

Research Programme on  
the Use and Application of  
Bond / NIDOS  
Effectiveness Tools and  
Services

Volume I - Final Report  
(Anonymised Version)

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# Volume I – Final Report

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## Preface

*Michael O'Donnell, Head of Effectiveness & Learning, Bond*

Bond and NIDOS are committed to promoting learning and transparency in the international development sector. As part of our own work to support and promote the effectiveness of international NGOs, Bond and NIDOS commissioned in-depth case studies by INTRAC over a 2-year period (2014-15) to provide granular information on why organisations used Bond services, and whether and how change happened in organisations as a result. This complements more quantitative monitoring, and the final evaluation of the DFID-funded grant which supports this work.

This version of the final report of INTRAC’s research is anonymised. We have done this to respect our agreement with case study organisations that they could participate honestly in this work without fear of any repercussions, while also meeting Bond’s, NIDOS’ and DFID’s desire that learning about what works in promoting effectiveness could be shared widely.

# PART I - INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background

INTRAC was commissioned in June 2014 to carry out a research programme on the use and application of Bond and NIDOS' effectiveness tools and services (referred to as the Effectiveness Programme). The primary aims of the research are:

- To help Bond, NIDOS and other providers of support services to better understand what drives the use of tools and services to improve effectiveness, and the mechanisms by which such support actually brings about changes in how organisations work and improve development outcomes
- To contribute to the evaluation of Bond's current strategic grant from DFID (2013-16), which funds a significant portion of Bond and NIDOS' effectiveness support

This report provides an analysis of the findings of the research. It draws out lessons and suggestions for Bond and NIDOS from the empirical studies that form the evidence base (case studies and stories of change). It incorporates reflections that emerged at a validation discussion with staff of Bond and NIDOS on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2016.

## 1.2 Research design, methods, limitations and evidence

### a. Research design

The research team used a case study methodology to examine the use of tools and change patterns across different types of organisation. This was framed by a Theory of Change approach to planning and evaluations.

A Theory of Change was included in Bond's 2013 Business Case and Intervention Summary to DFID for support on NGO effectiveness, transparency and joint civil society action.<sup>1</sup> However, Bond's Effectiveness Programme team soon felt this was too simplistic. A detailed Theory of Change was therefore developed in June – July 2014. It was agreed that this version would be revisited by Bond, NIDOS and the INTRAC team at the start of the research to consolidate a shared understanding on the Theory of Change that underpins the two Effectiveness Programmes, especially in relation to the roles of both organisations in the **processes of change** and the **assumptions** that have been or need to be tested in relation to these programmes. There was also a need to revisit the Theory of Change as the role of local partners was not explicitly referenced.

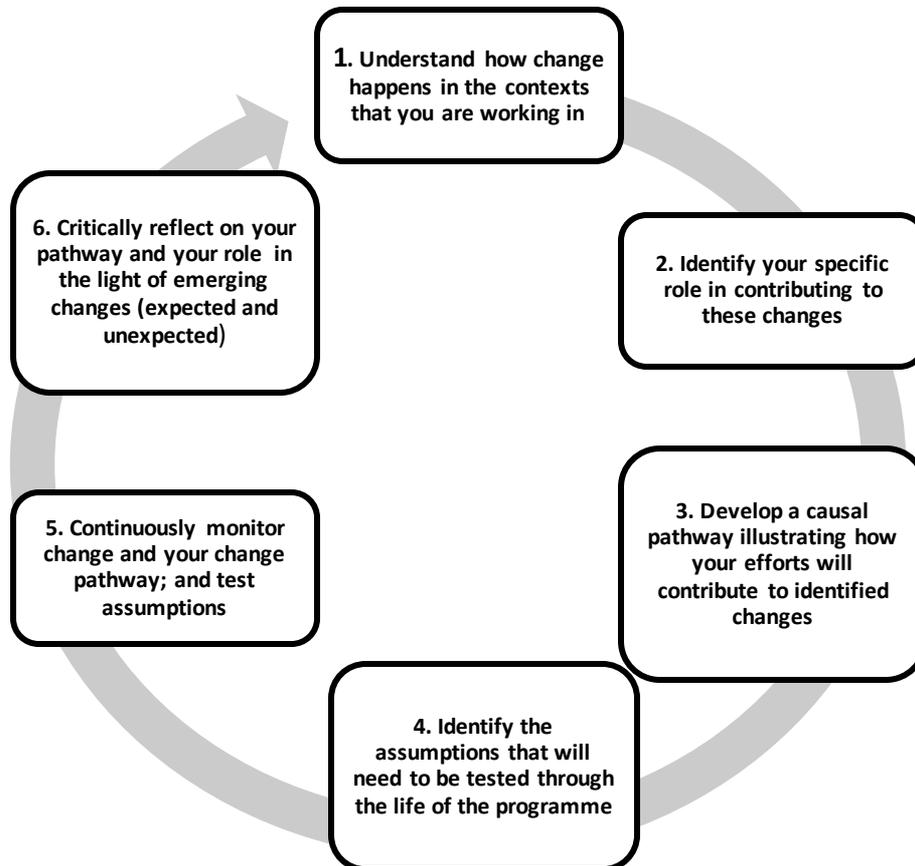
In order to clarify, explore and test these points, the INTRAC team facilitated a Theory of Change session during an Inception Workshop on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015. The session explicitly covered Points 3 and

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<sup>1</sup> See [https://www.bond.org.uk/data/files/Bond\\_DFID\\_Accountable\\_Grant\\_Business\\_Case\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.bond.org.uk/data/files/Bond_DFID_Accountable_Grant_Business_Case_FINAL.pdf) (pages 8 - 15)

4 in **Figure 1** (develop a causal pathway illustrating how your efforts contribute to identified changes; and identify the assumptions that will need to be tested through the life of the programme).

**Annex 1** provides a copy of the change pathway and the five levels of assumptions that the research planned to interrogate. These were developed based on Bond, NIDOS and the INTRAC team's best understanding at the time of the sequences of changes that the Effectiveness Programme planned to achieve and influence.



**Figure 1: The Theory of Change approach to the Bond / NIDOS Effectiveness Programme Research**

## **b. Methods used**

Our approach to undertaking the case studies was participatory, using a combination of Theory of Change and organisational capacity and development tools. We sought to explore and test the assumptions inherent in the change pathway (**Annex 1**) about how the use of Bond and NIDOS tools and services strengthens organisational effectiveness.

Two sets of case studies were included in the research:

- Group 1: Organisations with which full case studies were carried out over the course of the research, and were active users of the tools / services.
- Group 2 ('one-off' studies): Organisations which were involved in the research at one point only, and / or used the tool or service as a very focused, one-off intervention.

Organisations for both sets of case studies were selected based on criteria established by the research team with Bond and NIDOS (**Table 1**).

**Table 1: Minimum case study selection criteria**

	<b>Selection criteria</b>
<b>Group 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bond / NIDOS membership</li> <li>- Use of at <i>least one</i> of the following tools / services: Bond's Health Check, NIDOS Effectiveness Toolkit, Evidence Principles, Transparency support</li> <li>- Additional use of other tools / services</li> <li>- Proven willingness to participate in the study</li> </ul>
<b>Group 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bond / NIDOS membership</li> <li>- Provides a good illustration of an interesting experience (positive or negative)</li> <li>- Can be a very focused one-off intervention</li> </ul>

Bond and NIDOS worked with the consultants to identify a shortlist of possible **Group 1** participants before approaching them. Eight organisations (six Bond members and two NIDOS members) were included. In this report, they are referred to as “Case Study 1” to “Case Study 8”.

The selection of **Group 2** cases was an emergent process. Bond and NIDOS identified points of particular interest from the interim report to potentially be explored, and interesting cases. Two organisations (one Bond and one NIDOS member) participated: Case Study 9 and Case Study 10 (see **Annex 2** for organisation profiles and the use of tools and services under study).

**Data collection:**

**Group 1** organisations were visited (or a telephone / Skype conversation was held) twice during the research project, at the start and then after around 12 months. Each face-to-face visit involved participatory workshops and, where possible, individual or group interviews. As each organisation was at different stages of using the tools and services, aims and objectives for each visit were adapted in discussion with the organisation, but working from a common framework. In between visits the consultants made follow on calls to the participating organisations. Organisations also collected information over the year to **track their engagement** with the tools and services.

A template for Stories of Change from within participating organisations and from **Southern partners** was sent to participating organisations in an attempt to capture the views of others beyond those directly participating in the research.

**Group 2** organisations were visited / telephoned once to investigate one-off uses of the tools or services. The aim was to explore the reason why the tools / services were chosen in relation to other available alternatives, how they were used, and with what results. A number of organisations were approached to participate in a third Group 2 study, but declined due to challenges with sensitivity of issues covered and / or staff turnover.

**c. Issues encountered (limitations)**

An identified risk to the conduct of the research was that case study organisations might **pull out** during the process. To mitigate this, we were open with the case study organisations about what participation would entail. One organisation, Case Study 1, did not participate in the second round of research as planned. The focus of that study shifted to summarising the results of the first round and then investigating to what extent and how the use and benefits of tools and services can survive major shifts and changes within an organisation.

The methods chosen took into account the demands on case study organisations. This meant the methodology used was not the same across all of the organisations. **Telephone / Skype interviews** rather than face-to-face visits were held with the Case Study 8 and Case Study 10 due to factors including distance and availability of staff.

Given the time and resources for the exercise, only **brief direct engagement** with each organisation was possible. As a result, the case studies only provide a 'snapshot' at a given moment in time. The research was also very dependent upon individuals within the participating organisations engaging. In three cases, the consultants did not talk to the same staff in the second round. The **impact of changing staff** at different levels is taken up in the analysis.

The case study methodology itself may have affected the results. For example, as the case study organisations were self-selecting, there may have been a **selection bias** towards those that were involved in the piloting / development of the tools and services. It also proved quite difficult to find organisations that were **willing to participate** as a case study. Therefore, there may have been a bias towards **larger organisations** that were able to dedicate staff time and resources to participating (as demonstrated by seven out of 10 organisations being in the medium to large Bond membership category); and / or organisations that have used the tools or services and therefore felt that they could show the results of engagement. Bond and NIDOS should be aware that the results are potentially affected by these factors.

Another potential bias identified was that two members of the INTRAC team had worked with Bond on the development of some of the tools and services examined prior to this project. However, we have no reason to believe that this affected their perspective on engagement with the organisations, or interpretation of the findings.

#### **d. Evidence base**

INTRAC's approach to the research was in line with Bond's **Evidence Principles** where relevant:

Voice and inclusion: Throughout the research the **voices** of the organisations themselves were prioritised. We also attempted to include the views of Southern partners and staff across different levels, not just senior management. However, reaching Southern partners was not particularly effective and we recognise there have been limitations to this, due in part to limited resources. We received only four Stories of Change from partners (one from a partner of Case Study 1, and three from partners of Case Study 7).

Appropriateness: Data collection and analysis methods which were **appropriate** to achieving the research objectives while promoting participation in the process were chosen. From this research, ten case studies have been produced using a robust case study methodology. Relative to the total Bond

and NIDOS membership, this is a small pool and **not representative**. Bond and NIDOS should therefore be wary of extrapolating the findings beyond the case study organisations.

Triangulation and mixed methods in data collection were used in order to strengthen the reliability and internal validity of the data, and the analysis involved a quality assurance process from within the INTRAC team. The external validity of the findings has been tested through feedback (including reviews of draft reports by the participating organisations), and learning processes (a final **validation** workshop with Bond and NIDOS).

Contribution: The approach to analysis assessed the contribution of tools and services to change. The methodology included a **temporal dimension** to explore change between the first and second visits. Our criteria for interpreting the findings related back to the assumptions set out at the outset of the research, and the analytical framework was informed by our Theory of Change approach.

Transparency: The purpose of the research and how it would be carried out **was explained to participants**. The team was open about how data would be used and how findings would be fed back to them. Informed consent was obtained from all participants (written or verbal).

## PART II FINDINGS

### 2.1 Contexts and motivations to engage

There are several motivations that influence decisions to engage with Bond and NIDOS tools and services, set against the contexts affecting the organisations. Here we differentiate between a) internal drivers (i.e. changes and dynamics within the participating organisations), and b) external drivers. We outline the findings and give brief examples to illustrate points. However readers are strongly encouraged to refer to the full case studies for detail and for understanding the findings in their context.

#### a. Internal drivers

Core value, interest or priority: There is evidence to suggest that where a tool or service fits with a pre-existing commitment, such as organisational development (Case Study 3 and Case Study 5 / Health Check; Case Study 7 / Effectiveness Toolkit) or process, such as strategy development (Case Study 1 / Health Check; Case Study 2 / Effectiveness Programme) it can become a motivation for engagement. Likewise, where there is a match with the **core interest or priority** of the organisation (Case Study 3, Case Study 5 and Case Study 9 / Transparency Review); or where a tool or service ‘taps into’ the core, inherent **values** of an organisation (**Box 1**).

#### **Box 1: Tapping into core values – two illustrative examples**

In Case Study 9, ‘connecting and sharing’ is a core value of the organisation. In the opinion of one informant, this interest in understanding how information is used had a ‘knock on’ into the transparency area, which was exhibited in staff buy-in to work on this topic. Similarly, the CEO of Case Study 7 saw engaging with the Effectiveness Toolkit as helping to achieve the organisation’s vision as more professional and authentic in its religious identity.

Personal needs and motivations: The need to develop **new skills** is a factor influencing take up of the tools and services, as evidenced with Case Study 1’s engagement with the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Working Group, Impact Builder and training courses; and Case Study 3’s training in Impact Assessment/Theory of Change and Planning and Practice in MEL.

Role of individuals: The role of certain **individuals** also appears to influence initial engagement with the tools and services. This was the case in Case Study 2, with the appointment of a new Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning staff member who was eager to develop new systems and processes; and in Case Study 7 where the CEO had enthusiasm for diagnostic tools and processes.

Changes in leadership: A change of **leadership** was seen in one organisation to have generated an interest in an area, which then led to the search for appropriate tools / services. In Case Study 7, a new CEO was recruited some years prior to the research with the mandate to engage Case Study 7 in a major modernising effort. The major change process focused on core areas such as governance, leadership and fundraising. This modernisation effort was reinforced by a fundraising consultant’s report which highlighted the need to address many areas of organisational health and effectiveness.

Later that year the CEO had the opportunity to hear other network members talk about their experiences of engaging in the pilot of the Effectiveness Toolkit. The CEO felt it chimed with what Case Study 7 wanted to do and saw engaging with it as a means to help achieve the vision of Case Study 7 as ‘more professional and more authentic in our religious identity’.

## **b. External drivers**

Funding: The evidence suggests that the following funding-related factors influenced the desire of organisations to respond to donors through the use of different tools and services:

- Drivers to access new or more sources of funding. For example, Case Study 8’s motivation to engage with their network was largely connected with their need to access more sources of income. The whole Committee took part in the Effectiveness Toolkit work as part of an application for institutional donor funding. One of Case Study 4’s primary motivations for using the Health Check was to “get through the hoop” in order to qualify for a similar grant focussing on organisational effectiveness. They also continually need to fundraise and access new sources of income, and consider that membership of a network and the use of tools and services supports this need.
- Indirect donor pressure (i.e. the perception that if the organisation does not engage it will not stand a good chance of securing further funding). For example, Case Study 7 were aware that IATI compliance was a condition of DFID funding, and were hoping to obtain DFID funds in the near future, so decided that it would be worthwhile embarking upon publishing data on the IATI website. Similarly, Case Study 3 were considering applying for DFID funding in the future and thus decided that the Finance and IT Director should participate in the IATI training in order to gain information about what is involved. For Case Study 5, the Transparency Review was seen by participating staff as a contribution towards preparing a plan for DFID on how the organisation would be strengthening the transparency area, alongside future work on value for money.
- Compliance with mandatory requirements of grantees was a driver for Case Study 2, Case Study 5 and Case Study 6’s engagement with IATI.

The response to donor pressure varied. Some saw positive opportunities (e.g. Case Study 9 are involved with Bond in seeking to incorporate elements within the IATI reporting mechanism); others were more sceptical (e.g. Case Study 3 remain to be convinced that IATI reporting would help them to strengthen organisational transparency or increase beneficiary accountability; while Case Study 5 found IATI reporting useful in terms of organisational transparency, but not increased beneficiary accountability).

There are also cases where donors have played a positive **facilitating role**, which has enabled engagement with the tools and services (**Box 2**).

### **Box 2: The enabling role of donors – an example from Case Study 3**

Funding from an institutional donor had provided Case Study 3 with the opportunity to invest in documenting the successful work which formed the core of their research and evidence base. Engagement with the Evidence Principles pilot subsequently provided a means to build on this initial investment.

Public profile / improving positioning within the sector / competitive edge. As outlined above, the desire to improve positioning vis-à-vis donors was a motivating factor. However, **general improvement** for different audiences, beyond donors and sponsors was also a motivating factor for Case Study 6. Three of the eight Group 1 organisations expressed the desire to be the **best in the sector** as motivations for engagement with the Health Check, or referred to comparison against the industry standard and an awareness of the need to perform well or better than the sector at large (Case Study 1, Case Study 2, and Case Study 4).

Wanting to engage through networking, sharing, and learning also influenced engagement. Reasons included the desire to engage with others on existing areas of work (Case Study 6 / Impact Builder development), **engage with others** on quality of evidence (Case Study 5 / drafting Evidence Principles); participate in shared learning groups (Case Study 7 and Case Study 3 / MEL); and contribute to relevant sector debates (Case Study 4 / Bond membership).

Previous experiences with Bond and NIDOS or the Effectiveness Programme appear to be motivating factors for engagement. For example, Case Study 9's engagement with the Transparency Review was influenced by their previous positive experiences with the Health Check and Evidence Principles. Likewise, Case Study 7's engagement with the Effectiveness Toolkit highlighted the need to strengthen the area of transparency, which motivated them to include it in their Action Plan. Confidence in the Bond / NIDOS **brand name** (i.e. track record) was also a driver for Case Study 8.

Involvement in piloting the tools and services appears to be a driver in itself. Five of the eight Group 1 organisations were involved in **piloting or development** of the tools (Case Study 6 / Evidence Principles and Impact Builder; Case Study 7 / MOT; Case Study 1 / Impact Builder; Case Study 2 / Impact Builder; Case Study 5 / Evidence Principles).

Looking for user-friendly tools and services that are **sector relevant and cheaper than those of other providers** also influenced engagement (Case Study 2 / Health Check; Case Study 6 / Evidence Principles; and Case Study 1 / Bond's services).

Being a member of a larger 'family' / federation had implications for Case Study 6's decisions about engaging with the tools and services. For example the need to comply with wider international organisational policies contributed to some degree of nervousness around engagement with the Transparency Review. However, there was interest in learning from the experience of the review and a recognition that increased transparency does facilitate improved positioning vis-à-vis external donors. Similarly, the interest in strengthening the quality of evidence within the wider '**family**' provided further motivation for Case Study 6 to actively engage with the Evidence Principles. However, decisions to *not* engage with the final Impact Builder product and Health Check were partially due to the fact that the family uses a number of its own tools and processes.

As section 2.1 shows, the cases demonstrate a fair balance between internal and external motivation. It is also apparent that instability and change in the national and international funding and policy

environment (including more competition and less money) may be leading to shifts in motivations for engaging with the tools and services.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.2 Changes identified

Findings on the contribution of the Bond and NIDOS tools and services to change are broken down into a) the organisational level, b) partner level, and c) other stakeholders (donors and other practitioners). As above, we make reference to brief examples but readers are encouraged to refer to the full case studies to see the degree of change and strength of association<sup>3,4</sup>.

### a. Organisational level

Competence and confidence of individuals: The evidence would suggest that the use of the Evidence Principles has strengthened individual competencies in a number of areas, including: confirming, shaping and enhancing how individuals think about evidence (Case Study 2); understanding the quality of evidence (Case Study 6); and improving their ability for critical analysis and triangulation (Case Study 3). Some participants report that staff members are better equipped to write Terms of Reference (Case Study 3) and design evaluations (Case Study 2). However, it is important to note that our evidence refers to only a small number of staff within most of the organisations.

There are also examples of how increased competence has been reported as contributing to organisational level change (**Box 3**).

#### **Box 3: Increased competence leading to organisational level change**

For Case Study 5, IATI training / follow-up advice gave increased confidence to the individual responsible for IATI publishing. This in turn was one contributing factor for the overall increased organisational capacity to fulfil reporting obligations, which is seen as of relatively high significance.

For Case Study 6, use of the Evidence Principles helped develop individual understanding on the nature of evidence, which along with other factors resulted in increased M&E competency and more effective support to partners subsequently (country offices of Case Study 6).

Increased shared understanding: There is evidence to suggest that use of the tools and services has contributed to improved understanding of organisations' own strengths and weaknesses (Case Study

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<sup>2</sup> Bond (2015) 'Fast Forward: The Changing Role of UK-based INGOs.' London: Bond; Bond (2015) 'Tomorrow's World: How might megatrends in development affect the future roles of UK-based INGOs?' (London: Bond); CIVICUS (2015) 'State of Civil Society Report.' South Africa: CIVICUS; PRIA, CDRA, PSO, INTRAC, EASUN, and ICD (2012) Civil Society at Crossroads: Shifts, Challenges, Options? Delhi: PRIA and Oxford: INTRAC.

<sup>3</sup> Note that it is not possible to anonymise individual case studies, and therefore Bond and NIDOS are not making those publically available.

<sup>4</sup> The analysis framework for this research focuses on five levels of change (Annex 1). Each individual case study includes references to these different levels and the degree of contribution from engagement.

7; Case Study 8 / MOT + Full Assessment), enabled prioritisation (Case Study 1 / Health Check; Case Study 10 / MOT), and helped to build a sense of a united team (Case Study 1 / Health Check and CESA; Case Study 7 / Effectiveness Toolkit process).

The use of the Evidence Principles has made a positive contribution to the ability of staff to engage with debates and issues around quality of evidence (Case Study 3; Case Study 6 together with other Case Study 6 country offices).

The use of certain tools and services has contributed to shared understandings of the need to improve communications:

- In Case Study 9, as a result of engagement with Transparency Review, understanding now goes beyond compliance with regulations, to what is best practice in communicating to an external audience about one's own organisation.
- In Case Study 5, the implementation of an action plan following the Transparency Review was reported as having partially contributed to more accessible information online.
- The Transparency Review partially contributed to Case Study 3's decision to invest in a new website.
- For Case Study 6, low scores from the Transparency Review in relation to peers helped the team's effort to deepen understandings within the wider organisation of the need for the website to speak to a wider audience.

Increased focus or value placed on areas of concern: Although not a significant change or shift, the research did highlight a few examples of increased focus or value placed on areas of concern due to engagement with the tools and services. These include the elevation in strategic importance placed on transparency (Case Study 9 / Transparency Review) and aiding the development and posting of a Transparency policy on the website (Case Study 5 / Transparency Review).

Governance: There have been positive changes in governance in two organisations, to which the tools and services made a partial contribution:

- Whilst work on strengthening the leadership and governance of Case Study 7 had been in progress since the arrival of the new CEO, this area saw some significant changes which can be linked to the self-assessment process. The Chair of the Board indicates that the discussions at the workshops, together with the production of the action plan, provided the basis for change which led to the engagement of external consultants to implement a Board Effectiveness Review and subsequent development plan. Work has been taking place to clarify their role and strengthen the composition of the Board; define their appetite for risk; improve functioning at meetings and ensure they are working at the strategic, rather than operational, level.
- For Case Study 5, a few immediate changes from engagement with the Health Check were noted by informants. In the first visit, staff reported that there had been a specific contribution to increased understanding of their situation when using the tool. The overall assessment process had indicated some challenges in the area of leadership, but the realisation that there was a need to work on this area was reinforced by seeing the visual 'dip' in the 'spidergram' image generated by the Health Check. The development of a leadership programme, and the need to work on governance issues emerged as a priority area. Whilst the leadership programme was put on hold, there were positive changes in the governance area, to which the Health Check was seen as partially contributing.

Improved profile and communications: Concrete references were made by two organisations to improvements in their profiles with other members, the wider sector and the public, helped by engagement with IATI and the Transparency Review (**Box 4**).

**Box 4: Improvements in profile – examples from Case Study 7 and Case Study 9**

With regards to the transparency area, Case Study 7 believe that they are seen by others as a professional, transparent and credible organisation. They have been invited by their network to talk to others about transparency; Case Study 7 have asked to use data for a video case study for other network members about IATI publishing, and IATI themselves have requested a short case study for their annual report. Staff believe that a concern about transparency was always central to their identity – it was a “virtue of being a good religious organisation”. Now they believe they are showing that they are serious about this, that they have taken action before it was a requirement and that the Bond Transparency Review and IATI reporting has helped them to achieve this.

For Case Study 9, the informant’s assessment of what has changed as a result of the Transparency Review includes increased awareness of marketing opportunities linked to being more transparent or broadening what they share with the public, particularly those things which they are proud about. For example, the organisation has developed a whistleblowing policy and actively train all staff on it. They were used to sharing this with auditors but had not thought of the benefits of sharing it with a wider external audience. Now that they have a broader understanding of transparency and its linkage to strengthening the organisational profile, they have posted their entire Global Employee Handbook (which includes sections on whistleblowing, corruption etc.).

Access to more / improved sources of funding: There is some evidence to suggest the use of tools and services has contributed to accessing more or improved sources of funding, or increased capacity to apply for funding:

- For Case Study 7, a major contribution made by engagement with the Effectiveness Toolkit has been enabling the organisation to position itself positively with regard to donors (DFID and EC) due to increased focus, more professional systems and organisational policies. Following the Full Assessment, increased attention on communications capacity enabled more effective fundraising (linked to investment in website improvement).
- For the Case Study 8, there is evidence of improved capacity to apply for more diverse sources of funding (through the small agency support group).

Improvements in programming: The evidence would suggest that engagement with the tools and services has led to some improvements in programming, evaluation and learning. For example:

- Greater potential for learning and rigour which – eventually – staff believe should lead to improved programming (Case Study 2 / Evidence Principles).
- A more focussed strategic approach, and improved understanding and easier financial budgeting/monitoring (Case Study 7 / Effectiveness Toolkit).
- Increased confidence in evidence leading to feeling stronger when making programme decisions (Case Study 3 / partial contribution of Bond’s Theory of Change and Impact Assessment training and Evidence Principles).

There are also examples of engagement informing other areas of work (**Box 5**).

**Box 5: The Transparency Review and facilitation of internal knowledge exchange**

In their assessment of the results of Case Study 9's engagement with the Transparency Review, informants in this study report that posting items on the website has facilitated access for internal stakeholders (for example, evaluation reports are of interest to staff working in different contexts, as well as to donors and potential supporters). Informants also report that it has been helpful for staff in different field offices as they are able to quickly access information via the website.

Changes in ways of working with partners: Changes are reported in ways of thinking about working with partners through the use of the Health Check. In the first visit, Case Study 5 staff indicated that a very small contribution was made by the Health Check by means of the partner indicators in the tool, which helped them to reflect on their existing processes in this area.

**Box 6: Confidence in evidence from partners – an example from Case Study 6**

Case Study 6's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning team use the Evidence Principles to review the quality of evaluations produced by country offices and to ensure that baseline / evaluation processes are more rigorous. This is one factor amongst others that has built their confidence in products from country offices. They are prepared to be held accountable in this area through the use of the Evidence Principles within a public report on their impact.

Confidence in evidence from partners: There is an indication of a partial contribution of the Evidence Principles to increased confidence in evidence produced by partners (**Box 6**).

**b. Partners**

The research provided illustrations of some changes at the partner level. However, it should be noted that very little of the Effectiveness Programme filtered down to partners overall, and in some cases organisations put a clear caveat on linking changes in partner effectiveness with the programme (Case Study 2; Case Study 4).

Accessing funds: Partners of two participating organisations are reported to be accessing more funds:

- Case Study 1: The use of the Impact Builder by partners in Kenya and Uganda supported the development of more robust and clear indicators. As a result, their bids were stronger. This was reported by participants in the first workshop to have led to the partners receiving more funds as a result of successful bids. It should be noted, however, that this is a potentially tenuous link.
- Case Study 7: According to staff, strengthening the communications capacity of the organisation (which was identified as an area of attention following the Full Assessment) has enabled more effective fundraising. The investment in website improvement enabled Case Study 7 to launch multiple successful appeals. The funds raised by this (and both matched by DFID) enabled Case Study 7 to respond to a difficult situation, and to bring significant DFID funds to partners.

Increased understanding of effectiveness: For one organisation (Case Study 1), partners were clearer about what effectiveness means for them in their context. Use of the adapted pilot version of the Health Check<sup>5</sup> tool supported more in-depth understanding about different elements in running schools effectively. Positive outcomes include more active participation of stakeholders.

Increased engagement in advocacy: Partners of Case Study 7 are more engaged in advocacy and seeking to influence. This is linked to the inclusion of an advocacy policy and description of how the organisation views the role of governments within its Operational Framework, which was shared with partners and taken forward.

Increased confidence in gathering evidence: In working on the Monitoring, Evaluation and Research area with their partner in Malawi, Case Study 3 staff in this study report general increased confidence and competence of the partner and, more specifically, in the gathering of evidence e.g. in the use of a baseline survey. They also report a change of culture and way of doing things in programme design. Case Study 3 staff report that this is of relatively high significance, but that the degree of Bond's contribution is quite small.

'Ripple out' among family members of Case Study 6: The sharing of the Evidence Principles within the wider Case Study 6 Partnership is reported by Case Study 6 staff to have resulted in some changes in practices by different types of Case Study 6 partners. **Box 7** offers some brief examples.

#### **Box 7: The 'ripple effect' of Evidence Principles – an example from Case Study 6**

- Three offices in the global north in the Case Study 6 family use the Evidence Principles in their M&E work.
- Four Case Study 6 offices in Asia and Africa are currently using the Evidence Principles in internal and commissioned evaluations; and a fifth office has adapted the tool. The UK MEL specialists say that the use of the Principles has helped the fifth office team to change their thinking about the quality of evidence used when coming to conclusions, and the reports are more rigorous as a result.
- The UK team believe the Evidence Principles have facilitated a discussion within the 'family' around the quality of evidence by providing a framework for that conversation. Accessibility and ease of use of the Evidence Principles has been a key factor in enabling the tool to provide a real contribution / value added over more academic research standards being proposed by other Case Study 6 members.

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<sup>5</sup> Known at the time as the "Capacities for Effectiveness Self-Assessment Tool" (CESA)

### c. Other stakeholders

There are some small examples of changes within other stakeholders (donors and practitioners) influenced by the case study organisations' use of the tools and services (**Box 8**).

#### **Box 8: Changes amongst other practitioners and donors**

When looking at the 'ripples' out beyond the Partnership, Case Study 6 staff cited an example of how another Case Study 6 office in the global north worked with one of the **world's leading practitioners** of the 'realist' approach to evaluations to develop a version of the Evidence Principles to help assess the value of individual evaluation reports in contributing to 'realist meta-evaluations'.

Staff also expressed their belief that their involvement with shaping the Evidence Principles has contributed to **influencing DFID's thinking** about quality evidence (which was one of the initial drivers for them to get engaged). At a forum where Case Study 6 staff were present, DFID staff expressed the view that the Principles were ahead of their time due to their emphasis on inclusion. Overall, Case Study 6 staff feel that the dialogue with DFID around the Principles has led to a positive outcome for the whole sector. A former MEL Manager believes that Case Study 6 itself also gained increased reputation and 'kudos' through their active role in this dialogue (by being invited to make several presentations to donor teams and donor partners).

## 2.3 The nature of support from BOND and NIDOS and change

The role of the support from Bond and NIDOS in producing evidenced changes is broken down into the micro-level (specific interactions between Bond and NIDOS staff and members) and the macro-level (benefits to the wider sector linked to the Effectiveness Programme).

### a. Micro-level

The nature of Bond's and NIDOS's engagement with users of tools and services varied. Bond has over 480 members and NIDOS has over 110 members; consequently Bond / NIDOS staff have only directly engaged with and supported some organisations to use some tools and services. But it was also common for users of some tools to simply access them online (e.g. the Evidence Principles and Impact Builder). The evidence in the full case studies suggests to the INTRAC team that:

A presentation of the tool or service to the organisation proved valuable. Case Study 7 staff said that they appreciated the support received from NIDOS throughout engagement with the Effectiveness Toolkit. This started with the initial launch meeting, where there was a clear explanation of the methodology.

Visits from the Bond Effectiveness Programme staff to the member organisation are helpful. For example, Case Study 3 report that there was a positive start with the Health Check, provided by the

visit of Bond's Head of Effectiveness and Learning, followed up with help to the Case Study 3 staff lead person as they started to engage with implementing the tool (although they reported that they were not made aware of the accompanying guide).

Facilitation of the engagement process has contributed to changes. Examples include: NIDOS' external facilitation of the self-assessment (Case Study 7); helpful support from Bond IATI staff (Case Study 7; Case Study 5); direct support from NIDOS to small isolated organisations (Case Study 8); positive liaison during Health Check implementation (Case Study 5); and the personal and on-going process support from Bond for the CESA and Health Check (Case Study 1).

Support in implementation of action plans has been mixed. Following the full Effectiveness Toolkit assessment, Case Study 7 staff report that NIDOS provided helpful accompaniment by email and in person. In relation to the Transparency Review, Case Study 9 cited support available via the provision of useful reference materials on the Bond website; but for Case Study 5, staff report that several requests for examples of Transparency Statements and other good practice materials were not met at the time.

Engagement with other Bond members helped implementation for Case Study 5. Staff report that participation in the Bond Transparency Working Group enabled access to useful transparency-related materials from other members.

General regular contact / visits to Case Study 6 are looked upon positively. For example, Case Study 6 are generally keen to engage with the wider INGO sector and engagement with Bond is looked upon positively by senior management. The Consultant's assessment is that Bond staff appear to pay particular attention to the relationship with Case Study 6, as witnessed by regular personal visits to the organisation.

However, a number of organisations cited lack of consistency in communications and support due to Bond staff turnover. For Case Study 1, the development of the Impact Builder suffered as a result of the key member of staff leaving before the tool had been fully developed. Case Study 6 staff report that this has also created uncertainty about the status of certain initiatives (new version of Evidence Principles and working group on Transparency).

## **b. Macro-level**

The evidence suggests that NIDOS is perceived as a successful advocate for smaller NGOs. For example, NIDOS' role in campaigning directed at the Scottish government to provide smaller grants for small organisations enabled the Case Study 8 to access funding and provided motivation to engage more systematically in self-assessment.

Bond is perceived as a facilitator of sector-wide tool development. For example, Case Study 6 wished to influence DFID's thinking in the area of quality of evidence by finding a practical and 'good enough' alternative approach. They found that working with Bond on the development of the Evidence Principles was a useful way to do this, and to simultaneously engage in the thinking about evidence within the broader sector. They appreciated the role of Bond in facilitating the development of this alternative, and welcome the usefulness of the final tool.

Bond is also perceived as a facilitator of learning spaces and sector support. Examples include:

- Case Study 1 value the MEL Working Group as it provides the opportunity to network and learn from others in the sector, and has developed its own useful dynamic in which a sub-group is sharing experiences and supporting each other in the development of M&E frameworks.
- Case Study 2 cite Bond's capacity to facilitate networks of like-minded groups for mutual learning and sharing as one of its key and most influential roles in supporting effectiveness in and across the sector. The online platform (MyBond) is considered to be a very useful way of contributing to debates.
- Case Study 4 consider that Bond's most effective roles in relation to its member organisations are as a facilitator, networker and voice of its membership.
- Case Study 6 welcomes Bond's facilitation of cross-sector work to develop new instruments such as the Evidence Principles, and their recent, effective, 'brokerage' role in facilitating effective cross-organisational learning.
- Participation in the Bond Transparency Group enabled Case Study 5 to access useful transparency-related materials that were shared by other members.

However, practical challenges related to learning spaces and sector support were also noted, including:

- Having sufficient time to participate. For example, for Case Study 7, despite being motivated to engage in the NIDOS MEL group, the Director of Programmes is unable to participate due to the lack of time available to them.
- Participating in other available learning groups. For example, in Case Study 6, the MEL team are more motivated to participate in the cross-organisational learning space provided by the PPA Learning Partnership than that provided by Bond's MEL group.<sup>6</sup>

## PART III – ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

### 3.1 Lessons learned

From our interpretation of the evidence, we draw out lessons learned on a) enabling factors, and b) limiting factors contributing to results as well as the process of engagement.

#### a. Enabling factors

The following factors can be identified as influencing positive engagement and results. These are separated into those within the sphere of influence of Bond and NIDOS, and those that are outside of Bond and NIDOS' direct influence.

#### **Enabling factors within the sphere of direct influence of Bond and NIDOS:**

The characteristics of the tools and services. The findings show that there is a greater possibility of effective use when the tool or service is practical or easily applied to reality. Examples include:

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<sup>6</sup> Recognising complementarities and efficiency opportunities, the PPA Learning Partnership will be hosted by Bond and will use the MyBond platform as of April 2016, with some existing PPA and Bond groups merging in the process.

- The Evidence Principles, which are cited as a very accessible and concrete, adaptable instrument (Case Study 6; Case Study 2). The evidence suggests that Bond has played an effective role in enabling / catalysing the production of a practical tool which is accessible to practitioners and which presents a good alternative to models and tools being proposed by the donor (DFID). It also demonstrates that the sector is capable of producing its own appropriate resources.
- The MOT, cited as clear and easy to use in the North (Case Study 8).
- The Health Check, where evolving indicators are cited as having removed ambiguity and subjectivity (Case Study 3).

The characteristics of the processes (i.e. development of the tools and the way they were used). For example:

- Participatory development of the Evidence Principles was motivational and facilitated 'ownership' of the tool for Case Study 5.
- For Case Study 7, the facilitated Effectiveness Toolkit workshop included the process of inputting the data online 'live' – seeing the picture emerge and making adjustments when discussing the results there and then.
- Investment in planning and monitoring of action to be taken from the assessment process was a strong enabling factor for Case Study 7 / Effectiveness Toolkit; and for Case Study 5 / Transparency Review.
- The ability to network at the facilitated workshop that took place as part of the development of the Impact Builder was appreciated (Case Study 1).

Ongoing, personal support from Bond / NIDOS. Direct engagement is found to be extremely helpful. Case Study 4 state they could not have completed IATI training and registration without dedicated support from Bond.

Preparation for training courses. For Case Study 3, effective individual learning as an immediate outcome of engagement with the Impact Assessment course was reported by the informant as having been facilitated by the use of a pre-prepared case study which was submitted before the course.

The history of a positive relationship with Bond/NIDOS (Case Study 1; Case Study 8; Case Study 6; Case Study 9; Case Study 5).

Member confidence in the Bond / NIDOS 'brand' (Case Study 8 and Case Study 2).

Participation in previous, related initiatives appears to have 'primed' members for effective engagement. For example:

- Case Study 3's engagement with the Evidence Principles was able to be effective due to the pre-existing commitment and initiatives related to strengthening the area of evidence-based learning and research;
- In Case Study 7, positive results emerged from implementation of a holistic organisational development plan, and from engagement with transparency-related services (IATI and Transparency Review), which served to reinforce each other.
- Case Study 9's familiarity with benchmark-based Health Check tools, together with the cultural keenness to test themselves, provided staff with a degree of confidence to step into the unknown terrain of being judged by an external entity in the potentially delicate area of transparency.

The catalytic effect of using one tool, i.e. the use of one tool inspiring internal cross-organisational learning and sharing (such as Case Study 7 / NIDOS self-assessment process).

Experiencing a tangible value added of a tool or service (**Box 9**).

**Box 9: Providing tangible value added – an example from Case Study 7**

For Case Study 7, the Effectiveness Toolkit and accompanying process added value to an ongoing change process. The Chair of the Board identifies the NIDOS self-assessment exercise as providing the catalyst for change due to its structure and independence, as well as the value added of an external facilitator enabling the Board and management team to work together in a non-threatening way in order to tease out issues and find a way to move forward.

**Enabling factors outside of Bond and NIDOS' direct sphere of influence:**

**Box 10: Organisational culture enabling positive engagement – an example from Case Study 9**

Informants in this study referred to an 'entrepreneurial' or 'can-do' feel to Case Study 9. In general, the informants saw themselves as being prepared to take (calculated) risks and described Case Study 9 as an organisation that is keen to test itself and be proactive in seeking self-improvement.

The INTRAC team's assessment is that this is fertile ground for any benchmark-based service or tool. Case Study 9's organisational culture was supportive of engagement with a process which involved being judged by others, and which presented challenges for investment in a relatively new area.

Characteristics of organisational culture, as demonstrated by Case Study 9 (**Box 10**).

A link can also be made to organisations which are growing, investing in their development, or modernising. For example:

- In Case Study 3, the positive internal context of a growing organisation with effectiveness on its agenda provided strong enabling conditions for engagement with the Evidence Principles.
- Case Study 7 has been engaged in a major modernising / growth effort led by a CEO who saw engagement with the Effectiveness Toolkit as a means to help achieve the vision of Case Study 7. In addition, the CEO supported the investment of a senior staff person's time in the planning and monitoring of the organisational strengthening activities that emerged from the assessment process.
- Case Study 4 is an organisation that is growing and expanding rapidly. One motivating factor for engagement with the tools and services is that they continually need to fundraise and access new sources of income. They consider that membership of Bond provides, among other things, useful links, information and resources that support this need.

Timing, for example, when take up of the tool or service coincides with organisational need such as preparing for or working towards a new strategy (Case Study 2 and Case Study 10).

Leadership engagement. This includes encouraging staff engagement (Case Study 9); unblocking resistance to engagement from others within the organisation (Case Study 6); and exerting “soft power” to influence and motivate staff (Case Study 2). Continuity of leadership (Case Study 7), and a more collegiate and delegated leadership approach is also effective (Case Study 9; Case Study 7).

A connection to core values, concerns or interests. This is seen with Case Study 3’s engagement with the Evidence Principles, due to its pre-existing commitment to strengthening the area of evidence-based learning and research; and with Case Study 9’s conceptual framing and track record of applying its mission focus / programme interests to its own internal functioning. This enabled them to engage in the first place, and then to take the findings in a strategic direction.

A fit of the tool/service with the organisation’s vision / ongoing strategic initiatives can be both a motivator and an enabling factor. This is demonstrated in a number of examples, including Case Study 5’s use of the Health Check in a broad Organisational Assessment / Organisational Development process, which was funded by flexible resources via strategic funding from a donor; and Case Study 7’s use of the Effectiveness Toolkit, which responded to the clarity of vision on what kind of organisation they wished to be.

The role of donors in funding strategic organisational strengthening initiatives. For example, Case Study 3’s prior institutional funding laid the foundation to enable the organisation to take up other opportunities such as the Health Check; and Case Study 5’s access to flexible resources via a donor strategic funding pot supported a concerted and strategic effort to strengthen their MEL area, into which the Evidence Principles was able to make a positive contribution.

The desire to be ahead of competition in the sector. For example, in Case Study 1, participants cited an awareness of the need to perform well or better than the sector at large as one external factor that influenced their decision to engage with the Health Check. Being able to compare the organisation against Bond benchmarks was also referred to as an internal factor influencing use. One reason cited by informants for Case Study 2’s motivation to complete the Health Check was an aspiration to work towards becoming “the best in the sector”.

## **b. Limiting factors**

The following factors can be identified as influencing less positive engagement and results. As above, these are separated into those within the sphere of influence of Bond and NIDOS, and those that are outside of Bond and NIDOS’ direct influence.

### **Limiting factors within the sphere of direct influence of Bond and NIDOS:**

Weaknesses in specific tools / services, including technical issues with the Health Check and Impact Builder (Case Study 1; Case Study 5). In Case Study 5, participants of the first workshop observed that the Health Check pillars structure did not exactly mirror how Case Study 5 works, with some pillars or indicators mixing elements from different areas. This meant that for some staff members it was difficult to score as they may have known about one element / area but not the other (for example, a mix of communications and fundraising). For Case Study 3, the format of the Evidence Principles spreadsheet affected partner use. It was also a barrier in the Case Study 8’s attempt to use the Effectiveness Toolkit with their partner.

Weaknesses in the ways the tools / services were used. These include issues where there is a lack of dialogue or shared reflection when using the tool (Case Study 3 / Health Check); and where a lack of facilitation leads to different interpretations (Case Study 2 / Health Check). The appropriateness of self-assessment tools (the Health Check and MOT) for use by field staff or partners was also cited:

- For the Case Study 8, while the MOT is clearly useful and valued in Scotland, neither the process (self-reflection and evaluation), nor the content were considered appropriate for use with their Southern partner in Malawi. Issues included the language of the Toolkit. The informant noted that the concepts of 'diversity' and 'human rights' (to take just two examples) were understood very differently by their partner.
- Case Study 3, who did not engage with the analysis of the data, are finding it hard to draw conclusions from the Health Check benchmarking data, and also with interpreting the disparities that exist between field staff and UK staff perceptions. Generally the field staff scored a lot higher than UK staff, but this could be for a number of different reasons, for example cultural tendencies and access to information.

Open training courses not meeting the diverse needs of organisations with different capacities due to being perceived as too basic, with an overconcentration on the tools, rather than on issues of using them (Case Study 5 / generic effectiveness related courses); or being provided with insufficient information to ensure a good fit with the individual (Case Study 3 / PPMEL course).

Poor signposting, including engagement and follow-up (Case Study 2); and advice on what tools / services are appropriate to use (Case Study 3 / PPMEL course).

Low perceived return on investment from using a tool / service. For example, the effort to make changes based on the Transparency Review report not being seen as reaping benefits due to low visitor interest in transparency-related pages (Case Study 6); and the perception that the benefits do not match the time / resources invested in the Impact Builder (Case Study 2; Case Study 1; Case Study 6).

### **Limiting factors outside of Bond and NIDOS' direct sphere of influence:**

Organisational culture, including where there is an established culture with an aversion to change (Case Study 5).

A lack of staff time to engage sufficiently (Case Study 5 / Transparency area; Case Study 3 / Evidence Principles); or inappropriate timing (Case Study 3 and Case Study 6 / Transparency Review).

Finally, changes of leadership can have a significant effect on engagement and results due to limited continuity (as seen with Case Study 3 / Health Check), or different perceptions of what constitutes organisational effectiveness potentially meaning certain tools and services are no longer considered valid or valuable (which may be the case for Case Study 1).

## 3.2 Analysing the change pathway and underlying assumptions

The findings can be assessed against Point 5 in the Theory of Change approach used in this research (continuously monitor change and your change pathway; and test assumptions) (**Figure 1**). Although the change pathway (**Annex 1**) was seen as a little simplistic,<sup>7</sup> it proved very useful in terms of providing feedback on Bond and NIDOS' spheres of direct and indirect influence in supporting planned changes, as well as areas where they cannot expect to influence at all. It also provides useful information on the roles that Bond and NIDOS can and should play in supporting these changes.

Clearly member organisations of Bond and NIDOS vary enormously in terms of size, mandate, capacity, ambition, and so on, so responses on the validity of the assumptions are quite diverse. However, the overall analysis of these findings suggests that many of the assumptions at Levels 1 and 2 are either partially or completely valid, and that there are ways in which Bond and NIDOS could further adapt their ways of working in order to strengthen the chances of positive change. These levels most directly relate respectively to the Outputs and Outcomes in Bond's DFID grant logframe, and were the primary focus of Bond's and NIDOS' activities. Assumptions at Levels 3 and 4 were not only much harder to test because causal links to Bond / NIDOS efforts were considered very dilute given how many other factors affect that level of organisational change, or non-existent, but they were also seen to be compromised by simplistic characterisation of the nature of partnerships and learning. Assumptions at Level 5 were not tested and were considered too far away from the efforts of Bond and NIDOS to be relevant.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 2** details our findings against the five Levels of Assumptions (some of which may be repeated in other sections of this report).

**Table 2: Findings – testing the Assumptions**

Level 1 Assumptions	Summary of findings for Level 1 Assumptions
Bond and NIDOS ways of promoting / sharing services enables the right people to use the right tools/services at the right time  Member organisations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access tools / services at times when they can realistically apply them within their organisations</li> <li>- Promote an active culture for learning and improving</li> </ul>	The majority of the respondents agree that Bond and NIDOS have developed useful tools and that they do promote and share them. However they report that neither Bond nor NIDOS have the capacity currently to ensure that the right people access the right tools in the right way. It was noted that Bond in particular does not market or signpost tools or services as effectively as it might. Organisations do not always have enough information about the tools and services to make sure that they are “a good fit”.  It was also noted that in cases where organisations have an

<sup>7</sup> Specifically, Bond and NIDOS treated higher level assumptions more as hypotheses to be tested, wishing to understand (among their diverse membership) under what circumstances and for what types of organisations the assumptions might hold.

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the assumptions at Levels 3-5 were articulated in part as a response to challenges to Bond from the main donor, DFID, to articulate how support to organisational effectiveness would deliver tangible change to “beneficiaries” in developing countries.

	<p>active culture for learning and improving, or when they were involved in a whole organisation development process, they did select and use relevant tools and / or services at a time when they could realistically apply them. Some organisations note that they could have made more effective use of tools (e.g. Health Check) if Bond had been able to provide more follow up support. It is obviously worth remembering that Bond / NIDOS tools and services make up only a very small number of the relevant tools and services that organisations can access.</p>
<p><b>Level 2 Assumptions (immediate changes resulting from use of Bond/NIDOS tools and services)</b></p>	<p><b>Summary of findings for Level 2 Assumptions</b></p>
<p>Engagement with Bond / NIDOS tools and services acts as a motivator in itself for individuals and member organisations to build on their efforts to improve effectiveness.</p> <p>Individual practitioners who engage with tools and services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are motivated and willing to share new learning</li> <li>- Have the capacity / influence to drive change forward within their organisations</li> </ul> <p>Member organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have capacity to absorb and apply new learning effectively to their programmes and practices</li> <li>- See the value of becoming more transparent and strive to improve their practices</li> <li>- Engage in open and useful collaboration with other INGOs and member organisations in relation to thematic areas of intervention</li> </ul>	<p>The assumption that using a tool or service would act as a motivator in itself seemed to have limited validity. On the whole, respondents felt that other internal and external drivers (development of new strategy, or a desire to be better than the bench mark, or to attract other sources of funding) acted as more powerful motivators to engage either more deeply with one tool, or to experiment with others.</p> <p>The roles and capacity of the key engagers with the tools and services were seen as instrumental in whether or not they were able to drive change forward within their organisation. As stated elsewhere in this report, in situations where the people leading the use of a tool or service had relevant capacity, authority and consistency, and the time was right, substantial and useful changes resulted (Case Study 7 and Case Study 2). This winning combination was not often seen in the case studies.</p> <p>The assumption that organisations see the value of becoming more transparent and strive to improve their practices proved valid in a number of cases where there had not been much previous consideration given to this area. In these cases the assumption may need to recognise explicitly that efforts to improve transparency may be initially motivated by a need to comply with donor demands, but that engagement with the transparency tools and services can provide the opportunity for organisations to see the value in this area. However, in a number of other cases the transparency topic was already a high priority and the Bond transparency tools and services proved rather limited in their orientation. Comments from organisations referred to their restricted scope for helping improve transparency in ways that are non-web based, beneficiary oriented or for use with Southern partners.</p> <p>The assumption around engaging in open and useful collaboration with other INGOs and member organisations in relation to thematic areas of intervention proved valid when tools were being developed and piloted. These opportunities were highly valued. In addition, some respondents valued the opportunities for sharing, learning and networking provided through Working Groups (MEL and Transparency). A number of respondents would like to see Bond and NIDOS developing further opportunities for collaboration around thematic areas.</p> <p>Finally, one case study organisation in particular commented that the assumptions at this level seemed very limited: that they seemed to imply that Bond and NIDOS' role in supporting organisational development and effectiveness focussed only on the provision of tools and services. They note that Bond and</p>

	NIDOS have important and potentially more valuable roles to play in influencing INGO and donor debates in the global north.
<b>Level 3 Assumptions (expected short / medium term changes)</b>	<b>Summary of findings for Level 3 Assumptions</b>
<p>Member organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Apply new learning to / with partners in equitable and useful ways</li> <li>- See the benefit of including partners' views in PMEL and do so more effectively</li> <li>- Have applied new learning / testing and programmes and practices have improved accordingly</li> <li>- Increasing numbers of NNGOs are motivated to improve their practices and effectiveness</li> </ul> <p>Networks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Networks of common purpose drive new standards forward and promote them effectively</li> <li>- Collaboration around thematic areas leads to improved effectiveness in programming</li> </ul> <p>Donors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Respect and reward evidence of improved effectiveness in INGOs</li> </ul>	<p>In general, respondents report that changes and assumptions tested at this and subsequent levels are effectively out of Bond and NIDOS' spheres of influence; that there are too many other contributing actors and factors to consider; and that the change pathway is premised on simplistic and inaccurate assumptions about both the nature of partnerships and the nature of learning.</p> <p>The assumptions that relate to member organisations making efforts to apply learning with partners and including them in PMEL is largely seen as valid but that this has very little to do with either Bond or NIDOS' efforts. Equally, <b>how</b> individuals within partner organisations apply new learning is out of the control of their UK INGO partners.</p> <p>The size and nature of the partnerships that UK INGOS have differs enormously, which compromises the usefulness of any generalised statement about ways in which they respond. Many of the larger partners that case study groups work with in the global South have numerous donors from many different countries; and with very different demands for reporting and compliance.</p> <p>One key area that a number of respondents noted was that this assumption is based on a false idea that learning travels from the global north to the global south. Issues raised in relation to this include the fact that we believe that <b>the UK way is the right way</b>. In some cases this may actually have negative consequences for partners who are working very effectively with few resources, as they attempt to comply with new approaches and new levels of evidence.</p> <p>In terms of testing the extent to which new learning may lead to improved programmes, one case study organisation noted that the timeline was currently too short to test this: that changes to programming and the results would take much longer than this study allowed.</p> <p>On the whole, respondents comment that Bond and NIDOS should restrict their focus to strengthening their member organisations' knowledge and skills sets, and representing their issues and views to the donors; and that they should not attempt to attribute causality of any changes in partners' approaches or ways of working to these efforts.</p> <p>In relation to the assumption around networks driving standards forward, case study organisations report that there is definitely an appetite for networks of common interest to collaborate, and that the processes of sharing and learning together are highly valued but that, apart from a couple of illustrations, more research would be needed to test this.</p> <p>Equally, the assumption that donors respect and reward evidence of improved effectiveness could not be tested with any rigour in this exercise. There are examples of member</p>

	organisations accessing grants as a result of using some Bond / NIDOS tools and adapting their practice, and there are examples of where they have adapted their practices after using tools, and still failed to secure grants. It is clear that the term “donors” refers to UK donors in particular rather than donors in general.
<b>Level 4 Assumptions (longer term changes that the programme hopes to influence indirectly)</b>	<b>Summary of findings for Level 4 Assumptions</b>
<p>(Members’) Partner organisations in the South:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Have capacity to absorb and apply new learning effectively to their programmes and practices</li> <li>- See the value of becoming more transparent and strive to improve their practices</li> <li>- See the benefit of including beneficiaries’ views in PMEL and do so more effectively</li> </ul> <p>Donors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to use NNGOs as a primary vehicle for influencing positive changes for beneficiaries in the South [during the lifetime of the project, 2013-16]</li> </ul>	<p>Following the findings for the Level 3 assumptions, case study organisations either did not feel it was relevant to comment on the validity of these assumptions, or they stated clearly that this was the case. Case Study 7 has validated the assumption with one example of how their partners have explicitly put learning into their practices.</p> <p>Case Study 6 suggests that assumptions at this level should focus more on ways in which organisations in the global South value rigorous evidence for making decisions. Case Study 2 notes that partners need to comply with donor demands as much as agencies in the global north, and compliance can often be a stronger internal drive for change than a desire for improving effectiveness.</p> <p>The assumption around donors continuing to use NNGOs as a primary vehicle for influencing positive changes in the South is fast shifting territory and needs to be tested further. It is worth noting that Bond’s recent ‘Futures’ work indicates a shift in assumptions about this.</p>
<b>Level 5 Assumptions (relating to Bond / NIDOS vision of success and which it has little or no influence over)</b>	<b>Summary of findings for Level 5 Assumptions</b>
Effective CSOs can and do really result in improved quality of life for beneficiaries	Apart from noting that this should be the ultimate goal of the Bond and NIDOS effectiveness programmes, there was no way of validating this assumption and no desire to attempt to make any causal links.

## PART IV- CONCLUSIONS

### 4.1 Key learning points

The following learning points are based on the consultants' assessment of the evidence. They are broken down into areas that Bond and NIDOS could consider building on (key directions), and areas they should perhaps be aware of in the future (possible areas for consideration).

#### a. Key directions

This section outlines the tools and services that were perceived as most useful overall, and highlights the characteristics which enabled positive engagement.

The Evidence Principles: The findings of this research suggest that the Evidence Principles are the best tool in terms of accessibility. The fact that they are digestible, simple to share and explain, and can be adapted if necessary has contributed to effective use (they made a positive contribution to changes at individual and organisational level in a number of organisations; and also made a small contribution to change at the partner level). Participation in drafting the tool was also valued.

The Health Check: The Health Check was valuable to many organisations as it reinforced existing beliefs about their strengths and weaknesses, and enabled prioritisation of areas for improvement. The tool can be seen as 'opening the door to changes', and a potential useful platform for staff discussion. However, there were limited results from engagement, including due to confusion around terminology and a lack of guidance on how to interpret this. In terms of the process, personal and on-going support was highly valued.

The Impact Builder: The evidence suggests that respondents liked the collaborative process of developing the Impact Builder (facilitated workshops were found useful for sector learning and sharing), however the product did not contribute as much as organisations originally anticipated due to accessibility (downloading and using the tool; engaging overseas staff).

The Transparency Review: The Transparency Review made some positive changes at different levels (for example to increased organisational confidence and building a united team).

In conclusion, the evidence from this research programme suggests that there are certain enabling characteristics of the tools and services that increase the possibility of effective use. Most notably these include being designed well, accessible (easy to use and share), and practical.

The process of being involved in piloting and shaping tools is also very valued; it encourages ownership, motivation, and the determination to make it work. Facilitated workshops are also appreciated. Tools and services are most effective when ongoing support or accompaniment is provided by Bond and NIDOS, although the question is whether this is realistic or sustainable. Finally, the evidence suggests that tools and services are most useful when there is a real value-added (i.e. there are no other tools available). Bond and NIDOS should keep these factors in mind in the development of new tools and services.

## b. Possible areas for consideration

- The ways in which Bond and NIDOS understand partners and partnership would benefit from further exploration and analysis. This is a fast changing arena in which there are a large number of variations and modalities. It is no longer enough to categorise this key component of the effectiveness paradigm under a single heading.
- The role of Bond vis-à-vis DFID is not always clear to its members, or is interpreted as that of being a facilitator for DFID (not pushing back enough on requirements, e.g. around the results agenda and IATI publishing), rather than a convenor or voice of sector perspective.<sup>9</sup> This was especially apparent in the Transparency area.
- Transparency work focused on IATI and websites is proving too limited and not responding to members' needs in this area. Members would like more support in the transparency area.
- Learning in organisations only becomes institutionalised if management and leadership have ongoing, full commitment and understanding, and strategize.
- If organisations are not ready for change, or the timing is not right, then engaging with the tools and services may be a waste of time and resources.
- There are negative repercussions associated with staff turnover at CEO / senior management level.
- In any one organisation, only a few individuals are knowledgeable about the tools and services. When this 'connector' leaves, a link to the Effectiveness Programme and / or Bond / NIDOS is lost.
- A diagnostic service / tool (Health Check or Transparency Review) cannot in itself guarantee a positive set of outcomes; there also needs to be knowledge of change planning and management.
- Whilst embedding the elements of a tool into other resources may provide some positive benefits, this mainstreaming may lead to weakening of awareness of the area within an organisation. This was the case with one organisation's use of the Evidence Principles, where they lost awareness of the topic of quality of evidence as staff changed. Where it was still used explicitly (Case Study 6) the results regarding continued conscious reflection on the nature of evidence were a lot more positive. Thus, in the future, the sustainability of the changes, as related to the use of the tool, may be a topic for conversation with the users.

## 4.2 Final reflections

The research programme on the use and application of Bond and NIDOS effectiveness tools and services aimed to provide a better understanding of what drives the use of tools and services to improve effectiveness, and the mechanisms by which such support actually brings about changes in how organisations work and improve development outcomes.

This report has outlined that there are a number of internal and external drivers influencing engagement with the tools and services (including the development of new strategies, personal needs and motivations to develop new skills, a desire to be better than the benchmark, or to attract new or more sources of funding). The INTRAC team's assessment is that the motivation to engage largely

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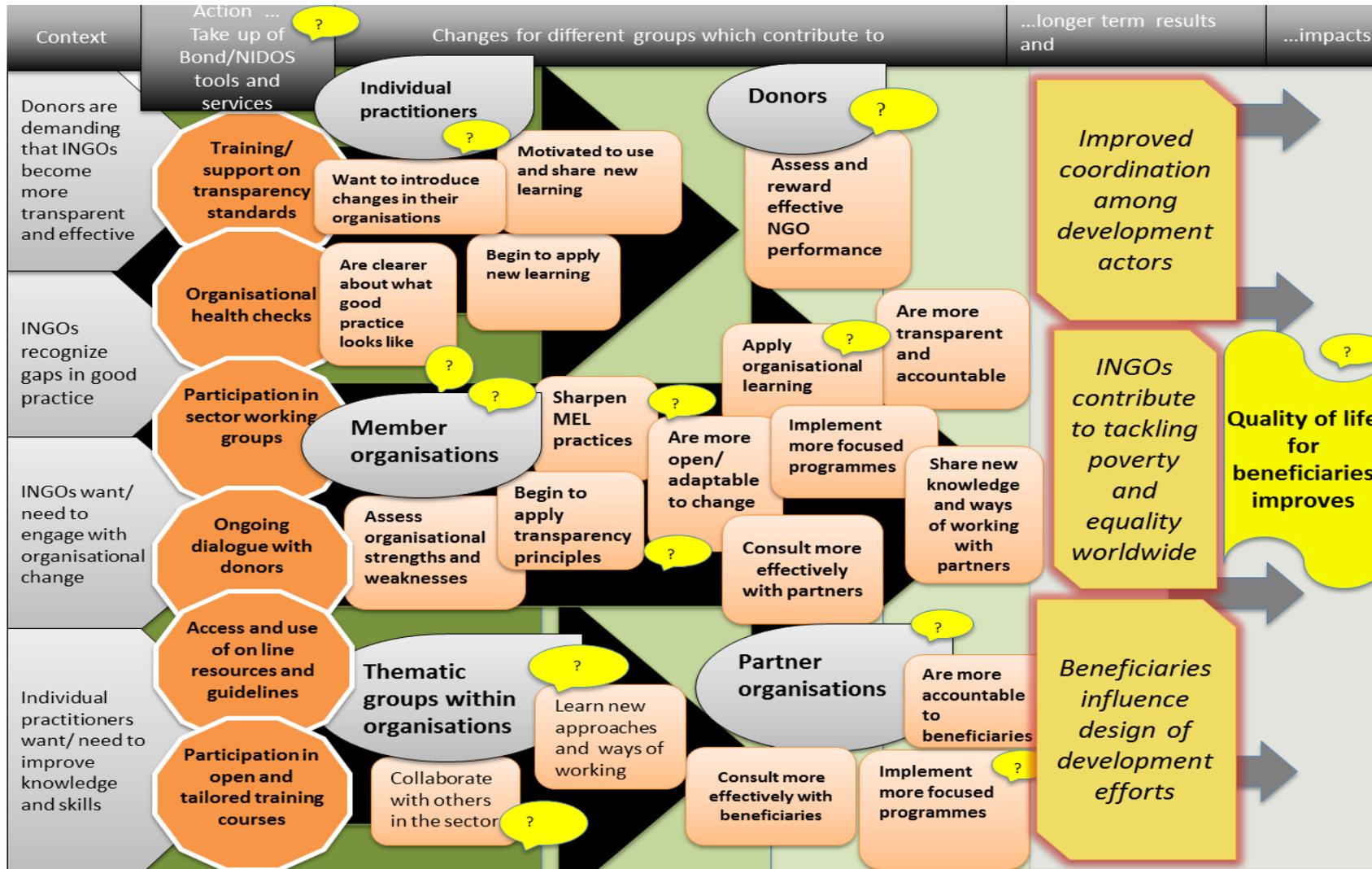
<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that this is not the case of the perception of NIDOS vis-à-vis the Scottish government.

comes from a preceding interest in a specific area, and a desire to then find the tools that can help the organisation advance this.

Overall, the evidence suggests that the effectiveness tools and services did lead to some changes at different levels, most notably at the individual and organisational level. The research also provided illustrations of some changes at the partner level, although very little filtered down to partners overall. The research programme has therefore shown that there is value in the Effectiveness Programme tools and services. However, it should be recognised that the extent to which the tools and services can bring about positive and sustained change is highly dependent on intrinsic factors, such as the need for an active culture for learning and improvement; and extrinsic factors, such as the funding landscape affecting how organisations engage with their own organisational effectiveness.

As stated elsewhere in the report, elements of the Theory of Change for the Effectiveness Programme - particularly those relating to the ways in which new skills and ways of working are absorbed and applied by members' partners in the South - proved to be overambitious. Equally, there are areas of change that Bond and NIDOS could have contributed to more successfully (e.g. amplifying the voice of the members and representing this voice more effectively with donors). We recommend that Bond and NIDOS now apply our findings and points for consideration relative to the change pathway and underlying assumptions to further refine their understanding of how change happens in terms of organisational development and effectiveness, and – most importantly – the roles that they as member support organisations can play in contributing to these changes (Points 6, 1 and 2 in Figure 1). We suggest using this analysis to think about where real efforts should lie; and consider the usefulness of working with the current Theory of Change or whether future work on a revised version would be beneficial.

# Annex 1: Bond / NIDOS Effectiveness Programme 2009-16: Outline Change Pathway and Assumptions



## Assumptions to Test for this Change Pathway

### Level 1 Assumptions:

- **Bond and NIDOS** ways of promoting / sharing services enables the right people to use the right tools / services at the right time
- **Member organisations:**
  - Access tools / services at times when they can realistically apply them within their organisations
  - Promote an active culture for learning and improving

### Level 2 Assumptions (relating to immediate changes resulting from use of Bond/NIDOS tools and services):

Engagement with Bond / NIDOS tools and services acts as a motivator in itself for individuals and member organisations to build on their efforts to improve effectiveness

- **Individual practitioners who engage with tools and services:**
  - Are motivated and willing to share new learning
  - Have the capacity / influence to drive change forward within their organisations
- **Member organisations:**
  - Have capacity to absorb and apply new learning effectively to their programmes and practices
  - See the value of becoming more transparent and strive to improve their practices
  - Engage in open and useful collaboration with other INGOs and member organisations in relation to thematic areas of intervention

### Level 3 Assumptions (relating to expected short / medium term changes):

- **Member organisations:**
  - Apply new learning to / with partners in equitable and useful ways
  - See the benefit of including partners views in PMEL and do so more effectively
  - Have applied new learning / testing and programmes and practices have improved accordingly
  - Increasing numbers of NNGO's are motivated to improve their practices and effectiveness
- **Networks:**
  - Networks of common purpose drive new standards forward and promote them effectively
  - Collaboration around thematic areas leads to improved effectiveness in programming
- **Donors:**
  - Respect and reward evidence of improved effectiveness in INGOs

### Level 4 Assumptions (relating to longer term changes that the programme hopes to influence indirectly):

- **(Members') Partner organisations in the South:**
  - Have capacity to absorb and apply new learning effectively to their programmes and practices
  - See the value of becoming more transparent and strive to improve their practices
  - See the benefit of including beneficiaries' views in PMEL and do so more effectively
- **Donors:**
  - Continue to use NNGO's as primary vehicle for influencing positive change s for beneficiaries in the South

### Level 5 Assumption (relating to Bond / NIDOS vision of success and which it has little or no influence over)

- Effective CSOs can and do really result in improved quality of life for beneficiaries