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“How do we measure the impact of our work?”

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This paper will discuss the One Army Impact Initiative, which started in January, to answer this important question: “How do we measure the impact of our work?”

The need to improve the description of the impact of our programmes, was brought to our attention by some of the development offices in supporting (donor) territories, in response to demands from their donors for more evidence about the results of Salvation Army community development projects around the world. We realized however that almost all territories are struggling with the same issue. But it is not just for our donors that we need to answer this question.

We should all desire to know what kind of change and transformation are we aiming for in our work and whether we are achieving it ; whether it is funded by a donor or not. We need evidence as a testimony to the redeeming grace of God and a learning point to guide our future work.

I think the title – One Army Impact Project – is a problem. It can be misunderstood in all the elements of the title. In this paper I will show you why this is so; highlight the challenges and potentiality of this project; and hopefully encourage you to help us to make this initiative a success.

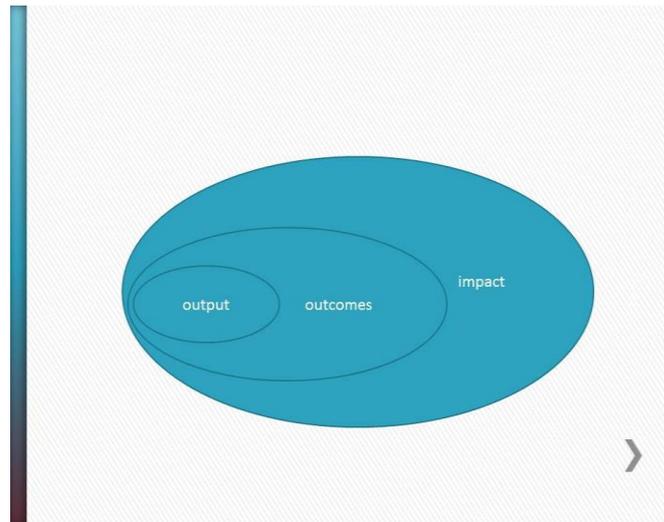
Let’s start with “**One Army**” and be honest. We are not one Army, not by a long shot. There are enormous variations in Salvation Army ministry across territories and across the work in a territory. Our Army world is marked by its diversity as pictures taken around the world quickly reveal. However we want to be united, and what is more important we want our work to be holistic in its approach: “The whole gospel for the whole person for the whole world”.

The need for an integrated mission focus has been recognised since the 1980s and it is still a matter of a lively internal discussion. General Bond in her vision statement has

offered us a new way to talk about this: “We are One Army with One Mission and One Message”. This is still a vision and not the reality everywhere but this vision clearly states where we want to be. We may be diverse in our ways of working but I think we are more together in our view on our One Mission. We should certainly be united around our One Message. My first observation is that we need to have solid theological foundations for our work. Theological reflection as exercised by practical theologians is no longer a luxury for our Army. It is a necessity.

The One Army Impact Project will seek to identify an appropriate approach to Impact Assessment, which includes our notion of a holistic ministry, an integral mission, for our faith based organization, taken across all our activities. This understanding will then have to be applied to the particular circumstances and parameters of all our mission initiatives.

The next word in the title is “Impact”. An assessment of past evaluations of projects indicates this is a weak point in our system. In my experience working in Salvation Army programmes in Africa and Europe for more than 30 years and with my overview of worldwide Army programme for nearly three years, I conclude we tended to focus on what activities we do and what they cost. Sometimes we try to measure the outputs. We rarely take the time to examine outcomes and impact. In our evaluations we often have not answered the questions about the bigger picture and the larger context. Too often we say: “Well we have done our bit and it is now out of our hands, we must leave it to the Lord.” This is understandable but not good enough. Is there any way to describe what the Lord is doing? What is the impact/change the Gospel message affects? What reason do we have to believe that we were doing what needed to be done? Impact assessment deliberately casts a net wider around our action and tries to make sense of the changes that become visible through our activities. I have found the following diagram to be the most helpful illustration of what Impact looks like:



But asking questions about our influence in a wider circle of influence immediately raises the question: How much can we reasonably attribute to our action? Can we make any claims to impact at the macro level? Changes in society are influenced by many other factors social, economic and political that easily become more crucial parameters of change in any given environment.

The particular difficulty with impact assessment in relation to social programmes is that they operate in complex environments where it is not easy to attribute the impact to the influence of any particular programme. The complexity of society is caused by the interaction of social economic and political factors.

This difficulty has been recognised by the evaluation theorists and has in fact led to a particular type of impact assessment approaches that could be grouped under the heading theory-oriented.

When we define our spiritual mission as an integral holistic mission – the whole gospel for the whole person for the whole world – we enter even deeper waters. The spiritual impact of our work is particularly difficult to gauge.

Let me give an example. Many Christmas movies feature a Salvation Army band playing in the street at Christmas to underline the need for a charitable spirit in that season. However we cannot take the credit for any increase across the general population in charitable spirit in the month of December. We may contribute to feelings of goodwill but we cannot claim all the impact. The question remains: is there way to measure the impact of our corps band in our town?

Sometimes the impact of our action will only be visible on a long term. This calls for longitudinal evaluations over let's say a decade or a generation. This is more the realm

of the historian. In project work we do not have time to wait that long. Baseline studies and reliable indicators of change are very important in this context.

The problem is often that we only have a poor description of the wider context before we began our activity and are unable draw firm conclusions based on limited data. We need more and a different kind of data for this work.

Central to this issue is a desire not to focus solely on measuring the number of activities or the number of people involved or the amount of money spent on programmes. Although these are important, the focus needs to be on the outcomes of the programmes and their long-term impact on people, families, communities and the structures of society

Quoting statistics often invokes a sense of reliability. Measuring numbers, creates the impression of objectivity, the cold facts speak for themselves. But statistics have their limitations and some matters cannot be captured in sheer numbers. It has been noted that the Annual Statistics Report published in The Salvation Army Year Book is unreliable. The variations seen from year to year suggest the issue is more complex than merely an unreliable method of counting. There is a programme definition issue which is not easily solved within such a diverse organisation. Steps are being undertaken to remedy the statistical reports, but measure the impact still eludes us.

For people of faith 'counting our strength' has a spiritual implication. There is the story about King David, In 2 Samuel 24 who towards the end of his reign, said: "Go number Israel." This was a dubious command. The spirit of vainglory in numbers had taken possession of the people and the king, and there was a tendency to trust in numbers and forget God. (Morgan) So Joab, David's General, objects: "Why then does my Lord desire this thing?" The motive is clearly very important. If we are acting out of a spirit of vainglory or if the motive is pride then it is clearly wrong. Do we need to boast about our strength because "the donors want to know exactly what their dollar, pound or Euro is doing?" Why do they want to know? Do we need to educate the donor that it is not always the way of the Kingdom to measure to the last digit?

We need another approach to capture change: more descriptive of a qualitative nature, expressed in a narrative, taken beyond the anecdotal. We need to get our stories right, so they are representative and indicative of the change that is taking place within our ministries.

Measurement and evaluation still carry the stigma of judgment. This is even worse if it is forced upon us, done by an outsider. No one likes very much to be weighed and

measured in our actions. The outside evaluator may portray a sense of objectivity, but in his evaluating criteria he will have to deal with his own biases.

Theory-based assessments offer different compelling reason to assess impact: that is to learn and to steer our actions, and they include the end-users of our programme. This goes beyond management. As Peter Drucker wrote: “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.”¹

I think impact assessment is about doing the right things. It is not a management issue but it is about leadership and strategy. Fundamentally, it is about learning to be better stewards of the resources God has entrusted to us.

In the One Army Impact Project we believe measurement is a key characteristic of a learning organisation. Learning is a discipline we should all engage in for our own sake. Knowing why we are doing things, what we aim for and how we should improve doing them. “Measurement as learning” is what this engagement is all about.

Finally, the last word: the One Army Impact **Project**. The problem is it suggests we are going to do something new. Here we go again; another new buzz word; another a new trend. This is not what this initiative is about. We do not want to change the direction. We just want to add an element to it that we have which we have found is missing.

We are in fact intentionally mindful of what we have learned as an Army over the past decades, and want to be building on the foundations of the lessons we have learnt. Participatory Approaches; Community Counselling; Integrated Mission; Faith Based Facilitation – these have all been stepping stones for this next stage.

With these critical reflections in mind, we have designed this project with three phases. The first stage of our engagement is the formulation of a framework that collects our thoughts on impact assessment in the context of our faith-based mission. Put simply : we want to explore what impact measurement means in the context of an Integral Christian ministry so that people of faith may to be able to capture the essence of the impact of their efforts in a language that can be easily understood We will have to define what we mean by the different terms we are using.

We are not the first to explore the subject of evaluation. A large number of approaches and theories are available in the social sciences, but we must additionally take into

¹ Peter F. Drucker, Essential Drucker: Management, the Individual and Society

account the complexity of our integral mission. We will need to distinguish between the theories and methods, and decide which approach would be the most valid for us and how does this approach would need to be adapted to make it fit for our purpose.

It will be important to state how we think measurement and evaluation relate to our mission purposes theologically. In Lamentations 3:40, God's people are instructed to test and examine their ways, to take a good look at what they are doing and re-order their lives under God. General John Gowans often said: "We must continually review what we are doing and why we are doing it" in order to remain faithful practitioners in the world. With this Biblical mandate and Salvation Army tradition in mind, we are approaching the One Army Impact Project.

The work is similar to that done in developing the Faith-Based Facilitation Process and Toolbox. The FBF process is based on the work of David Kolb on experiential learning but adapted by practical theologians into the "pastoral cycle". They have introduced the element of theological reflection in the process. This has been further adapted for our own use in the faith-based facilitated reflection process that we call FBF. A similar exercise lies ahead of us in the field of evaluation.

Secondly, based on the developed framework we need a simple tool that can be used in the field. We will not be able reach the impact level if we bypass the outcome.

An outcome based tool that sights towards a description of the impact will be a stepping stone for impact assessments. This is already a considerable step forward. We envisage the actual impact assessment to be a facilitated collaborative learning process undertaken in partnership between implementers and support offices. This tool will be promoted by IHQ for use across the Army for years to come.

We are going to start by focusing on two sectors: health and work (livelihoods and income generating activities). Obviously many more applications of the unified framework are needed and we hope colleagues will find ways to apply the framework in their sectors and work collaboratively in this task.

We want to emphasise the learning element of this exercise by bringing together practitioners on the Internet. We hope to create virtual communities of practice around the world – permanent online communities where programme implementers and support offices can exchange experiences and ideas. We are making use of the Connections platform that is available to all Lotus Notes users.

The third phase will be a plan to implement these tools in the coming years through seminars and one on one project support. We are still in the first phase of our project

and would like to refer to the fact sheet that is available about our preliminary findings in the process and would like to encourage all to take part in the discussions on our Connections forum.

To conclude, let me return to the question: “How do we assess the impact of our work?” Well, we are working on the answer! In this paper, I have shown the challenges of the task, and I hope the need for the One Army Impact Project, I am inviting you to help us be more faithful as we together seek to understand the impact we are making in Christ’s name.