



Evaluation Report

The Private Development Aid Project

**An Outcome Evaluation of a Royal Roads
University Graduate Student Research Project**

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Cover photo: Rolling hills among farmer fields on the outskirts of Moshi. Moshi, Tanzania. Photo: Carla Funk

The majority of this evaluation was carried out over 2018-2020, with a pause in the later half of 2020 that extended to 2022 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, other projects, and new collaborations. Through further testing and learning over this period, our thinking has evolved – particularly with respect to evaluation questions, outcome framing, mechanisms, and assumptions. We have chosen to maintain the report’s structure and analyses as originally conceptualized, accompanied with footnotes to indicate and explain where our thinking has since advanced. As the fifth case study, the PDAP evaluation serves as the last case in the first set of Royal Roads University graduate student case studies. New thinking and changes to our approach will be taken and reflected in all future evaluations moving forward.

Any views expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not necessarily represent the views of Royal Roads University, the principal investigator, the principal investigator’s institution, or financial sponsors.

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List of Acronyms

CEO	Chief executive officer
CAGP	Canadian Association of Gift Planners
CTC	Community Transformation Centre
DAC	Development Action Canada
DSocSci	Doctor of Social Sciences
ED	Executive director
EoP	End-of-project
HLO	High-level outcome
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IISS	International Interdisciplinary Social Sciences
KASR	Knowledge, attitudes, skills, and relationships
LTRM	Learning, Teaching and Research Model
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PDA	Private development aid
PDAP	Private Development Aid Project
PhiLab	Canadian Philanthropy Partnership Research Network
PI	Principal investigator
QAF	Quality Assessment Framework
RRU	Royal Roads University
SRE	Sustainability Research Effectiveness
SSHRC	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
SWD	Sense-making workshop discussion code
TDR	Transdisciplinary research
TI	Transform International
ToC	Theory of Change
UVic	University of Victoria

Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents an outcome evaluation of a research project undertaken by a Royal Roads University (RRU) Doctoral of Social Sciences (DSocSci) student. The Private Development Aid Project (PDAP) focused on understanding the perceived nature, reach, and influence of private development aid (PDA) as experienced by recipients of philanthropic giving in Moshi, Tanzania. PDA plays an increasingly significant role in the development arena, but research has not kept pace in providing a credible understanding of the current state of PDA, the influence of philanthropic giving in development, and how it can be effectively facilitated and enhanced. The project aimed to contribute to the academic discussion on the topic; inspire organizational change to encourage 'thriving' practices; and support the professional development of the student researcher as a scholar-practitioner, hereafter referred to as the principal investigator (PI). The outcome evaluation assesses whether and how the PDAP contributed to the improved management and practice of PDA organizations in Moshi and beyond.

Methodology

The evaluation investigates how the PDAP generated new knowledge, attitudes, skills, and relationships (KASR) among system actors to influence the practice of PDA organizations. The objective of this evaluation is to critically assess the project by collecting and analyzing information about its activities, outputs, and outcomes to support learning for research effectiveness. The evaluation is part of a series of case study evaluations of RRU graduate student research projects.

The evaluation applies the Outcome Evaluation approach, which is designed to assess research projects, specifically transdisciplinary research (TDR), sustainability science, research-for-development, and other change-oriented approaches (Belcher et al., 2020). The approach assesses whether and how a research project contributed to the realization of outcomes, using a Theory of Change (ToC) as the analytical framework. A ToC is a set of causal relations, hypotheses, and assumptions that model how and why a project is expected to lead or contribute to a change process. A ToC models research activities, outputs (i.e., knowledge and services), and outcomes (i.e., expected changes in KASR and behaviour), and provides a set of testable hypotheses about what actors (individuals and organizations) will be influenced by the research process and outputs, and how their resulting actions are expected to contribute to higher-level changes. The ToC is also used to define data needed and identify potential data sources to deductively test each change hypothesis (Belcher et al., 2020).

The evaluation team led a workshop with the PI in May 2018 to define the scope of the evaluation, retrospectively document (i.e., make explicit) the implicit ToC for the PDAP (Figure 1), and identify possible sources of evidence to empirically test the ToC. The Outcome Evaluation method collects participant and stakeholder perspectives to identify and assess project as well as external contributions to a change process (Belcher et al., 2020). To gather these perspectives, we conducted 23 interviews and reviewed relevant documents (e.g., proposals, dissertation, book chapters, press releases, websites) to answer the following evaluation questions for the outcome assessment:

1. Research Outcome Evaluation:

- a. *To what extent and how were outcomes realized?*
- b. *Were there any positive or negative unexpected outcomes from this project?*
- c. *Could the outcomes have been realized in the absence of the project?*
- d. *Were the project assumptions sustained?*
- e. *Are the higher-level changes likely to be realized?*

PDAP characteristics were assessed using Belcher et al.'s (2016) Transdisciplinary Research Quality Assessment Framework (QAF). QAF results indicate the extent to which the PDAP incorporated recognized quality criteria of TDR¹, organized under the principles of *Relevance*, *Credibility*, *Legitimacy*, and *Effectiveness*. In combination

¹ The QAF is not meant to be a measure of excellence, but rather characterizes the project design and implementation in terms of the extent of its transdisciplinarity.

with the outcome evaluation, the QAF highlights elements of research design and implementation that contributed to the realization of outcomes. The project assessment was guided by the following questions:

2. Research Project Assessment:

- a. *What elements of research design and implementation supported outcome realization, and how?*
- b. *To what extent and how did the project engage effectively with relevant stakeholders?*
- c. *To what extent were the research findings sufficiently relevant to achieve the stated objectives?*
- d. *To what extent are target audiences aware of and using project outputs? How are they using them?*
- e. *How does RRU support student success in research?*
- f. *What lessons about effective research practice can be learned from this case study?*

Data collection was mostly completed in 2018 and 2019. Results were analyzed and grounded in the context of social change theories to address shortcomings acknowledged within literature that the theoretical bases for many ToCs are weak (Weiss, 1997; Stachowiak, 2013). Researchers seldom make explicit the theories underlying why change is expected to manifest from their research. Social change theories applied to the evaluation include Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), Social Capital Theory (Putnam, 2000), and Community Organizing Theory (Biklen, 1983), which help explain some of the assumptions and social processes underpinning outcome realization.

Project Theory of Change

The guiding purpose of the PDAP was to empower communities by transforming the management and practice of PDA organizations. By gaining an understanding of the nature, reach, and influence of PDA from the perspective of recipients – both end-users (i.e., end-use recipients) and organizations that receive philanthropic funds (i.e., project implementers) – the PI aimed to develop lessons and recommendations to inform and improve ‘thriving’ PDA practice.

The project expected changes to manifest through three interconnected impact pathways. Within an *academic* pathway, the PDAP aimed to contribute to the academic knowledge base using findings from the literature review and empirical evidence of the Moshi case study. It was expected that the academic discussion on PDA would gain traction as other scholars and students use the findings and take up new lines of inquiry. With growing academic engagement on the topic, it was expected that the accumulation of scholarship over time would influence the practice of organizations. Under the *organizational capacity and practice* pathway, building trust and relationships with participating organizations and donors in combination with the sharing of PDAP findings back to these actor groups would serve to generate interest in the knowledge of how to make organizations ‘thrive’ and incentivize participating organizations to change their approach. The approaches taken in the fieldwork activities (e.g., conversational interview style, follow-up interview) and PI’s engagement with the wider PDA community in Moshi (e.g., *pro bono* services) were expected to foster relationship-building. As practitioners learn from and adopt PDAP findings, it was expected that PDA organizations would become better managed and coordinated. It was also expected that the sharing of findings with PDA practitioners and donors would influence their understanding and attitudes on the role of learning in PDA. As more organizations engage in ‘thriving’ PDA practices and as donors begin to support demand-driven PDA, there would be an observable shift in PDA toward an orientation of learning. It was expected that if PDA became learning-oriented, the development sector would be better informed and equipped to enhance the impacts of PDA projects and thus more effectively contribute to the empowerment of communities. The PDAP and the doctoral experience were expected to provide a significant *professional development* opportunity that would contribute to the enhancement of the PI’s expertise, research capacity, and recognition as a professional consultant and scholar-practitioner in the field. Through the literature review, fieldwork, and networking, the PI would gain insights into the role of PDA in the development sector, connections between PDA and tourism, organizational characteristics of PDA in Moshi, and lessons on ‘thriving’ versus ‘floundering’ organizations, which the PI could apply into their consulting work. With growing recognition of the PI as a PDA expert, it was expected that the PI would join new professional collaborations as a consultant, where application of relevant PDAP findings would influence the practice of organizations. Influence of the PI’s

consulting within the *professional development* pathway interconnects and strengthens expected changes in the *organizational capacity and practice* pathway. Together, all three pathways were expected to support PDA transformation. These key steps, expected changes, and pathways of the PDAP are illustrated in Figure 1.

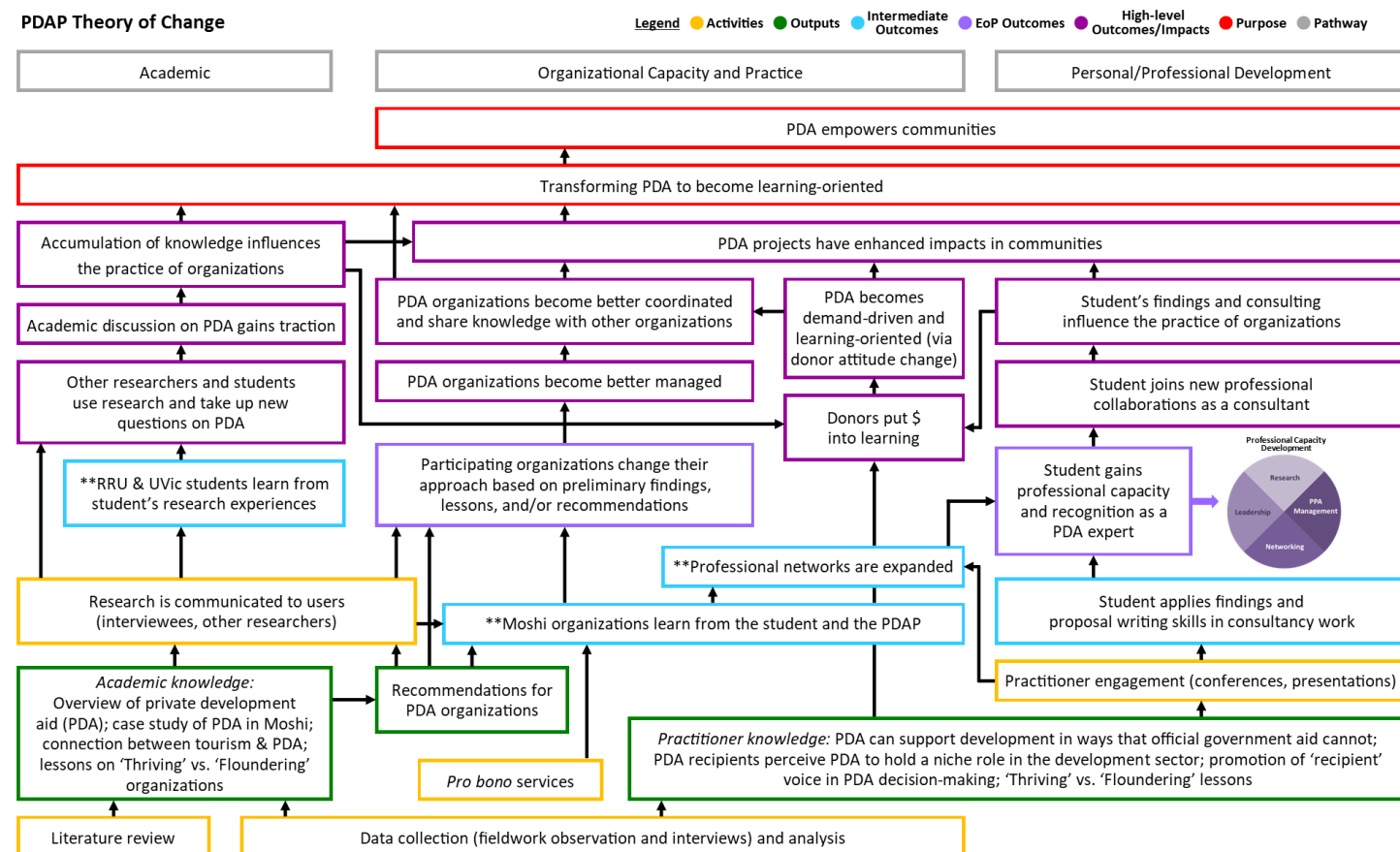


Figure 1. Simplified PDAP Theory of Change² (**) see footnote

Results

Outcome Evaluation: To what extent and how were outcomes realized?

Table 1 summarizes the extent to which outcomes were realized. The PDAP clearly contributed to the partial or full realization of all ten intermediate and end-of-project (EoP) outcomes. The project supported changes in knowledge of academics and practitioners within the PI's social network, as well as capacity-building of former participants, PDA practitioners, and the PI. The PDAP also resulted in changes in professional relationships for the PI. Outcomes in the *academic* and *professional development* pathways were mostly realized. Intermediate and EoP outcomes pertaining to the *organizational capacity and practice* pathways were either partially or fully realized as these changes were expected to occur amongst organizations that participated in the PDAP. However, high-level outcomes (HLO) and changes for PDA organizations more broadly have limited evidence to make a reliable assessment and may take time to materialize.

The PDAP employed four mechanisms of change across its three impact pathways, which include: increasing scientific knowledge and/or filling a knowledge gap; co-producing knowledge with participants; improving the capacity of system actors; and leveraging and/or enhancing reputation.

² A table showing the relationship between the simplified and more detailed Theory of Change can be found in Appendix 2.

** Based on our current thinking, boxes marked with a double asterisk state the theoretical reason for a change and are better conceptualized as theoretical assumptions rather than outcomes.

Table 1. Summary of outcome realization and project contributions

Outcome	Assessment
RRU and UVic students learn from the PI's research experiences [intermediate outcome]	Partially realized, clear project contribution
Other researchers and students use findings and take up new questions on PDA [HLO]	Not realized
Academic discussion on PDA gains traction [HLO]	Partially realized, clear project contribution
Accumulation of knowledge influences the practice of organizations [HLO]	Partially realized, clear project contribution
Moshi organizations learn from the student and the PDAP [intermediate outcome]	Realized, clear project contribution
Participating organizations change their approach based on preliminary findings, lessons, and/or recommendations [EoP outcome]	Partially realized, clear project contribution
PDA organizations become better managed [HLO]	Insufficient evidence
PDA organizations become better coordinated and share knowledge with other organizations [HLO]	Partially realized, clear project contribution
Donors put \$ into learning [HLO]	Not realized
PDA becomes demand-driven and learning-oriented (via donor attitude change) [HLO]	Partially realized, clear project contribution
The PI applies findings and proposal writing skills in consultancy work [intermediate outcome]	Realized, clear project contribution
The PI gains professional capacity and recognition as a PDA expert [EoP outcome]	Realized, clear project contribution
The PI joins new professional collaborations as a consultant [HLO]	Realized, clear project contribution
The PI's findings and consulting influence the practice of organizations [HLO]	Realized, clear project contribution
PDA projects have enhanced impacts in communities [HLO]	Insufficient evidence

The PDAP is one intervention among many processes that influence the academic agenda, the practice of PDA organizations, and professional growth. To account for complexity within the Moshi context and wider international systems, other interventions and contextual variables influencing the extent of outcome realization and how they were realized were assessed. Within the *academic* pathway, there have been many other scholars researching similar or parallel topics since the PI completed their doctoral research in 2016. While the PI has made an original contribution to the academic knowledge base, other scholars' work is likewise contributing to the academic discussion on PDA. Changes in *organizational capacity and practice* are influenced by the work of other system actors (i.e., large philanthropic foundations, practitioner networks, civil society organizations, thinktanks, etc.), which are slowly transforming PDA approaches. For example, there are growing trends toward local or place-based development, which are tailored to the context and more demand-driven than former one-size-fits-all development approaches (FP4, Res2). In the *professional development* pathway, several informants felt the PI was already an expert in PDA. While the PI has transferred and applied findings from the PDAP in their consulting work, the PI also draws upon their pre-doctoral practitioner experience. In terms of successes achieved in organizations in which the PI collaborates or consults, the PI recognized that these achievements are the result of team efforts, capacities, and commitment.

There were few unexpected outcomes, which is in part an artefact of the ToC's retrospective development, making the distinction between expected and unexpected outcomes difficult to discern. Most outcomes had already materialized when the ToC was documented; outcomes that were unexpected at the time of the PDAP's inception have been marked with a single asterisk (*) in the model. For example, the collaboration with Transform International (TI) did not directly arise through the activities of the PDAP, but arose via the unexpected opportunity to mentor within the DSocSci program. For some outcomes, it was not always clear how they would

manifest; the PI expected to transfer and apply PDAP findings in their future consulting work, but exactly which organizations would fall within the PI's sphere of influence could not be anticipated. Unexpected outcomes were positive and pertained to changes in all three pathways.

Project Assessment: *What elements of research design and implementation supported outcome realization, and how?*

The QAF assessment reveals that the PDAP's design and implementation aligns with many principles and criteria of relevant, credible, legitimate and effective research, and produced knowledge that is useful and used (see Appendix 7 for QAF results and justifications for the project assessment). Aligned with the *Relevance* principle, the PDAP identified and addressed a socially relevant research problem, clearly defined the socio-ecological problem, and effectively engaged with the problem context to design and implement a relevant project. Filling a knowledge-practice gap, especially in a highly specialized topic as philanthropic private aid, increased the relevance of the findings and likelihood that they would be used. The findings were also well-grounded in the literature and Moshi's unique PDA context. Both the PI's expertise in the topic and the approach taken during the fieldwork positioned the project well to influence change. However, a fully articulated ToC would have improved the project and resulting dissertation (i.e., by supporting research planning and strategy development around explicit outcomes). Regarding *Credibility*, it was evident that extensive preparation was undertaken to engage with diverse academic and grey literature to understand the problem context and design the research. The PDAP was guided by a clearly defined research problem, set of research questions, and appropriate methods that upheld the credibility of the findings. The PDAP was feasible, and the PI had adequate competencies to undertake the research. The project's credibility could have been strengthened if it had clearer objectives, stronger methodological and epistemological integration, and a more complete presentation of the limitations. Under *Legitimacy*, the PDAP took extensive steps to ensure the research was ethical. The PI's collaborative approach, investments in trust- and relationship-building, and inclusive engagement of a wide range of actors within Moshi's PDA community increased the trustworthiness of results. Yet, some aspects of the project's engagement and collaboration had potential to support intended outcomes had the project been co-designed with participants, but this was not possible to undertake and did not align with the exploratory focus for the PI. The *Effectiveness* principle manifested most clearly in the PDAP's contribution to knowledge and practical application of findings. The project also supported social capacity and contributed to significant outcomes. The PDAP generated evidence-based recommendations and strategically engaged PDA organizations in Moshi to position the research for use and inform organizational practice. Together, these characteristics supported the relevance, credibility, legitimacy, and effectiveness of the research process, the knowledge produced, and outcomes.

Lessons Learned

Project Lessons

- Leveraging the PI's professional reputation and fostering social capital with the community were effective strategies to collect and validate data, as well as support uptake of the findings.
- Building in social processes within (e.g., reflexive discussions, capacity-building) and outside of the research process (e.g., *pro bono* consulting offered in parallel) supported organizational change.
- Practical findings enable the implementation of knowledge-into-practice for effective decision-making and practice change.

Contextual Lessons

The PDAP was well-situated within Tanzania's specific problem context and appropriately framed to speak to broader PDA contexts. Entry points were drawn from literature gaps as well as the PI's professional experiences. These factors played a key role in the accomplishments of the PDAP and offer important contextual lessons for conducting research in Tanzania and research-for-development contexts like PDA.

- Systemic barriers may inhibit the research process and its intended outcomes. Future research on PDA or related development sectors in Tanzania must understand political context, and consider building in

engagements to foster governmental understanding, support, cooperation, and constructive policy change into the project in order to enhance PDA practice.

- Researchers must account for their role in the research, particularly when they are perceived as outsiders. The PI dedicated much energy over ten months of fieldwork to build relationships within Moshi's community and with participants that would support trust in the project and its findings. Other strategies could involve partnership with local researchers or organizations to support access and the negotiation of insider-outsider relations.
- The dearth of credible literature on the topic made it important that the PDAP was grounded in and triangulated across diverse literature, stakeholder perspectives, and empirical analyses to support the rigour of the research. Future research on PDA would benefit from the interweaving of literature and theory with participatory methods that elicit diverse stakeholder perspectives to ground findings and recommendations for practical application.

Evaluation Limitations

Limitations of the analytical framework: Retrospective documentation of a ToC can make the distinction between intended and unintended outcomes unclear. In the case of the PDAP, some outcomes identified during the ToC workshop were not expected at project inception (e.g., *Transform International collaboration*).

Limitations of the data and results: Assessments using the Outcome Evaluation approach rely on informant perspectives, which can be affected by several factors, including time. Interviews were conducted a few years after the project concluded, making recall of project details and processes difficult for informants. In addition, having the PI identify informants to test the outcomes can also increase the risk of introducing bias into data collection as informants may be selected for their likelihood to reflect positively on the project's results and outcomes. It is possible that informants willing to interview may predominantly come from 'thriving' organizations (creating a possibility for sampling bias as informants from the former participant group self-selected to participate); information regarding the type of organization that the informant came from was not disclosed to the evaluators. To address these limitations, snowballing for additional perspectives and sources of information was undertaken. The evaluation is a snapshot in a continual process; it is possible that further changes have or will occur following the publication of this evaluation. This evaluation captures evidence of PDAP influence prior to July 2019.

Recommendations

Considering the results of the case study evaluation, we propose the following recommendations for the design and implementation of future research:

1. Use a ToC to inform strategy and monitor progress.
2. Develop research objectives that clarify the structure and purpose of the project.
3. Utilize transdisciplinary and participatory methods to support co-generation and mutual learning.
4. Recognize the opportunity to benefit participants and wider system actors in the research process.