

# Portal Impact Assessment: The NGO in Pakistan Case

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## Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to present the results of an end-of-project impact assessment (IA) of a Social Enterprise Development Center (SEDC) (created in Pakistan 7 years ago). The SEDC was created in 2000 to provide mainly training to non-government organizations (NGOs) and be a central recourse for their communication, resource sharing and support. The IA entailed the measurement of a large number of indicators spanning a wide range of stakeholder across various levels of impact chain: from individual to government. In this paper we present the results of the portal which was a central component of the project. A survey methodology approach was used and 280 members were asked to participate in a questionnaire online. Respondents to the survey indicated that they were somewhat satisfied with the achieved portal outcomes; in meeting their expectations; and that the components were favorable to their needs. However, they reported that they were not using the portal enough. Most participants agreed that the content is useful, clear, concise and accurate, but not (to a lesser extent perhaps) complete or current. Also, most agreed that the website interface is acceptable and readable with no complaints in terms of availabilities, loading speed, colors, organization, etc. Many expressed that the portal did not have adequate search facilities. Moreover, the data did not show any consensus among participants with regards to the portal helping them reach career objectives. The majority claimed that they access the portal mainly seeking to improve their skills, prepare for work related tasks and to get informed through latest news announcements.

**Keywords:** Portal, NGO, Pakistan, Evaluation, Impact

## Introduction

Since the end of the cold war, donor agencies have renewed and increased prominence to the roles of non-governmental organizations and grass roots organizations in poverty alleviation, so-

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cial welfare and the development of civil society (Edwards & Hulme, 1996). NGOs today are viewed by many donor agencies as being more efficient and cost effective service providers than governments, giving better value-for-money, especially in reaching poor people (Vivian, 1994).

NGOs and the projects they initiate typically start small. Even when successful, they usually remain rather

small, especially when compared to the scale of the challenges of poverty and exploitation that exists within and between countries or when set against the scale at which most government agencies and for-profit enterprises operate (McMichael, 1996; Uvin & Jain, 2000).

Globalization trends in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has prompted a massive emergence of new social movements as local communities and marginalized groups around the world strive to create their own self-identity (Lach, 1993; Madon, 1999). Contemporary social theorists have referred to this eruption of new social movements as ‘globalization from below’ claiming that these movements operate by networking with each other at grassroots level rather than by creating or maintaining existing authority structures (Dirlik, 1998; Madon, 1999). Moreover, NGOs function in a complex environment, making it difficult for any one of them to manage effectively in isolation (Vangen & Huxham, 2003). One way to manage complexity is through community interaction and inter-organizational collaboration. In doing so, NGOs would find considerable common ground and scope for the sharing of information to increase the impact of development programs (Gulzar & Henry, 2005; WHO, 2003). Indeed, many writers link information and communications technologies (ICTs) specifically to successful democratic uprisings (Clark, 1995; Meyer, 1997; Spybey, 1996).

Considering the growing needs of Pakistan’s NGOs to improve their managerial and technical skills, in order to better design, implement and monitor their social programs, a LUMS (Lahore University Management Science, Pakistan) - McGill (Desautels Faculty of Management, Montreal, Canada) Outreach Continuing Education Program for Community and District Social Service Managers was created (funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)).

Considering also the large number of NGOs found all over Pakistan, a portal was created to function exactly as discussed above, and that is to enhance community interaction among NGOs for training purposes, information sharing and support in general. It is exactly to that effect, that this paper aims to present the results the portal component of the larger IA study performed.

## Impact Assessments Overview

Impact assessment is a formal evaluation type of study that assesses the extent of implementation and influence of a specific program or project on desired outcomes and data collected is used to measure the extent of desired change in the targeted population (Bird, 2002). Impact studies tend to focus on specific contexts and do not attempt to generalize beyond the cases at hand. They often use a range of qualitative and quantitative tools but rarely use control or comparison groups and statistical methods to test specific hypotheses. To be more specific, the impact assessment aims at measuring not only outcome attainment but its level of success (Higher Education Funding Council [HEFCE], 2004).

Any impact assessment initiative entails the identification of units of assessment (UA) (Hailey & James, 2003). These units of assessment which are sometimes viewed as levels of assessment include the individual, household, organization, community, development agency, institutions and any combination. Should analysis take place at the level of the individual, household, community, organization, institution at which the agents operate or any combination of them? It is important to extend focus on a particular level or unit of assessment such that analysis may lead to important gaps in understanding. Carrying out the analysis at different levels has the potential of revealing any inter-linkages between them (Roche, 1999).

It is understood that a successful impact assessment needs to explore the whole ‘impact chain’ and so investigate the linkages between inputs and activities, how these generate the outputs which then produce outcomes and finally impact. Although originally, impact assessments have been single method, there has been move towards multi-method approaches. Method of assessments include surveys, appraisals, observations, case studies, and participatory learning. In the

present IA study, we follow a multi-method approach with a range of participants and methods to be more in-line with participatory type of approaches. Although surveys have been used, we combine them with participatory, other qualitative and quantitative methods such as rapid appraisal and participant observations and reporting. As a result, our impact assessment study benefits from the advantages of various methods that allow for quantification, representativeness and attribution as well as for qualitative and participatory approaches with the advantages of capturing the diverse opinions and perceptions and unexpected impacts (Gosling & Edwards, 1995).

## Methodology

Data for this study was collected via a questionnaire administered online via the LUMS portal. Items in the questionnaire were measured using different Likert-type scale as shown below. The portal database included 280 members all of which were sent an email asking them to complete the questionnaire and with a link to it.

The potential participants to the questionnaire were asked to complete it on a voluntarily basis with no motivation to do so. Their participation was to be motivated by their desire to give feedback on the portal with the aim that their feedback would be used to enhance the portal for their own better usage. The portal members were distributed across the major cities in Pakistan.

The questionnaire included items related to the participant's experience with the portal and in relation to the following constructs: Satisfaction, portal quality, usability, usefulness, ease of use, reasons to access the portal, component based evaluation, attitudes, intimidation, and anxiety. The Appendix provides an accurate description of the questionnaire and a sample of the questionnaire items used in this IA.

### **The Portal**

The LUMS-MCGILL portal can be accessed via a web browser [<http://sedc.org.pk/portal/index.php>]. The purpose of the portal is to create a virtual environment whereby participants in the NGOs can collaborate with each other and LUMS faculty can disseminate knowledge in various forms to them. The portal entailed the following components: NGO directory; Donor directory; Book catalogue; News and events; Online tutorials; Online resources; Reports; Distance learning; Discussion board; Chat corner; White board; Email exchange; Survey corner; Content repository; and Case studies.

## Discussion and Analysis of Results

Forty eight individuals participated in the portal survey, 75% of which were male. 35% of respondents claimed to have access to 2 or more computers. Only one respondent reported that he/she has no access to a computer. Of those who had access to computers, when asked about the time that they have had access to a computer:

- 3 = never
- 6 = 1 to 3 years
- 3 < 1 year
- Remainder claimed to have > 3 years.

All with the exception of 5 respondents reported to have easy access to a computer, such that 3 claimed to have a slow internet connection with the rest reporting their internet connection to be fast. Close to 40% of respondents reported to use the internet more than 2 hours per week (combined at work and home). Some have claimed to use the internet over 10 hours per week. Table 1 presents the usage of the internet at home and work as reported by the respondents. This table

should give us an idea of information that need to be put on the internet and which would be of interest to the SEDC clientele.

**Table 1. Aggregation of responses to internet usage at home and work.**

What do you use the internet at home for?	What do you use the internet at work for?
Email	
Chat	For Business Purpose
Surfing	checking official mails and replying
Fun, Browsing global health sites	research
Information about the NGO Sector	Information about the NGO Sector
surfing the internet	surfing, fetching information
Searching Jobs and Reading News	job requirement
for business and mails new ideas in social services, reading newspaper of the world, etc.	
Consultancy work	Consultancy work
for chatting with friends and searching for relevant materials	search for required information
entertainment	research, official work
Chat	Business
Checking Email, Searching Software, Designing Websites	Checking Email, Composing Letters, Designing and Developing Website
searching, material reading, emails	searching, material reading, emails, office work
Education	

Fourteen different reasons for using the internet were presented to the respondents. The results are shown in Table 2. Around 75% of the respondents (that is 75% of 41 who answered the question) reported that they use the internet for two personal reasons namely self development and education, while 65% use the internet for two social reasons namely to be in touch with friends and to collaborate/meet/connections new people. Other significant personal reasons also include leisure activities and information seeking, and other significant social reasons are to find relationship, communicate with younger generations and to keep up to date with current news and events.

**Table 2. Reasons for using the internet.**

Reasons for using the Internet (N=49 participants)	Total	Personal	Social
For self development	40	73%	28%
To educate myself	42	76%	24%
To keep up to date with news, current events	41	49%	51%
To become more independent in life	38	61%	39%
To obtain information which allows me to arrange things for	36	69%	31%
To obtain information that can help me with my studies	39	64%	36%
To obtain information that can help me at work/to find work	38	47%	53%
To be in touch with friends	40	38%	63%
To meet new people	38	34%	66%
To communicate with the younger generation	38	42%	58%
To find a relationship	39	36%	64%
To stop being embarrassed about being a computer illiterate	37	46%	54%
Not to be bored	37	59%	41%
To enjoy leisure activities: movies, music, games	39	64%	36%

Respondents to the online portal survey indicated that they were somewhat satisfied with the achieved portal outcomes; in meeting their expectations; and that the components were favorable to their needs. However, they reported that they are not too happy at trying enough to use the portal.

Looking closer at content, most participants agree that the content is useful, clear, concise and accurate, but not (to a lesser extent perhaps) complete or current. Also, most agreed that the website interface is acceptable and readable with no complaints in terms of availabilities, loading speed, colors, organization, etc...

Identifying weaknesses in the reported results, many expressed that the portal did not have adequate search facilities. Moreover, the data did not show any consensus among participants with regards to the portal helping them reach career objectives. The majority claimed that they access the portal mainly seeking to improve their skills, prepare for work related tasks and to get informed through latest news announcements.

Table 3 below presents the top best and top worst rated parts of the portal. The scale was from 1 to 7, 1 being the maximum positive and 7 being the maximum negative, on four variables namely, good, advantageous, valuable and useful for each of the components of the portal: NGO directory, Donor directory, Book catalogue, News and events, Online tutorials, Online resources, Reports, Distance learning, Chat, White board, Email exchange, Survey system, Content repository and Case studies.

**Table 3. Top best and worst portal components.**

<b>TOP BEST Score = 1</b>	<b>TOP WORST Score = 7</b>
<b>Good</b>	<b>Bad</b>
NGO/DONOR directory; News	Discussion/White boards; Survey
<b>Advantageous</b>	<b>Disadvantageous</b>
Case studies; survey; NGO/DONOR directo-	Discussion/White boards; Chat
<b>Valuable</b>	<b>Worthless</b>
Case studies; NGO directory; Online resources;	Discussion/White boards; Book catalogue; con-
<b>Useful</b>	<b>Useless</b>
Case studies; Surveys; Online resources; Donor	Discussion/White boards; Content repositories;

It seems from the results that the case studies, the survey system, new and events and online resources were well done and thought of as advantageous, valuable and useful. On the other hand, the discussion and white boards, the content repository, book catalogue and distance learning were not well done in the portal and found (in the present portal setup) to be disadvantageous, worthless and useless. This does not necessarily mean that the components are not useful but most probably the way they were utilized from within the portal.

## Conclusion

An impact assessment (IA) for the SEDC was initiated in October 2006. By November, the design and implementation of the IA were completed. In December, the implementation of the IA started by the IA team of the SEDC in Pakistan. The IA data collection was completed by the time of the symposium held on April 13-14. Following the symposium, an impact assessment team was established for data analysis and which was completed in May 2007.

**The IA was designed primarily to identify the output of the SEDC as per pre-established expectations. This output entails impact on the various stakeholders namely LUMS, individuals in the NGOs and DSSOs and the organizations themselves (NGOs and DSSOs).**

The majority of respondents reported to have easy access to a computer, and fast internet connection. Close to 40% of respondents reported to use the internet more than 2 hours per week (combined at work and home). Usage of the internet at home and work as reported by the respondents ranged from the standard email, chat, surfing and entertainment, to consulting, job searching and research.

Respondents to the online portal survey indicated that they were somewhat satisfied with the achieved portal outcomes; in meeting their expectations; and that the components were favorable to their needs. However, they reported that they are not too happy at trying enough to use the portal. Most participants agree that the content is useful, clear, concise and accurate, but not (to a lesser extent perhaps) complete or current. Also, most agreed that the website interface is acceptable and readable with no complaints in terms of availabilities, loading speed, colors, organization, etc... Many expressed that the portal did not have adequate search facilities. Moreover, the data did not show any consensus among participants with regards to the portal helping them reach career objectives. The majority claimed that they access the portal mainly seeking to improve their skills, prepare for work related tasks and to get informed through latest news announcements.

Looking at the portal functional components, it seems from the results that the case studies, the survey system, new and events and online resources were well done and thought of as advantageous, valuable and useful. The discussion and white boards, the content repository, book catalogue and distance learning were not well done and were found to be disadvantageous, worthless and useless. This does not necessarily mean that the components are not useful but most probably the way they were utilized and facilitated to the user play the most significant role in them being perceived negative.

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## Appendix: Usability of LUMS-McGILL Portal

Name:

Region:

Organization you work for:

Position title at your organization:

Number of employees at organization?

Gender:

Which task force did you participate in?

Task Forces		Priority
1	Development of teaching materials (DTM)	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Train of trainers (TOT)	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	On the job assistance (OJA)	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Training of managers (TM-NGOs)	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Training of managers (TM-DSSOs)	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	NGO Pulse (NGO-P)	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Devolution (DEV)	<input type="checkbox"/>

### Computer and internet access:

How many computers do you have access to? Only 1 | 2 – 3 | > 3

How long have you owned a computer? Never | less than 1 year | 1-3 years | > 3

What kind of access do you have to the internet? Easy access | With difficulty | No access

What kind of connection you have to the internet? No connection | Modem (slow) | Modem (fast) | ADSL/Cable (Very fast)

How long have you had access to the internet from home? Never | less than 1 year | 1-3 years | > 3

How long have you been using the internet? Never | less than 1 year | 1-3 years | > 3

On the average how often do you use the internet (hours per week) at home? [NUMBER]

On the average how often do you use the internet (hours per week) at work? [NUMBER]

What do you use the internet at home for? [FREE TEXT]

What do you use the internet at work for? [FREE TEXT]

## Portal Impact Assessment

Based on your experience with the LUMS-McGILL PORTAL, please answer the following questions as accurately and candidly as possible.

- Satisfaction
- Portal quality
- Usability navigation
- Usability affect
- Usefulness
- Ease of use
- Reasons to access the portal
- Evaluation of different components of the portal
  - NGO directory
  - Donor directory
  - Book catalogue
  - News and events
  - Online tutorials
  - Online resources
  - Reports
  - Distance learning
  - Discussion board
  - Chat corner
  - White board
  - Email exchange
  - Survey corner
  - Content repository
  - Case studies
- Attitudes towards internet
- Intimidation from internet
- Internet anxiety
- Reasons for internet use

<b>How satisfied or dissatisfied are you...</b>	Very satisfied	satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
1. with the achieved portal outcome?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<b>How satisfied or dissatisfied are you...</b>	Strongly agree	Agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
2. I am satisfied with my usage of the portal.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

<b>Usability – Affect</b>		3	2	1	0	1	2	3
<b>Using the portal ...</b>								
13. makes me feel	pleased	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	frustrated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



**I think that the NGO DIRECTORY of the portal is...**

NEVER USED *O* (GO TO NEXT QUESTION)

	3	2	1	0	1	2	3	
good	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	bad
advantageous	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	disadvantageous
valuable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	worthless
useful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	useless

**Check your reasons for internet use**

14. For self-development

Personal

Social

## Biographies



**Dr. Raafat Saadé** is a lecturer at the DSMIS department, John Molson School of Business, Concordia University, Canada. Dr. Saadé obtained his Ph.D. in 1995 from Concordia University. He subsequently received the Canadian National Research Council postdoctoral fellowship, which he completed at McGill University (Montreal). He has been recognized twice as a North Atlantic Treaty Organization ASI award winner. Dr. Saadé has 18 years of industrial experience (engineering, elearning and ehealth), and presently is involved in international consulting projects. He is very active in research with over 25 peer refereed journal articles. Dr. Saadé has published in top tier journals including Information & Management, JISE, Expert Systems with Applications, and Decision Sciences.

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