

The Discourse of Results in the Funding of NGO Development Education and Awareness Raising: An experiment in retrospective baseline reflection in the Norwegian context

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Abstract

Government-funded Development Education and Awareness-Raising (DEAR) programmes are under pressure to show results in many European countries, for a variety of reasons. But how can results be measured in cases where funding was originally given in an era before the current results-based language was in vogue or in use in this field of work? In this article, Arnfinn Nygaard, director of the RORG network in Norway, addresses this anomaly. He presents an experiment in 'retrospective baseline analysis' in a results-based mode, in an effort to find answers to this key question. He does so from the perspective of an engaged actor in the movement for improved DEAR in Norway and Europe.

Keywords: development education, awareness-raising, results-based management, public enlightenment, outcomes, impact

Introduction

At a seminar in Oslo on 24 March 2009, the Norwegian agency for development cooperation (Norad) encouraged debate about 'Funding of Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR) in a New Era'. There was a particular focus on a key question currently being asked in many countries around Europe: What are the results, after many years of public funding for NGOs to provide DEAR? Results-focused evaluation is currently very much in vogue, and supported by many who wish to increase and improve global learning, development education and awareness-raising. But in a long term perspective, how do we evaluate the results of policies, processes, programmes and projects that were not originally planned with such a focus? How do we establish baselines, ex-post? In this article, I present an experiment in retrospective baseline reflection in a results-based mode which attempts to find answers to this key question, and use this as a basis for assessing the results of government-funded DEAR in Norway.

In this article, I will discuss the issue of the results of Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR), after many years of government funding in Norway. In order to do that I will draw on the model of Results Based Management (RBM)¹, which has been used by the Norwegian agency for development cooperation when introducing the renewed emphasis on results to NGOs funded to carry out DEAR in Norway². According to this model, results, in the form of 'outcomes' or 'impact', should be assessed in relationship to a 'baseline' – the situation prior to the activities carried out. However, neither Norad, as the funding agency, nor any of the other stakeholders, had originally spelled out a clear baseline. An original explicitly-stated baseline is therefore missing.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to attempt, retrospectively, to identify the baseline in the mid-1990s when new guidelines for funding DEAR were established by the Government and the Parliament of Norway. On the basis of this retrospective analysis, I will discuss what kind of results we might be looking for as well as attempting to assess results to date. So, I propose to engage in a thought experiment – what might be described as 'retrospective baseline reflection'. Based on experience and documents from that time, I will try to build up a picture of the actual baseline or starting point which implicitly existed in the mid 1990s and then use this to reflect on subsequent results. I do this from the point of view of an engaged actor writing reflective activist history, as I was part of the NGO movement for DEAR throughout this period and am now the director of the RORG network³.

This debate about results and outcomes is also currently taking place in a number of other European countries. Issues relating to a focus on results and to the introduction of results-based language in planning and evaluation are currently being debated, inter alia, in Austria, Belgium, Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands and Portugal, to name a few. A recent Global Education Network Europe (GENE) initiative, entitled DESIRE (Development Education – Sharing Results, Impact and Evaluation), aims to bring these initiatives together to share learning (Frans and Wegimont, 2009:15-28). I hope that a Norwegian analysis might therefore provide an interesting case study in this emerging debate.

Norwegian Traditions and Concepts in Development Education

Norway has a long tradition of DEAR – among the longest in Europe. It started back in the early 1950s, when national fundraising for development assistance to India was initiated as the first step towards the establishment of Norad. This was followed by initiatives by the Government and actors within civil society to mobilise popular support for Norway as an active actor in development aid and development policies. NGO funding for DEAR expanded in 1977, after the establishment by Norad of a framework agreement arrangement to fund DEAR activities by key civil society actors. The concepts used at that time were *u-landsinformasjon* ('information about developing countries') or *bistandsinformasjon* ('information about aid'). The

stated aim was to increase popular knowledge of and support for Norwegian aid, as well as for increased official development assistance (ODA) budgets (Norad, 1984). Although not explicitly spelled out as a baseline, the results were easily measured by opinion polls on public support for ODA. Based on such a baseline one can only conclude that results in Norway have been extremely good. According to polls carried out by Statistics Norway (SSB), the percentage of the population in favour of ODA has increased steadily, from 72% in 1972 to 90% in 2006⁴.

However, new perspectives on DEAR had been emerging for some time. In the early 1990s a new concept was introduced which heralded a shift in the understanding of the content and objectives of DEAR in Norway. The new concept was 'North/South information', indicating a broader development perspective (i.e. beyond aid) and with an increased focus on wider North/South relationships beyond simply that of donor and recipient (Norad, 1992). This concept is still widely used, although more general concepts such as *opplysningsarbeid* ('enlightenment work') or *informasjonsarbeid* ('information work') which are implicitly linked to global development issues, are also used by many.

The substance of these concepts in Norwegian, however, is richer than the English term 'information'. When Norad started funding for *u-landsinformasjon* in the late 1970s, this support for 'information' was seen by many in the context of the Nordic tradition of popular enlightenment (or public enlightenment/citizenship education), in Norwegian *folkeopplysningstradisjonen*. This is part of a strong tradition of citizen movement and learning initiated by the Danish teacher, writer, poet, philosopher, historian, pastor, and politician N.S.F. Grundtvig (1783-1872). Thus, the concept of 'information' or 'awareness-raising' used in Norway should, in large part, be understood as linked to adult education and learning within a democratic process, much like other concepts used elsewhere in Europe, including development education and global learning. It should not be understood as 'information' as a one-way communication; and the common distinction in many European countries between 'development education' and 'development information' does not apply, because the concept of 'information' in this Norwegian context is seen as richer, more two-way, and related to peoples' movements, learning and political participation. In order to emphasise such dimensions, Norad is now considering the re-introduction of the concept *folkeopplysning* ('popular enlightenment') as a key concept for future funding arrangements (Norad, 2009).

In this article, I will use the term 'Development Education and Awareness Raising' (DEAR) to encompass this field in Norway.

The Discourse of Results in Development Education and Awareness Raising (DEAR)

'Results' is now a key buzzword, and European NGOs engaged in development aid abroad or DEAR at home are trained in the use of such vocabulary. In reporting to

their donors, NGOs are encouraged to move their focus from 'output' to 'outcome' and 'impact' and in their planning documents to identify 'achievable goals' and 'measurable indicators' and to discuss 'risks' ahead. They are also encouraged to establish a 'baseline' as a starting point for measuring results.

This focus on results is obviously much to be desired. We all wish to increase and improve the effect of the work that we do. The vocabulary and grammar of results-based evaluation is, of course, not new. Almost a decade ago, recognising the growing trend in this regard, the OECD surveyed emerging practice. Coming as it did from public sector reforms during the 1990s, and based on models of RBM, the OECD recognised the importance of this form of evaluation for development agencies and donor policies (Binnendijk, 2000). Its use has grown in the subsequent decade.

Of course, this way of improving practice through more rational planning is not only the preserve of 'results-based management'. The Logical Framework Approach (LFA) to planning and project design, for example, shares a similar concern. This approach is or has been used by many bilateral and multilateral donors, and by extension by many NGOs in the development arena. First developed in the US in the late 1960s, it became so popular as to be almost compulsory in the 1990s (cf. AusAid, 2005; Norad, 1999; World Bank, 2005). More recently, critique of the LFA approach has meant that while still used by many donors, it is now less prevalent than before⁵.

Nor is such a concern the preserve of development policy or organisational management alone. It has similar parallels in educational improvement. Here is how one philosopher of education describes similar earlier initiatives in the educational field:

'In the late 1970s, with colleagues in the college of education where I worked, I was formally introduced to a model of teaching that promised, we were told, spectacular improvements in the quality of our students teaching, if only they (and we as their mentors) would use it as a blueprint in planning and conducting lessons. This model was called the behavioural objectives model. Teachers ... would formulate very specific goals ... for each lesson ... and then plan their teaching as a series of instrumental steps towards the achievement of these goals. The pre-specification of intended learning outcomes would be the primary requirement for effective teaching.... and at the same time it would provide a clear cut criterion for evaluating the success of their endeavours' (Dunne, 1993)⁶.

Sound familiar?

Leaving aside philosophical and critical considerations for the time being, I wish to examine one particular challenge from the perspective of a results-based approach. I outline the challenge below:

Many attempts have been made by different actors to prove that 'aid works', but the discourse among donors, NGOs, researchers and critics on the results of aid continues to be marked by a lack of agreement⁷. Measuring the results of DEAR may be even more difficult, and is certainly different. Funders and actors around Europe

have hunted for results, often without knowing what they were actually looking for. The discourse is also often just as much about goals as it is about results. Many plans are made both on a project basis as well as within a framework of yearly progress based on annual plans and budgets. Aims are often vaguely formulated (such as 'enhanced support' and 'deeper understanding'), and what is measurable (such as circulation, visits, number of participants, user satisfaction, etc.) are often dubious indicators which may say something about the project's ability to attract attention or satisfy users, but not about their content or quality as DEAR. Even where multi-annual funding exists, the focus is relatively short term in accordance with multi-year strategic documents (usually 3, 4 or, at maximum, 5 years). Education systems, on the other hand, change slowly, and consider change in terms of decades.

So, measuring results in DEAR is difficult. Still we wish to do so. But what if you seek to identify results in a long-term frame and the plans were made before results-based planning was either popular or profitable? How do we provide a baseline which can help us to understand the results achieved, when the intended results were not written down explicitly in the first place?

Asking for results on a national level after many years of funding may thus be regarded as too ambitious. However, before even attempting to measure and document results, it may be useful to start with some reflection on what kind of baseline and results we are actually looking for.

The Early and Mid 1990s

When evaluating results of many years of work, it is important to know the history. From the late 1970s, the stated aim of DEAR in Norway was to increase popular knowledge of and support for Norwegian aid, as well as increased ODA budgets (Norad, 1984). This was to change in the early and mid 1990s. When I started working for the RORG network in 1992, I found myself in the middle of a conflict. DEAR was under pressure and from that time two particular debates were prevalent. One was a debate, dominant within the aid community, which argued that 'one krone [Norwegian currency] spent on DEAR at home is one krone less for the poor in Africa'. The other debate, found particularly within the funding institutions, asked: 'Why should we fund NGOs that only criticise us?'

This scepticism must be understood in the context of the perceived 'aid fatigue' at that time, which was the result of years of continued reports in the media of 'white elephants', corrupt leadership in the recipient countries and failed aid. Polls by Statistics Norway in 1990 showed that public support for ODA was at 78%, down from 85% in 1986⁸. In an op-ed in the Norwegian Daily *Dagbladet* in 1991, the new director of Norad, Mr Per Ø. Grimstad, explained his concern: 'I'm in serious doubt about development cooperation. My concern is fundamental and existential: does aid work? Do we approach these matters in the right way? Do the results match our efforts?' (Grimstad, 1991). This statement caused grave concern among aid workers.

I believe this is a fair description of the situation at the time, and reflects the key concerns that were prominent within the funding institutions as well as the wider policy contexts which needed to be addressed by DEAR. These might be summarised in three main points:

- Development aid, as well as DEAR, was under pressure and criticism.
- 'White elephants' and a lack of perceived results from aid had contributed to 'aid fatigue'.
- In the debate on international development issues, aid was the main focus, and a key concern was that aid levels were at risk.

However, this situation and understanding of the role and mission of DEAR by those advocating it was challenged by others within the funding institutions, by politicians and also by NGOs.

In the debate over this, two different approaches on how to address the situation emerged. Norad was in the process of changing its information policies with greater focus on its main task: Norwegian bilateral assistance, with a special focus on 'good examples' to counter widespread criticism. The NGOs, however, wanted a broader and more holistic approach to global development issues and refused to accept what they perceived as a process by which Norad assigned them to a role as 'propagandists for Norwegian development aid'⁹.

The widening gap between Norad and NGOs in the early 1990s had to be addressed. Norad established a 'resource group', with representatives from both NGOs and Norad, to make recommendations on the future of DEAR cooperation in Norway. The report, which heralded a fundamental change in DEAR in the country, concluded:

'DEAR should be linked to educational work in a holistic North/South perspective. The main objective is to help create understanding and public support for Norwegian North/South-policies that can contribute to the global changes that are necessary for a global development that is economically, ecologically, socially and politically sustainable.' (Norad, 1992)

A major shift made by the report was that DEAR was no longer seen as an effort merely in support of ODA and increased ODA budgets, but in support of global sustainable development (of which ODA can, of course, be a part). This was an understanding of the challenges of DEAR largely shared by NGOs, and these perspectives influenced the work of the government-appointed North-South/Aid Commission in its subsequent report *Nord-Sør/Bistandskommisjonen* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 1995a). The Commission, established to advise the government on North-South/aid policies, formulated for the first time what was to later become the basis for government policies on DEAR. These perspectives on DEAR were also to a large extent later adopted by the government in a Report to the Parliament on Development Policies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1995b) and, subsequently, by the Parliament (Stortinget, 1996).

The result was that Norad funding for DEAR through NGOs was guided by the understanding of the report of North-South/Aid Commission (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1995a). This report outlined its view of the development context, stating:

'Norway shares responsibility as an actor in a global society where poverty, unjust distribution, pollution and the use of resources are challenges for a common responsibility. A development paradigm that will ensure welfare and human dignity for all must increasingly be managed within global democratic structures.'

It went on to outline the role of information and awareness-raising work in this context:

'Information and awareness-raising is important to induce changes, but also to create acceptance of such changes. The information work shall contribute to providing broad layers of the Norwegian society with knowledge of and insights into the global challenges facing us. The follow-up of the recommendations of the Commission on Norway's North-South policy depends on the positive support and understanding of public opinion. We have to acknowledge that we are in a process of global change that will require critical engagement and a search for new insights and new solutions. Information and awareness-raising thus have to be understood in a broader perspective aiming at stimulating active popular participation in these processes of change.'

The report went further and elaborated its understanding of the goal of this work:

'It has to be a main goal for information and awareness raising to prepare a political will within broad layers of the population for the consequences required by global sustainable development. Such a development will require, inter alia, a change to sustainable production and consumption patterns, and changes in the unjust distribution of resources and wealth in the world. In such a process of change it is clear that there are both common and competing interests. If attitudes are negative, the danger will increase for changes being enforced through crisis, force and war.'

The subsequent government report to the parliament (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1995b), building on the report of the commission just cited, also made a strong point about the importance of bringing in perspectives and views from the South. A majority on the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee also stressed the importance of stimulating critical engagement and debate.

Thus, through a political process between 1992 and 1996, the foundation was laid for a new understanding of the challenges facing DEAR to be approved by government and Parliament. This basis, and the context in which it arose, in my view, should be seen as the baseline for a present-day assessment of the results of DEAR since the mid 1990s.

This shift also acknowledged that Norad, as well as other development actors, might have other needs that guide their individual information strategies, and that these should not be confused with the aims of government funding for DEAR. Thus, as funding for DEAR within this new contextual understanding continued, Norad, for their own part, followed a new information strategy approved in 1994 with the stated goal of 'creating engagement and acceptance for Norad's goals and methods' (Norad, 1994).

Thus, in light of this suggested baseline and the new goals and understanding of DEAR that was established, the question is: What results have been achieved by DEAR in Norway since the early and mid 1990s?

Retrospective Baseline Reflection

Looking back at more than 15 years of engagement with promoting and developing the field of DEAR in Norway, I suggest that the main outcomes are to be found within four areas:

- a decisive shift of focus from aid to broader development policies/issues that are beyond and outside of the discourse on aid and donor/recipient relationships;
- increased critical and necessary debate on key development issues from a global perspective as a result of the establishment of broad political acceptance of the principle that the state finances its critics;
- increased knowledge of and insight into Southern views and perspectives through contacts and relationships that are different from, and additional to, historical donor/recipient relationships;
- increased understanding and commitment among young people in relation to broader policy issues on development and interdependence.

The main impact, however, has been a fundamental change in the way the Norwegian government and many Norwegians understand and address the global challenges of our time¹⁰. These views will be further elaborated below, based on my assessment of the baseline in the mid 1990s.

Outcomes and Impact

In my view, Norad's funding to NGOs for DEAR has resulted in a number of important outcomes which have had a significant impact on how Norway and many Norwegians understand and address key global challenges (poverty, environment, justice, power, etc.) in our time. The most important outcomes are to be found within the following areas:

1. *A decisive shift of focus from aid to broader development policies/issues beyond and outside of the discourse on aid and donor/recipient relationships.* NGO-funding for DEAR has played a major role in shifting the focus of the debate on international development cooperation from aid to broader development policies and issues; an essential prerequisite for improving the results of international development cooperation, including aid. Norad (especially in the 1990s) often ended up in a defensive position, pushing a message of 'aid works'. Meanwhile NGOs (thanks to Norad's funding for DEAR) were able to move forward on a broader development agenda, focusing on issues like sustainable production and consumption, third world debt, trade issues, climate change, tax justice and

other issues related to the unequal distribution of power in the world community and international financial institutions, as well as domestic policy issues linked to development policy in a global perspective. This change of focus and understanding is very much present in recent government white papers and reports to the Parliament, and in particular in the report of the government-appointed Committee on Development Policy (*Utviklingsutvalget*; see Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008), the recent government reports to the Parliament on development policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009a) and foreign policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009b).

2. *Improved critical and necessary debate on key development issues from a global perspective.* The NGOs have had a breakthrough in stressing the role of civil society not just as service providers in the South, but as 'watch dogs' as well as 'lead dogs' in the North, achieving political consensus in parliament for the basic principle that the state should fund its own critics. This has opened up and stimulated, with the strong participation of NGOs, a lively and critical debate on global development issues and policies. This has been crucial for mobilising a critical civil society in a country where the alternative to state-funding has been and is fund-raising. This forces NGOs to choose a role either as competitors in the humanitarian fund-raising market or as supporters to the current government. Critical debate is crucial for the improvement of development policies. In addition, the shift of focus to a broader development agenda has provided space for engagement and participation in the debate by groups that have previously been excluded due to their critical views on aid.
3. *The South – from passive aid recipients to key actors.* The 'aid era' has been characterised by a paternalistic perspective and approach where 'we' in the rich countries offer to help 'them' in poor countries. DEAR has been important to bringing in other and critical perspectives from different voices in the South by facilitating South/South and North/South exchanges and meetings that go beyond the historical donor/recipient relationships. A systematic focus on bringing in views and perspectives from the South on key global development issues, including a critical focus on domestic issues in Norway (e.g. management and ethical guidelines of the Norwegian Sovereign Wealth Fund, commonly known as the oil-fund; trade policies; climate issues; Norwegian policies within the international financial institutions; corporate social responsibility; consumption; etc.), has contributed to a change in the way that Norway and Norwegians look at the South. In other words, Southern nations are no longer looked upon solely as war-torn and poor, or their people simply as poor and begging for money. Southern intellectuals, policymakers, and representatives of social movements are instead increasingly seen as critically important development actors, pushing the South's varied interests and differing development

agendas. They are also increasingly being backed by policies and actions emanating from the growing financial and political powers of the South.

4. *Increased engagement on global development issues among young people.* One encouraging outcome, in my opinion, is that young Norwegians have become increasingly interested in global development issues based on the understanding that aid alone will not help unless the broader development and justice issues are dealt with effectively. This trend has been visible through the increased interest in development studies within higher education (Bjergene, 2004), the large number of applicants for jobs in Norad and NGOs, and the enthusiastic engagement shown by new youth organisations within established development NGOs¹¹. In addition, it is most encouraging to note that these young people, to a greater extent than young people in the 1970s and 1980s, are more concerned with a critical approach than with ideological purity, and more interested in solutions than problems.

Summing up the change in position from the presumed baseline presented above to the situation as it pertains today, we may outline the situation thus:

From a baseline where understanding of global development issues was focussed on aid and marked by 'aid fatigue', the knowledge of and commitment to justice and development policy issues in a global perspective has changed dramatically. This is true of Norwegian society in general, in development policies (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009a) and perhaps particularly among young people. This change can be characterised as moving in a direction that might form a better basis for 'creating understanding and public support for Norwegian North/South policies that can contribute to the global changes that are needed for a global development that is economically, ecologically, socially and politically sustainable' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1995b).

NGOs active in DEAR, thanks to financial support from Norad and inspired by a change of concepts from 'information about developing countries' to 'North/South information', have played a prominent role in this process of changed understanding and perspectives. Today there is a broad political consensus behind this change, as expressed by the two recent government reports to the Parliament (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009a and b). It is also very encouraging that both the Minister of Environment and International Development, Mr. Erik Solheim¹², as well as Foreign Minister, Jonas Gahr Støre¹³, when launching their respective reports, emphasised the need for debate and reflection on new and broader development policy challenges. However, these changes are vulnerable. Despite a changed perspective on global development challenges having reached political prominence today, historical and paternalistic stereotypes of donor/recipient relationships are still widespread as a result of a powerful and active donor lobby which is still focused on aid relationships, fund-raising and the promotion their own work.

In Conclusion

In this article, I have sought to provide a retrospective baseline analysis in order to reflect on some of the results of decades of support for DEAR in Norway. Examining documentary evidence from the early nineties, I have built up a picture of the baseline from which these results might be judged. Of course, the reflection itself must be judged, in terms of both its adequacy and its appropriateness, by those, like myself, who were involved at the time. While this reflection has focused primarily on the quality of public debate, it might also have reflected on other dimensions, including institutional arrangements, curricular integration, building capacity among civil society, etc. The results and outcomes suggested are, of course, difficult to attribute to specific activities; but this is not a challenge to DEAR alone (cf. Smutylos n.d.).

The preceding is offered as a thought experiment for others involved in attempting, after the fact, to reflect on the results of work to which they have been committed, and the effects of which they have witnessed and are engaged in improving. With other, diverse reflections, a more complex baseline and a richer tapestry of reflection on the results that we have, and the results we wish to obtain, might well be devised.

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Notes

1 For an overview of the literature of Results Based Management as it relates to development, education and development education, see Frans and Wegimont (2009: 1-14).

2 This is evidenced, for example, by a Norad presentation at a course for NGOs engaged in DEAR on 13 March 2009.

3 It is important to note that it is not possible to develop a neutral or objective baseline for DEAR, because it is explicitly or implicitly based on a particular understanding of what the most important objectives of DEAR are.

4 See <http://www.ssb.no/uhjelphold/>.

5 For recent debate on the mutation of LFA and alternatives see <http://mande.co.uk/2009/coming-events/workshops/bond-quality-group-%e2%80%93-debate-on-logframes/>.

6 Dunne goes on to indicate that the philosophical roots of this model of educational improvement – and similar movements ‘in other fields such as political activity, organisational and management practice, psychotherapy, and community development’ (1993: 8) has its philosophical roots in a particular form of rationality and a particular understanding of the relationship between theory and practice.

7 This was, for example, clearly demonstrated in Norway in 2007 when there was intense public debate and focus on issues related to ODA and its results, with different views and perspectives presented by academics,

researchers, politicians and representatives from Norad and civil society. A collection of links to the debate are available at <http://www.rorg.no/Artikler/1582.html>.

8 See <http://www.ssb.no/uhjelphold/>.

9 A joint letter from NGOs to the Minister for Development Cooperation, Ms. Grethe Faremo on 10 January 1992 makes this point strongly. The author of this article, who started to work with the RORG network in February 1992, was, needless to say, on one side of this debate.

10 As evidenced, for example, by the *Report to the Storting* [Parliament] *no 13 (2008-2009)* on development policies and the subsequent decision to produce an annual report to the Parliament on 'how other Norwegian policy areas influence the combined Norwegian policies towards poor countries' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009a).

11 Several Norwegian development NGOs such as Norwegian Church Aid, Save The Children and the Development Fund have, during the last ten to fifteen years, established youth organisation that have featured prominently in the media as development activists moving beyond aid and focussing on a variety of development issues, such as debt, trade, arms export, tax justice, etc.

12 Minister Solheim said at the launch of the report that he 'hoped it would inspire continuous debate on the big issues of our time' (see http://media01.smartcom.no/Microsite/dss_01.aspx?eventid=4048).

13 At the launch of the report, Mr. Støre said that: 'Through the process and the report I have wished to engage in reflection and debate' (see <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/ud/presesenter/pressemeldinger/2009/hovedlinjer.html?id=549415>).

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