practitioners would usually acknowledge that this was not how things actually worked on the ground. This 'brochure talk' in both internal and external fora helped create what I termed the 'myth of ALPS'. In this myth, ALPS had led to significant progress on transforming ActionAid's accountabilities to prioritise intended beneficiaries, and hence ActionAid's systems were aligning with its principles.

In the latter part of my discussion chapter, I explored what maintained this myth, despite evidence of contrary practice. This is where the concept of disjuncture took centre stage in my study. Using Lewis and Mosse's (2006a) concept of the inevitability of disjuncture in the contemporary managerialist aid sector, I proposed a framework to explain the second level of disjuncture. This is the notion that policy and practice will never meet, as the two serve different purposes for different audiences. As Mosse wrote, "good policy is unimplementable" (2003, p. 1). What purposes then are realised by maintaining this disjuncture? As in my earlier disjuncture framework, I again identified external and internal legitimacy benefits to the maintenance of disjuncture. There is much evidence that external legitimacy benefits have accrued to ActionAid from the existence of ALPS; it has been a significant public relations success for the organisation. For instance, ALPS is mentioned positively in numerous publications. ActionAid has itself also spoken of the success of ALPS in various external documents, such as in fundraising materials. In terms of internal legitimacy benefits, it would appear from the literature on ALPS inside the organisation that ALPS plays an important role in motivating staff who want, or need, to believe in the possibility of downward accountability.

Having discussed the legitimacy benefits that cause the second level of disjuncture to persist, I then posited three mechanisms through which it functions. The first two were mentioned in the earlier disjuncture framework: language and discontinuity. My research supported what authors such as Apthorpe (2006) and Mosse (2005) have noted about language in the aid sector, that it can be vague and misleading. I found that brochure talk played a key role in maintaining the myth of ALPS and hence the second level of disjuncture between intentions and practice. The second factor, discontinuity, describes the way in which constant fads and trends and staff turnover within the aid sector can allow myths to persist without being supported by evidence. A third factor, emerging from my research and supported by some literature, is organisational hierarchy. In organisations such as ActionAid hierarchy enables myths and disjuncture to continue, in part as the staff that are best-placed to speak about the realities of practice are the least empowered to do so. These staff may be hindered by the kinds of pressures mentioned in the earlier discussion on obstacles, such as

livelihood concerns. Finally, I concluded that the very fact that there are legitimacy benefits to organisations from maintaining disjuncture with respect to downward accountability becomes one more obstacle to it actually being achieved. The appearance of fulfilling the goal can become more important than its actual realisation.

As noted earlier, while my study began with a strong focus on accountability, it ended with disjuncture as the central phenomenon, and with accountability as one case study of how disjuncture emerges and functions.

Having summarised my findings, in the next section I discuss the methodological and theoretical limitations of my research.

7.4 Methodological and Theoretical Limitations

In this section, I reflect on six methodological and theoretical limitations of my study, recalling and elaborating on those mentioned in my methodology chapter. The first two limitations relate to my position as a former practitioner, the next three relate to the depth of my study and the last to its generalisability.

The fact that I came to this research with a practitioner background naturally meant that I had to work harder to look at familiar phenomena in new ways, and I may not always have managed to do so. On the positive side, as noted in the methodology chapter, I may have been able to delve deeper than the average researcher as I did not need to spend much time understanding the basic elements of the sector. A second limitation of my background was that, while my 'insider status' may have generally been an advantage to my methodology, particularly in terms of ensuring access, it does make my study less replicable than others as it presumably would be difficult for a researcher without a comparable practitioner background to enter a similar space and gain the same level of access.

A third methodological limitation was my inability, given the way in which my study was structured, to go into much depth at community level. Since ActionAid as an organisation was my central focus, and since I looked at its accountabilities to all different actors, this limited the extent to which I could spend significant time in individual communities. My typical interaction with community members was

observing their participation in a PRRP session of perhaps two hours, and then holding one group discussion with them. Given that the stakeholder group of intended beneficiaries is one of the most difficult to penetrate of all of ActionAid's stakeholder groups, with barriers around language and cultural distance, I would have needed far more time in each individual community to gain a fuller understanding of how ActionAid and partners interact with these intended beneficiaries. I chose not to structure my study in this way, in order to divide my time among the breadth of relevant stakeholders, with a strong focus on staff members and partners as was appropriate to my research question. However, there is no doubt that this led to a relatively superficial interaction with community members. In addition, the fact that I sometimes travelled with ActionAid staff and vehicles would have worked against community members seeing me as an 'independent' researcher.

Fourthly, and along similar lines, another methodological limitation is that I interviewed some people in political positions, both at national and local levels, who may have been even more constrained than the average interviewee in terms of what they could or would say to a researcher.

Fifthly, my study only briefly touched on some potentially interesting theoretical avenues. For instance, related to the point on the limitations of my interaction with communities above, I did not conduct an in-depth theoretical analysis of power issues in this study. This would have been particularly relevant to my community-level findings. Furthermore, I did not analyse literature around the concepts of transparency and participation in any great depth and there may be some interesting analysis to be found within this literature. A final example of theories or concepts which I did not look into in much depth is the area of cognitive dissonance, which I allude to in the discussion chapter but do not fully explore. While these choices were deliberate, in order not to overload my dissertation with a lot of different theoretical ideas, the above are some important areas that may have yielded useful perspectives.

Sixthly and finally, I only studied one organisation, ActionAid, and thus my study cannot and does not claim any 'generalisability'. I hope that it does, however, provide some interesting ideas and frameworks for other researchers to test with other organisations.

Having discussed some methodological and theoretical limitations of my study, I now discuss its policy implications and some recommendations for NGOs.

7.5 Policy Implications and Recommendations for NGOs

What is the relevance of these research findings for policies on and of NGOs? The literature review chapter referred to the weaknesses of much literature on NGOs - particularly its lack of theoretical grounding and its normative orientation. It is vital, therefore, to bridge the gap between research on NGO topics and NGO practice. As can be seen from my findings, neither the obstacles to NGO accountability nor disjuncture are new issues and yet they keep recurring. It is incumbent on researchers such as myself to suggest ways in which research might have implications for better policy and practice.

In this section I highlight two implications of my study which are relevant to NGOs. Firstly, I argue that NGOs should avoid aiming for accountability to intended beneficiaries. Secondly, I make the case that NGOs should pay close attention to disjuncture. These implications align with my own research journey, as I began with the view that accountability should be the main focus of my study, and ended up concluding that the key issue was actually disjuncture, which affected NGO attempts at accountability, as well as other elements of NGO practice.

7.5.1 Seek Power Shifts, not Accountability

NGOs have many laudable intentions around increasing accountability to intended beneficiaries. For instance, they want to be more transparent to and consultative with beneficiaries. However, building on my discussion of definitions and models of accountability in the literature review chapter, I argue in this section that accountability to intended beneficiaries is almost impossible, in theory and in practice, and that the only exception to this involves a set of circumstances that NGOs are not in a position to create. Thus, aiming for accountability can be futile and distracting, and, at worst, can even be detrimental.

I first discuss why accountability to beneficiaries is almost impossible in theory. As discussed earlier, the most common definition of accountability in the academic sphere is Mulgan's 'core sense'. The key point of contention in this definition is that:

it implies *rights of authority*, in that those calling for an account are asserting rights of superior authority over those who are accountable, including the rights to demand answers and to impose sanctions. (p. 555, emphasis in original)

While academics generally subscribe to similar definitions, most NGO practitioners writing in the literature define accountability in a way that allows for beneficiaries to hold NGOs to account on the basis of 'moral authority', and hence raises the possibility of the 'voluntary accountability' of NGOs. These definitions fit into the broad sense of who NGOs should be accountable to, as per the spectrum set out by Unerman and O'Dwyer (2006). Indeed ALPS, as a system, is based on the notion that ActionAid can volunteer to be accountable.

However, some theorists see voluntary accountability as problematic. As Brett (1993) notes, NGOs attempts at empowerment, providing information and complaints mechanisms, engaging in participatory planning and so on, depend on good will and do not give intended beneficiaries any independent authority. Brett cites Hirschman's (1970) framework of 'Exit, Voice and Loyalty' as the three options for a consumer to hold a company accountable. However, he is of the view that the poverty and vulnerability of NGO beneficiaries is such that beneficiaries exiting from NGO programmes or exercising voice to complain about NGO services are not viable options, making it difficult to see how accountability could exist (T. McDonald, 2008, p. 27; Wenar, 2006, p. 16).

Similarly, Obrecht (2011, pp. 100-104) and Mulgan (2003, p. 137) label the concept of 'voluntary accountability' as a contradiction in terms. Mulgan explains why he thinks the concept is actually detrimental:

where the recipients of charity have no recognised rights to complain or demand redress or otherwise hold the volunteers accountable, such grace-and-favour sensitivity by volunteers hardly counts as accountability at all. To describe it as such only serves to hide the lack of external scrutiny and remedies that pervades the non profit sector.

My study supports the notion that the concept of voluntary accountability can be detrimental, for a related but different reason. As noted in my findings, despite ActionAid's voluntarism, its attempts to practice accountability ran up against fundamental 'authority-related' obstacles. These included power dynamics between ActionAid, partners and beneficiaries, and prioritisation being given to donor demands over community processes. The terminology in ALPS of "multiple accountabilities" to different stakeholders, but "most of all to poor and excluded people", is echoed in much NGO literature (ActionAid, 2006a, p. 4). I contend that this terminology serves to camouflage issues around power and authority but, crucially, does not make them go away. These are fundamental obstacles, as these theorists and Mulgan's core sense definition suggests. A comment from a trustee cited in Newman (2011, p. 253) draws attention to the problematic use of 'downward accountability' language in ActionAid:

While ALPS created space and processes for transparency, there was little emphasis on accountability: I don't believe we deliver on downward accountability, it is a misnomer. What we mean is we'll come down to you and you'll tell us what you are doing, or what you want to do. So there is a downward design to some extent, but we don't account for what we are doing to you, so in that respect it is not really downward accountability and we need to get that right.

I conclude that this camouflaging is problematic as it may lead NGOs further away from realistic prospects of improving their relationships with intended beneficiaries.

Thus, my study provides support for maintaining the 'core sense' definition of accountability. Using this definition, I contend that neither 'voluntary accountability' nor its related concept 'downward accountability' is possible in theory. However, I do not believe that accountability to intended beneficiaries is completely impossible. I conclude that it is highly improbable, but not entirely impossible, that NGOs can be accountable to beneficiaries. There is one 'loophole' that can be exploited: the appropriation by intended beneficiaries of authority. This might involve, for instance, beneficiaries joining together in large numbers to express demands, and/or aligning with donor agencies to benefit from donors' power over NGOs.

Three examples, including one from my own study and the two aforementioned case studies by Johnson (2001) in Thailand and Walker et al. (2007) in Mexico, show

prospects in practice on the appropriation of authority that are not illuminated in theoretical discussions. Johnson provides a case study of villagers in Southern Thailand who were able to hold an NGO to account, in part because of donor requirements on participation in the NGO's projects. Similarly, Walker et al. describe how local people in Oaxaca successfully used the NGO's language of participation to express certain demands. In both cases, beneficiaries managed to use the concept of 'downward accountability' to their advantage to appropriate the necessary bargaining power and hence authority, which then of course made it into 'upward accountability'.

A third example emerged in my case study and that involved the appropriation of authority by some of ActionAid's intended beneficiaries in the context of child sponsorship. It may seem surprising to be relating child sponsorship to better accountability to beneficiaries, as the sponsorship mechanism is often controversial inside and outside ActionAid (Newman, 2011, p. 122). With the focus in its advertising on how a small amount of funds per month can change the life of an individual child, it is seen as representing a 'charity' approach rather than a 'rights' approach. This has created what Newman (2011, p. 120) describes as an "uneasy tension" between the image of sponsorship and the image ActionAid wishes to portray with its rights approach, a tension which has caused "continual angst" in the organisation over the years.

However the main reason that many ActionAid staff members interviewed were critical of sponsorship funding is that it "tied" them to particular communities for up to 10 years. Most frustrating of all for staff, parents of sponsored children often cause problems for ActionAid by refusing to let their children write letters if they have not received any direct benefit from ActionAid. This issue of sponsorship families not receiving benefits, sometimes combined with other concerns, has led to instances of partners at LRP level being removed and being replaced by partners which are seen as more likely to provide services to sponsored families. In two cases which I encountered in Kalangala and Katakwi LRPs, these are parents' associations, which were formed by the parents of sponsored children to be a conduit for benefits from ActionAid. Thus, ActionAid has, in these instances, been 'accountable' to the sponsored families by listening to their concerns and acting accordingly.

However, it is noteworthy that this is not the kind of ‘voluntary’ or ‘downward’ accountability spoken about in ALPS. It was clear from my interviews that ActionAid’s decisions in these instances were based on the power that sponsored families held over the organisation to meet or refuse to meet sponsorship requirements. These families had authority, they got together and they used it. ActionAid met the demands but, my data suggest, at least some staff members did so with extreme reluctance. The type of demands usually made by communities for ActionAid and partner activities is not considered to be strategic or sustainable. The provision of direct benefit, which is usually what is requested, goes against the corporate grain of ActionAid, which is centred on the human rights-based approach, which has only limited provision for direct service delivery.

Thus, while there is considerable resentment among staff of this power of sponsored families, this type of response by ActionAid to the parents’ demands fits squarely into the definition of ‘NGO accountability to beneficiaries’. Sponsorship provides the elusive ‘authority’ from the classic definition of accountability that beneficiary groups usually lack. In some cases in Uganda, sponsorship has evidently led to a ready-made group of ‘empowered beneficiaries’ ready to ‘demand’, which is precisely what NGOs say that they are trying to cultivate under the human rights-based approach.

However, the key point about the appropriation of authority by beneficiaries is that, by definition, NGOs cannot create these situations and thus accountability is still not a useful aim for NGOs to start with. All NGOs can do is choose to either embrace or avoid these situations of appropriation if they arise. My first recommendation is therefore that NGOs stop aiming for ‘accountability’ and rather try to find ways to embrace shifts of power towards beneficiaries if they occur, as this can provide some

balance into the usually unequal relationship between NGOs and their intended beneficiaries⁸⁶.

7.5.2 Recognise the Inevitability of Disjuncture

My research, while it began as a study of NGO accountability, ultimately became a case study of how disjuncture applied to a case of NGO accountability. As I have demonstrated, all attempts at NGO accountability will be vulnerable to being undermined by the inevitability of disjuncture between aims and practices in the aid sector. As illustrated by my disjuncture framework, the desire of NGOs for external and internal legitimacy will tend to promote this disjuncture between policy and practice, which will be further facilitated by the use of misleading language, by discontinuity within the aid sector and by dynamics of organisational hierarchy within NGOs. In this section, I discuss two recommendations for NGOs with respect to disjuncture within their practice. The first recommendation is for NGOs to be careful with their use of language in order to be able to confront the tendency toward disjuncture. The second recommendation is for NGOs to review their funding structures, since the drive for external legitimacy is an important cause of disjuncture.

In a paper on whether poor people are mobilised by anti-poverty programmes, Joshi and Moore (2000, p. 26) conclude that the ways of working of aid organisations are often disempowering in themselves, even while they are trying to implement empowerment programmes. The authors note that “genuine inability to see through the fog of fashionable jargon and to think clearly about the political and institutional issues may be part of the problem.” Similarly, my first recommendation for NGOs, in order to confront disjuncture in their work, is to pay close attention to language. NGOs should try to recognise and be conscious of their own ‘brochure talk’ and the myths that may have emerged around their practices, and they should work towards frank internal discussions that more closely reflect staff (including local-level staff) experiences of

⁸⁶ There are many potential pitfalls here. A group of community representatives, such as the current parent associations could be a useful body with which to negotiate, but many questions arise as to how sponsored children are selected by ActionAid Uganda in the first place and who actually ‘represents communities’, given power dynamics within community groups themselves. My study raised several of these important ethical questions around child sponsorship which I will not discuss in detail here as they are outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless, sponsorship provides a rare opportunity to experiment with NGO accountability to intended beneficiaries in reality.

actual practices. As Sogge and Biekart (1996, p. 201) note in a discussion on NGO claims regarding their impact, NGOs have “the choice to stop fooling themselves. . . Out of the glare of the public media, agencies can take long sober looks at their activities and draw conclusions about the norms and paradigms that have guided them up to now”. Breaking out of what one ActionAid staff member called the “jargon-driven malaise” that often afflicts NGO work will allow organisations to reflect, with perhaps more honesty and modesty than usual, on how they want to move forward with their goals.

My second recommendation concerns NGOs’ funding structures. I found in my study that external legitimacy, particularly vis-à-vis donors, is a central reason for the continuation of disjuncture between aims and practices. Reducing the level of disjuncture would require considerable shifts in funding structures for most organisations, including ActionAid. For instance, leaving the terminology of ‘accountability’ aside, if organisations choose to ‘walk the talk’ on being more community-centred, they will need to find ways to invest significant resources and time at the community level, to commit for the long-term, to continuously reflect, to take risks, and to be prepared to change priorities as the context changes and as new opportunities or challenges arise. This kind of work will not be easily ‘scalable’, given that it requires so much investment in staffing and in particular communities. Critically, to do all this, the organisation will need to look carefully at its funding structure. It should only accept funds based on conditions and requirements that will not compromise its relationships with communities - whether that means negotiating with existing donors or finding new ways to raise funds. An organisation which does not already have significant flexible funding may find that it is impossible to survive in this way, or they may find that it is possible to survive but that the organisation must remain small and, possibly, institutionally insecure. In a paper on the future of accountability within ActionAid, one international staff member wrote:

In the pursuit of money to sustain our organisations and staff we may be in danger of wandering down a road of political compromise. Or is there another path we can seek? The shape of the alternative is not entirely clear to me but features smaller budgets based on ‘cleaner’ funds that allow us to continue to fulfil our mission and our work with integrity. (Hargreaves, 2009, p. 38)

The aim here should be to align the organisation's structure as closely as possible with its goals. This agenda will require much self-reflection within individual organisations. Refusing potential funding opportunities and remaining small will be counter-intuitive for most organisations and will work against the desires of organisations to create a more sustainable organisational base, to assure job security for staff, to pay their rent and so on. But such risks might be necessary in order for organisations to maintain their independence to pursue genuinely community-driven work, if that is their goal.

7.6 Future Research

My study suggests that three areas merit particular attention with regards to this topic. Related to the recommendations above, my first suggestion on future research is for studies to be conducted that expose disjuncture in the NGO sector, and thus assist NGOs to recognise and confront their own instances of disjuncture. The disjuncture framework which I posited for accountability could, for instance, be tested in other areas of NGO practice.

The second area is the need for studies of NGOs which have made attempts to maintain their operational independence in order to fulfil their goals - regardless of what these goals might be. Whether these attempts at the maintenance of an NGO's autonomy were successful or not, I believe that much could be learnt from how NGOs fare when they try to escape from the managerial context of the contemporary aid sector and from funding dependence.

Finally, the notion of organisational myths has been a major theme of my study. As noted, the fact that these myths bring external legitimacy benefits has a fairly strong basis in the literature. But the use of myths for internal legitimacy has not garnered the same level of attention. Further studies of how myths work in organisations would be illuminating, with a particular emphasis on this internal legitimacy dimension.

7.7 Contribution to Knowledge

My research makes some contributions which I believe to be original in terms of how I asked my questions, what questions I asked and what the answers bring to the existing literature.

In terms of how I asked the questions, my methodology, this research shows how an in-depth qualitative study of a key organisational issue can be undertaken using an actor-oriented approach, based on interpretative principles. As noted earlier, this approach enables a close, critical analysis of issues which is not always possible with other forms of research on NGOs, particularly given the need to get behind the powerful “myths, models and poses of development policy and institutions” (Long, 2001, p. 14). In this sense, my study builds on the tradition of Hilhorst’s actor-oriented ethnography of an NGO in the Philippines. My study adds an international dimension to this tradition by studying the dynamics of a multi-sited global organisation. My embedded case study contained within its scope the international level to the village level, and therefore my methods of interviewing, document analysis and observation were carried out at international, national and local levels. In particular, I used direct observation of accountability processes and interviews with intended beneficiaries which are rarely used methods in studies on this topic. Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, this is the most in-depth and long-term study to date on attempts to improve NGO accountability in practice; my study looked at one organisation during a span of 15 years and analysed both historical and contemporary data.

In terms of the questions I asked, I raised some ‘sacred cows’ in a highly normative area of development practice. Studies of NGO accountability rarely question whether it is possible in theory or practice, and even more rarely, whether organisations are actually motivated enough to achieve accountability to their intended beneficiaries. Thus, I tackled a number of the assumptions underlying much of the literature on NGO accountability.

Finally, in terms of what is new about my findings, I believe there are five main points. I think my principal contribution is demonstrating, via the case study on accountability, the central role of disjuncture between what is claimed and what is enacted in an NGO, and creating a framework to explain how this disjuncture arises and functions. Myth plays an important role here. In my case study, I find that a powerful myth about ALPS in ActionAid feeds the ongoing disjuncture between intentions and practice. Importantly, this contribution on disjuncture has implications for understanding other areas of NGO practice beyond accountability.

Secondly, I make a contribution to theory on NGO accountability by making an empirically-based argument for a narrow definition of accountability of NGOs. By highlighting issues around power dynamics at community level and between donors and NGOs, I contend that the ‘broad’ definition of accountability, with its accompanying concepts of ‘downward accountability’ and ‘voluntary accountability’, is both inappropriate and potentially detrimental. I also bring in a new possibility for NGO accountability into theory from practice: the appropriation of authority by beneficiaries which can lead to accountability of NGOs.

Thirdly, while most studies of NGO accountability tend to focus on upward accountability to donors as the main obstacle to NGOs’ accountability to beneficiaries, my research adds significant complexity and depth to this picture by using an actor-oriented approach and stressing NGOs’ own room for manoeuvre. Rather than seeing NGOs as simply beholden to the demands of donors in the context of increasing managerialism, I also look at decisions that are made (or not made) within NGOs which lead to poor practice of accountability. This includes issues around staffing, partnerships, and so on, that have hindered the operation of accountability within ActionAid⁸⁷.

Fourthly, my study lends empirical support to what many authors in the development sector have called for over the years: that more attention ought to be paid to people and how they actually operate within their contexts and cultures, rather than to technical frameworks and solutions. Building on the work of authors such as Hilhorst, Mosse and Lewis, my study makes a contribution in its analysis of the emotional life of ActionAid Uganda over a number of years. In this sense, I reject the “technical-rational” bias of managerialism which overstates the potential of technical solutions in development and understates dynamics such as those related to contexts and cultures (Harding, 2013, p. 131). I also reject the notion, sometimes implied in the NGO literature, of the ‘unified’ organisation with benevolent staff members who unquestioningly follow the organisational mandate. Rather, I discuss in detail the pressures on and interests of individual staff members from my case study, including

⁸⁷ ActionAid is an interesting case study here as the organisation is less dependent on institutional funders than many of its peers, and yet, I argue, is still affected by the current managerial context within NGOs.

issues such as livelihood concerns and fraud. I detail the detrimental effects evident in ActionAid of various internal issues such as poor management, job insecurity, a suspicious organisational atmosphere and high staff turnover. Critically, I demonstrate the negative effects of these internal organisational issues on NGO operations and relationships with external stakeholders, which is an aspect rarely seen in the literature.

Finally, I make a contribution with my analysis of some of the less discussed aspects of managerialism within NGOs. I discuss, as many authors on this topic do, the increasing managerialism in the NGO sector, but rather than focussing only on the visible impacts on NGOs' accountabilities, such as heavy planning and reporting requirements, as much of the literature does, I go further and explore less tangible impacts. For instance, the literature suggests that a key enabling factor of disjuncture within managerial contexts is the prevalent discontinuity within NGOs, which belies serious long-term efforts at implementation of initiatives. My case study demonstrates in detail the strong tendency for 'trend-jumping', evidenced by constant changes of approaches, strategies and staff, both at the international-level and at the level of ActionAid Uganda. I also point to the central role of language in feeding disjuncture in the NGO sector. I created a new concept 'brochure talk' to describe the rhetorical language that NGO workers use to maintain myths and positive profiles of their organisations, despite the fact that evidence may exist to the contrary.

7.8 Conclusion: Back to ALPS

This dissertation has been a critical analysis of an organisation that has made more efforts than many in this area. It was critical because it was comparing ActionAid's practices with the organisation's own intentions. However, ActionAid's attempts at accountability to intended beneficiaries can also be looked at in terms of how they may have opened spaces for discussion on important topics related to NGOs' relationships with the communities in which they work. David and Mancini (2011, p. 245) conclude that:

Whatever its lasting influence, ALPS has contributed to the on-going debate and development of practice. The last decade has witnessed an increased focus on NGO accountability to Primary Stakeholders and experimentation with participatory approaches that address issues of

power, justice and rights and open up new frontiers of enquiry, learning and understanding of change (Earl, 2004; PLA Notes, 2005-2009; Beardon and Newman, 2009).

ActionAid's commendable transparency throughout my study is relevant here. After my presentation in Uganda, one participant made the valid point that, had the organisation not been so transparent and open with me, my critical findings and our discussion on them would not have been possible.

When all is said and done, the most significant and lasting impact of ALPS may be, as Eyben notes, its role as a myth. Perhaps the aspiration and inspiration of ALPS has, in some cases, raised expectations for what communities deserve from NGOs that ostensibly exist to serve them and opened spaces for dialogue on these expectations. If it has done that, ActionAid has made an important contribution.

Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Interviewees

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Appendix 3: Survey

Appendix 4: Facesheet for Data Analysis

Appendix 1: List of Interviewees

UGANDA INTERVIEWS

| Current Staff | | | |
|----------------------|---|---------------------------|--|
| Name | Position | Interview Location | Interview Date |
| Henry Nickson Ogwal | IASL Coordinator | Brighton | 4/8/2010, |
| | | Kampala | 26/7/2011, 3/8/2011, 10/8/2011, 16/8/2011, 22/8/2011 |
| Tom Wabwire | Sponsorship Officer | Kampala | 28/2/2011 |
| Rose Ejang | Programme Assistant | Kampala | 1/3/2011 |
| Zaituna Fuambe | Administrative Secretary | Kampala | 1/3/2011 |
| Lucy Ojiambo | Governance Assistant | Kampala | 2/3/2011 |
| Saida Bogere | Sponsorship Coordinator | Kampala | 4/3/2011 |
| Alice Aseru | Sponsorship Officer | Kampala | 4/3/2011 |
| Mary Akiror | Sponsorship Officer | Kampala | 7/3/2011 |
| Charles Kiyingi | Acting LRP Coordinator, Kumi | Kumi | 9/3/2011 |
| Kevin Nabattu | Programme Officer, Busiki | Kumi | 10/3/2011 |
| Rose Atim | Programme Coordinator | Kampala | 18/3/2011 |
| Charles Businge | Country Director | Kampala | 1/4/2011, 28/4/2011, 2/8/2011, 10/8/2011, 11/8/2011 |
| Deo Lukomwa | LRP Coordinator, Kalangala | Kampala | 4/4/2011 |
| Chris Kinyanji | Regional Director (East and Southern Africa) | Nairobi | 15/4/ 2011 |
| Justus Rugambwa | Programme Development Manager | Kampala | 21/3/2011, 24/3/2011, 22/8/2011 |
| Ronald Kirabira | Acting Finance Director, AAI (Former Uganda Finance Director) | London | 5/7/2011 |
| Florence Apuri | Director Partnership and Sponsorship | Kampala | 8/7/2011 |
| Hellen Malinga Apila | LRP Coordinator, Katakwi | Soroti | 28/7/2011 |
| Matilde Okiror | Programme Officer, Katakwi | Soroti | 28/7/2011 |
| Elizabeth Nakiboneka | Education Coordinator | Kampala | 4/8/2011 |
| Caroline Odoi | LRP Coordinator, Pallisa | Mukono | 9/8/2011 |
| James Ongu | LRP Coordinator, Amuru | Mukono | 9/8/2011 |

| | | | |
|------------------------|---|---------|-----------|
| Richard Olong | LRP Coordinator, Nebbi | Mukono | 9/8/2011 |
| Rebecca Kukundakwe | Coordinator Building Local Democracy | Mukono | 10/8/2011 |
| Richard Gafabusa | LRP Coordinator, Masindi | Mukono | 11/8/2011 |
| Edward Iruura | Director Finance | Mukono | 12/8/2011 |
| Abey Makova | Internal Auditor | Kampala | 15/8/2011 |
| Sophia Irepu | Human Security Theme Head | Kampala | 15/8/2011 |
| Catherine Tumusiime | Human Resources Director | Kampala | 22/8/2011 |
| Ssanyu Kalibbala | Communications Director | Kampala | 22/8/2011 |

| Former Staff | | | |
|-----------------------|---|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Name | Latest Position within AAU | Interview Location | Interview Date |
| Meenu Vadera | Country Director | New Delhi | 7/8/2010 |
| Sarah Okwaare | IASL Coordinator for | Kampala | 3/3/2011 |
| Martin Kaleeba | Regional Facilitator | Kampala | 13/3/2011 |
| Mary SSONKO | Gender Advisor | Kampala | 14/3/2011 |
| James Kintu | Policy Manager | Kampala | 15/3/2011 |
| Medi Makumbi | Regional Facilitator | Kampala | 15/3/2011 |
| Anthony Wasswa | Country Director | Kampala | 16/3/2011 |
| Apollo Matovu | Finance manager | Kampala | 17/3/2011 |
| Cranmer Katalihwa | Reflect Coordinator | Masindi | 22/3/2011 |
| John Bulega | Acting Country Director, Regional Facilitator | Kampala | 25/3/2011 |
| Algresia Akwi | Programme Director (and Africa Regional Director) | Phone | 30/3/2011 |
| Colin Williams | Country Director (and Africa Regional Director) | Kampala | 3/4/2011 |
| Edward Kakende | DI Coordinator | Kampala | 21/4/2011 |
| David Lukwago | Human Resources Manager | Kampala | 12/7/2011 |
| Geoffrey Nuwamanya | Internal Auditor | Kampala | 1/4/2011 |

| Partners | | | |
|---|---|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Name | Position and Partner Organisation | Interview Location | Interview Date |
| Henry Kizito | Coordinator KAFOFAN | Kalangala | 23/3/2011 |
| Stephen Kizzo | Chair of board KADEFO, GA Member | Kalangala | 23/3/2011 |
| Peter Ssenyanja | Coordinator KADEFO | Kalangala | 23/3/2011 |
| Galiwango Gideon Ronald Bukko | Coordinator KDIFFA | Kampala | 25/3/2011 |
| Nulu Nabunya | Coordinator MAWDA, GA Member | Makarere | 31/3/2011 |
| Florence Masuliya | Programme Coordinator Tusitukirewamu Group | Kampala | 4/4/2011 |
| Alex Ndeezi | Executive Director UNAD, GA Member | Kampala | 5/4/2011 |
| Juliet Basemara | Programme Officer Kiruda | Masindi | 6/4/2011 |
| Jerome Biyaruhanga | General Secretary Virudi | Masindi | 6/4/2011 |
| Charles Wamara Edward Mbiheebwa | Programme Officer, Programme Coordinator Masindi NGO Forum, | Masindi | 6/4/2011 |
| Charles Banongo William Barundji Patrick Tumisime | Programme Director, Treasurer, Accountant, Bomido | Masindi | 6/4/2011 |
| Walter Tumwesige | Programme Officer Maden | Masindi | 6/4/2011 |
| Felix Arum | Programme Coordinator Cadovic | Apac | 7/4/2011 |
| Olam Geoffrey Tom | Coordinator Aweiwot | Apac | 7/4/2011 |
| Tom Oponya | Coordinator TACC, Former AAU staff | Apac | 7/4/2011 |
| Geoffrey Okullo | Former Coordinator Pasud | Apac | 7/4/2011 |
| Maria Nandago | Consultant Recabip, Former AAU staff | Kampala | 26/4/2011 |
| Tom Muzora | Consultant Recabip, Former AAU staff | Mukono | 27/4/2011, |
| Stella Amuron | Manager Nacwola | Pallisa | 14/7/2011 |
| Gabriel Angiro | Chairperson Fallisu | Katakwi | 21/7/2011 |
| Ijoot Victor | Chairperson KSCDA | Katakwi | 21/7/2011 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Otim John Robert Omoding Simon | Chairperson, Manager, TPP | Toroma | 22/7/2011 |
| Onyait Robert, | Chairperson NSCDA | Ngariam | 23/7/2011 |
| Isaac Opolot | Programme Officer TESDA | Soroti | 27/7/2011 |
| Jacob Aisia | Programme Officer YNO | Soroti | 27/7/2011 |
| Charles Obwade, | Programme Officer NSCDA | Soroti | 28/7/2011 |

| Community Members | | |
|--|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| Names | Interview Location | Interview Date |
| Isale Stephen Apiaya Jane Kasifa Akol Odong France Tukei Acheng Hellen Ikiring Anna Akia Demeteria Akia Anna Kulume Betty Akello Flow Achola Kevin Amulen Jostina Aanyu Mary Aanyu Christine Akurui Mary Naigaga Salama Amongu Anna Agwang Jesea Akiteng Betty Akiding Joyce Mary | Gogonyo, Pallisa district | 13/7/2011 |
| Otiang Moses Olupot Aloysius Akiteng Cilia Akwor Joyce | Omodio, Katakwi | 19/7/2011 |
| Omodo Martin (from Omodoi) | Katakwi town | 21/7/2011 |
| William Osege (from Kokorio) | Katakwi town | 21/7/2011 |
| Otim John Robert Aguti Florene Imaigat Marimu Amono Rose Akwi Selina Atim Rose Okello Joseph | Toroma, Katakwi | 22/7/2011 |

| | | |
|---|------------------|-----------|
| <p>Aciria Kalisito Emenyuk Basil Aduwet Stella Akido Josphine Ogullo Zakaria Okum Charles Apio Pulumera Atiang Jane Ongolepus Stephen Mohamad Ali Ogoi Alupo Gorrety Asekenye Florence Imalingat Florence Ibaat Sarah Arot Jeimfen Akudo Charles Adikam Max Obokorit Joshua Ekesit John Robert Ileut Ali Okiror Charles Emuron George W.</p> | | |
| <p>Enyuru William Olinga Moses Ojirot Martin Echuman Martin Echuman Nelson Akio Merasu Opio Charles Patrick Aukin Amadoi Martin Aguti Jesca Amangin Naume Rose Opowot Samuel Akwi Lusi Abunyang Ben Abunyang Malisa Okukway Michael Omongin Peter Akorimo</p> | Ngariam, Katakwi | 23/7/2011 |
| <p>Alupo Norbert Akwii Hellen Atai Rose Alienso Akontasia Aruto Ann Ogugul Alfred Musana John Ochen Gilbert Emuron Michael Ochen G. Okuro John</p> | Kapujan, Katakwi | 25/7/2011 |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| Amue Michael Apunyo John Ocen John Robert Opapelo Saverio Otim Francis Denis Opira Musana G. | | |
|--|--|--|

| Local Government Representatives | | | |
|---|--|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Name | Position | Location | Interview Date |
| Scholastica Alupo | Vice CAO | Katakwi district HQ | 22/7/2011 |
| Ongom Silver Kato Milton | Head of Production Department CAO | Katakwi district HQ | 26/7/2011 |
| John Robert Ekongot | LC5 Chairman, Katakwi district | Katakwi district HQ | 26/7/2011 |
| Margaret Ikulot | Vice-Chair Katakwi district | Katakwi district HQ | 26/7/2011 |
| Onwali Patrick Emmanuel Okiro | Inspector of Schools, Katakwi district Population Officer | Katakwi district HQ | 26/7/2011 |
| Onono Christopher Okwalinga John Michael | Vice Chair LC5 Community Development Officer Pallisa | Pallisa district HQ | 17/8/2011 |

| Trustees/Advisors | | | |
|--|--|-----------------|--------------|
| Name | Position | Location | Dates |
| James Otto | Chair of AAU Board | Kampala | 31/3/2011 |
| Edna Rugumayo | Board Member AAU | Kampala | 9/4/2011 |
| Caroline Ekobu Evelyn Mugenyi | Board Members AAU | Kampala | 9/4/2011 |
| John de Conninck | Consultant for AAU | Kampala | 2/8/2011 |
| Judy Aturi Adoko | GA member, ex-board member, (Executive Director of Land and Equity Movement in Uganda) | Kampala | 7/8/2011 |
| George Katumba – Sempangi Catherine Matovu- Muyanja | GA member, (Action Against Disability) | Kampala | 18/8/2011 |
| Tina Wallace | Consultant for AA Uganda | Outside London | 1/9/2011 |
| Irene Ovonji-Odida | Former chair of AAU board, Chair of AAI board | Kampala | 6/2/2012 |

| Other Stakeholders | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|-----------------|--------------|
| Name | Position | Location | Dates |
| Harriet Namisi | Accountability Coordinator, DENIVA | Kampala | 14/11/2010 |
| Professor Kwesiga | Executive Director, DENIVA | Kampala | 16/11/2010 |
| Arthur Larok | Director of Programmes, NGO Forum | Kampala | 30/3/2011 |
| Betty Angiro | Head of Kaddan, Katakwi network of CSOs | Katakwi | 30/7/2011 |
| Ssansa Mugenyi | Acting Director Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation | Kampala | 3/8/2011 |
| Innocent Ejolu | Principal Policy Analyst Office of the Prime Minister | | |
| Mercy Mayebo | NGO Advisor, USAID | Kampala | 4/8/2011 |
| Ambassador Gabriel Kangwagye | Chair, NGO Registration Board | Kampala | 4/8/2011 |
| Ejautene Fred and Wilberforce | Advocacy Officer and Director Paconet, Pallisa district network | Pallisa | 17/8/2011 |
| Agnes Ndamata | Civil Society Advisor, DFID | Kampala | 18/8/2011 |

INTERNATIONAL INTERVIEWS

| Current Staff | | | |
|----------------------|--|-------------------|-------------------------|
| Name | Position | Location | Date |
| Laurie Adams | Head of Impact Assessment and Shared Learning Team | Johannesburg | 2/12/2009 16/12/2009 |
| Ramesh Singh | ActionAid International Chief Executive | Johannesburg | 16/12/2009 |
| Anne Jellema | Head of Policy, AAI | Johannesburg | 2/12/2009 |
| Samantha Hargreaves | Shared Learning Coordinator, IASL team, | Johannesburg | 16/12/2009 |
| Tripti Rai | IASL Coordinator, Nepal | | 5/8/2010 |
| Yuko Yoneda | IASL Regional Coordinator, Asia | Brighton | 5/8/2010 |
| Vincent Azumah | IASL Regional Coordinator, West and Central Africa | Brighton Accra | 5/8/2010 9/4/2011 |
| Beata Musabyemariya | IASL Regional Coordinator, Eastern and Southern Africa | Nairobi | 5/11/2010 |
| Michael Odumbe | IASL Coordinator Kenya | Nairobi | 5/11/2010 |
| David Archer | Education Coordinator, AAI | London | 29/6/2011 |
| Emma Scullion | Fundraising Officer | London | 29/6/2011 |
| Judith Davey | Impact Assessment and Organisational Performance Advisor | London | 29/6/2011 |

| Former Staff | | | |
|---------------------|--|-------------------------|------------|
| Name | Position | Location | Date |
| Antonella Mancini | Former Head of Impact Assessment Unit | London | 5/11/2008 |
| Jenny Chapman | Former long-term consultant | London | 7/12/2008 |
| Lyndall Stein | Former Head of Fundraising | London | 12/12/2008 |
| Ashish Shah | Former IASL advisor for Africa and former ALPS focal point for Kenya | Limerick | 29/3/2010 |
| John Daly | Ex AA Ireland Head of Communications | Dublin | 10/6/2011 |
| Rosalind Davis | Former Head of Impact Assessment Unit, | Telephone (New Zealand) | 31/8/2011 |
| Nigel Saxby-Soffe | Former Head of Finance | London | 31/8/2011 |
| Kate Newman | Former Reflect Advisor | London | 2/9/2011 |

| Trustees/Advisors | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------|----------|----------|
| Name | Position | Location | Date |
| Robert Chambers | Former AAI Trustee | Brighton | 9/2/2010 |

| Academics/Practitioners in NGO Accountability | | | |
|--|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Name | Position | Location | Status |
| Jan Aart Scholte | Author on global governance and civil society's engagement, University of Warwick | London | 01/2008-02/2010 |
| Nick Stockton | Founder HAP International | Telephone | 4/1/2008 |
| David Bonbright | Founder and Director Keystone Accountability | London | 6/1/2008 |
| Alex Jacobs | Chair of BOND Quality Group | Oxford | 7/1/2008 |
| L. David Brown | Lecturer in Public Policy, Hauser Centre for Non-Profit Law, Harvard University | Boston | 21/10/2008 |
| John Gaventa | Academic on Governance and Accountability issues, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex. Board Member Oxfam | Brighton | 9/2/2009 |
| Ian Smillie | Activist and author of <i>The Alms Bazaar</i> , among other publications | Limerick | 5/6/2009 |
| Dorothea Hilhorst | Lecturer in Disaster Studies, Wageningen University | Utrecht | 28/02/2010 |
| Alnoor Ebrahim | Lecturer, Harvard Business School | Boston | 3/6/2010 |
| Kristina Mand | Head of Legitimacy, Accountability and Transparency Programme, Civicus | Johannesburg | 16/12/2010 |

Appendix 2: Interview Questions

Interview Questions/Topics

Changes in AAIU over the years (to staff, partners, communities)

- When did you join AAIU? Where did you work before?
- What attracted you to AAIU? How does it compare to other organisations in Uganda that you know or have worked for?
Have you seen many changes since you joined AAIU? Tell me about these. What were the main factors behind them? e.g. Meenu's time, OD process, lasting impact

ALPS

- Tell me about AA's work with rights-holders? Where do partners fit in?
- How has the relationship with rights-holders changed over the years?
- When did you first encounter ALPS? What does it mean to you? Is it useful? Are there gaps in it?
- How do you think ALPS is being implemented within AAIU? Which parts are stronger, and which are weaker? Why? What are the challenges/barriers?
- Has implementation of ALPS changed much since you joined AAIU?
- Are there DAs/DIs where ALPS is being implemented better than in others?
- In general what kind of training does staff get? Have you had much orientation on ALPS over the years? On which aspects?
- What prevents accountability to communities working better?
- How do you think communities would like AA to be accountable?

Partnership and accountability

- How are things going with partners? What are some of the issues? Is there much variance among partners?
- Do you think partners view accountability the same way AAIU does?
- How accountable are partners in general? To rights holders? How representative are they? Is it a requirement for partners to have GAs?
- Are AA following up on partner-government relations? Or partner-community relations?
- Are partners required to use same financial policies, allowances etc as AA?
- What support is given to partners who undertake risky work?

M&E systems

- How does AA do targeting in the area where it works?
- Tell me about your M&E system. How it is working?
- Has your M&E system changed much over the time you've been with AAIU? If so, why?
- How do you monitor partners?

Finance

- How do you feel about the audit and financial procedures? How do these work for partners?

Transparency initiatives

- What does AA do to share information about its work? How it is working?
- Are transparency boards only for the AA funds for partners, or broader? Are there any at local level?

Donor accountability –institutional donors, child sponsorship

- How are the different donors that AA works with? Are reporting and requirements manageable? Do any of these change how work is done?
- What are the issues with child sponsorship in terms of how it affects AAIU's work?
- Have donor/sponsor requirements changed much since you've been with AAIU?

Accountability to government

- What is AAIU's relationship with the government? Has this changed much since you've been with AAIU? If so, why?
- Does the government have any requirements for AAIU? How are these requirements?
- Are there regular interactions with the government? Which departments?
- Has there been much lobbying of government at your level? What have been the results?
- How much do you know about the NGO Act and Policy? How does it affect your work?
- What is the division of AA vs. partners' roles at local level when it comes to interacting with government?

Rights Based Approaches

- Are you aware of any instances where communities have tried to hold government to account, based on their experiences with AAIU or partners?
- What kind of initiatives does government at local level have for communities? How are these working?

Internal accountability

- How is staff accountable within AAIU? What kind of performance management mechanisms exist? Do these work well at all levels?
- How is AAIU accountable to staff? How does staff feed into decisions at national and international levels?
- Has internal accountability changed much since you joined AAIU? If so, why?
- Is there much staff turnover in AAIU? Why do you think that is?
- How is it to be female and working for AAIU?
- Have partners or communities ever been involved in staff recruitment in your time?
- What kind of learning and training opportunities exist? How have these changed over the years?

AA's new governance structure, national and international

- How is the new governance structure working within AAIU?
- Has internationalisation and AAIU's status as an affiliate make much difference day to day?

Peer accountability initiatives in-country

- Are you aware of any overall NGO accountability initiatives in Uganda or in areas where you work? Are these useful?

Closing

- How do you spend your time in AAIU? Which activities take up most time?
- Who else should I talk to?
- Is there anything in particular you think I should read?
- What would you do if you were the AA Country Director.

Specific Questions for Communities:

- Is AA different or the same to the early years when you met them?
- How different is it now that AA is working through a partner rather than directly with you?
- Have you ever been involved in AA staff recruitment in your time?
- How do you get information about AA and partners' work? Do you ever use transparency boards?
- What kind of meetings does AA have with you? How useful are these meetings that AA has with you, e.g. PRRPs
- Have you worked with many different people over the years in AA? Have you ever had problems with any of the staff? What would do if you did?
- Have community members had any successful advocacy with local government?

- Are you involved in a GA with the partner?
- How is Reflect going? (if applicable) Have any Reflect group members been elected as counsellors?

Specific Questions for Partners

- Do you/have you had any other donors? How does AA compare with these?
- How was AA changed since you started working together?
- How useful are the partner fora with AA?
- Are you involved in the General Assembly? How do you find this?
- How do you involve community members in planning and review?
- Do you have your own meetings with community members? How often? What do you do? How is it different to the PRRPs?
- How do you relate to the government at sub-county and district level? How do you divide responsibilities with AA? Have you had much successful lobbying?
- Have you ever been involved in AA staff recruitment in your time?
- Is there any support for risky work by AA?
- How long is your MOU for?

Specific Questions for Local government

- What's your interaction with AA? And partners?
- How do you get information about AA and partners? Are there transparency boards?
- What meetings do you have? Are they useful?
- Do AA and partner ever lobby you for certain issues?

Specific Questions for National Government

- Tell me about the government's relationship with NGOs?
- Tell me about the NGO Act and the review process.
- What was the impetus behind the NGO Policy? What did you think of the process and the end product?
- Do you have any thoughts on the Quality Assurance Mechanism?
- What are some of the challenges for NGO sector in Uganda re. accountability and transparency? What can NGOs do?
- Do you have any views on AA, either national or international?

Appendix 3: Survey

ALPS STAFF SURVEY

Question 1: Score the ALPS principles between 0 and 10 in terms of how you see them being implemented in AAIU today (Depending on your role, your view might be from your experience of one LRP or theme, or you may refer to the whole country programme)

1-For no implementation of this principle

10-For complete implementation of this principle

Accountability

Poor to participate in all implementation, reviews, planning, research, monitoring, analysis, advocacy and recruitment of frontline staff

Score: _____

Comment:

Women's Rights

Gender analysis done, women's rights components, women in decision making.

Women's rights and leadership advanced at organisational level.

Influence allies to strengthen women's rights

Score: _____

Comment:

Power Analysis

All strategies, appraisals, research, plans, reviews, reports to have power analysis and clear actions.

Examine personal power and AA's power in relation to partner, allies and communities.

Poor people to do own analysis of power

Score: _____

Comment:

Learning

Time spent on learning and critical reflection, including learning from failure, learning from partners and communities, using alternative communication mechanisms, documents to be approved from one level up

Score: _____

Comment:

Transparency

All information, appraisals, strategies, plans, budgets, reviews, reports to be open to all, translated into local languages and publicly shared.

Assess expenditure and determine value for money with communities and partners.

Make financial records public.

Written info relevant to users in majority language.

All info required should be used and feedback given

Open information through bulletin boards and posters easily accessible with plans and budget details.

Score: _____

Comment:

Question 2: Please rank the attitudes below from 1 to 8:

1=this attitude or behaviour is the one I see demonstrated the best by AAIU staff

8-this attitude or behaviour needs most improvement by AAIU staff

Behaviour that is not domineering or patronising and shares power

Rank:

Behaviour that supports full participation of excluded people in heart of decisions

Rank:

Addressing discrimination due to sex, age, ethnicity, class, sexuality, colour, disability, religion and HIV status

Rank:

Actively seeking alliances with others

Rank:

Seeking out best knowledge, even if against self-interest

Rank:

Actively seeking to learn from and share knowledge and skills with all

Rank:

Willingness to listen and understand others from difficult cultures etc

Rank:

Striving to effectively communicate in an accessible way

Rank:

Comment on any of the above:

Question 3: Please fill in the below table on ALPS processes

| ALPS Process | How well is this process being carried out? (0-not carried out 10-perfectly carried out) | Any challenges/problems with this process? |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|
| 1. Appraisals | | |
| 2. Strategies (Country Programme) | | |
| 3. Strategic Plans (DIs) | | |
| 4. Annual Plans and Budgets | | |
| 5. External Review | | |
| 6. Peer Reviews | | |
| 7. Organisation Climate Reviews | | |
| 8. Annual PRRPs | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | |
| 9. Annual reports | | |
| 10. Internal governance annual review <i>Sensitive facilitation, creative methods, funding and expenditure of AA should be transparent</i> | | |
| 11. External and internal audits <i>Including internal auditing of ALPS processes, e.g. budget transparency and Open Information Policy</i> | | |
| 12. Open Information Policy <i>Proactive sharing of</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - basic information, -governance information e.g. board meetings, -policies and partnership agreements, -staff data, including grades and salary bands, - strategy papers, -3 year plans and budgets, reviews, - annual reports, -PRRPs, - financial reports and audit statements, - grants to partners, - investment info, -groups of people worked with, -policy positions | | |

Appendix 4: Interview Summary Sheet for Data Analysis

| | |
|---|--|
| Who? Position then and now and time with AA and contact info | |
| When? | |
| Where? | |
| For how long? | |
| What are the key/interesting points/evidence/facts emerging (differences, complexities, competing explanations, gaps in stories, the untold story, the underexplored) | |
| Any good quotes? | |
| Major themes emerging | |
| Issues for follow up - this person? | |
| Issues for follow up-others | |
| Any other interviewees suggested? | |
| Any other documents? | |
| AOB | |
| Comment | |
| Response to research question | |
| Links to theory/explanations | |

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