Reflections on Peacebuilding Evaluation

The original theory of change
DEAR READERS OF NEW ROUTES 3/2008

This issue has a thematic focusing on impact/outcome assessment of peacebuilding and for the first time in the history of New Routes we have a guest editor, Ms. Cheyanne Church. It is a great pleasure to introduce her to you.

Ms. Church has been involved in peacebuilding research and practice around the world with specific geographic expertise in West Africa, the Balkans and Northern Ireland. She teaches at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, USA and is the West Africa Liaison for the Reflection on the Peace Practice project of Collaborative for Development Action. In this role Ms. Church has been a peacebuilding advisor to the United Nations Mission in Liberia as well as working with a number of peacebuilding agencies in Liberia. She also works as an evaluation consultant, and has conducted projects in Kosovo, Bosnia, Serbia, Ireland, DR Congo, and Burundi.

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Hopefully, you will find the articles in this issue very interesting and readable. As always, your comments and questions are most welcome. You can direct them either to Cheyanne Church (cheyanne.church@tufts.edu) or to the address below.

Kristina Lundqvist, ordinary editor of New Routes

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Contents

3 Peacebuilding Evaluation: From Infancy to Teenager
Cheyanne Church

7 May I ask, where is my reconciled heart?
Hannah Tsadik

11 Forget impact: Concentrate on Measuring Outcomes
Christoph Spurk

15 Circling and Framing Peacebuilding Projects
Reina Neufeldt

19 Demystifying Impacts in Evaluation Practice
Peter Woodrow/Diana Chigas

23 Randomisation: A New Approach to Measure Impact of Peacebuilding Interventions
Isak Svensson & Erik Brattberg

25 Life & Peace Institute and Evaluation: A Lesson Learnt
Adrian Calvo-Valderrama

27 News and Reviews
EDITORIAL:

Peacebuilding Evaluation: From Infancy to Teenager  
Cheyanne A. Church

With the creation of the United Nations (UN) Peacebuilding Fund in 2006, peacebuilding became formally institutionalised in an organisation that marks ‘the establishment’ of the international community. This new office followed the pattern seen in many multi-mandate international non-governmental organisations, such as Catholic Relief Services or CARE, who over the past decade have formalised peacebuilding into their mandate and staffing structures. The consequence of this is that peacebuilding is no longer the domain of a few small non-governmental organisations and with exposure come critique, debate and questions.

One such critique is that little hard evidence exists on the effectiveness of existing peacebuilding strategies, as overall the achievements of the peacebuilding field are hard to identify. This offers both an opportunity and a dilemma. An opportunity exists as the field is wide open for interpretation and innovation in terms of devising peacebuilding approaches and evaluation methodologies: an opportunity that New Routes is taking advantage of, with the hope that this edition will contribute to the advancement of evaluation of peacebuilding.

Conversely a dilemma exists as to what exactly constitutes peacebuilding. There appears to be two primary camps. The first ascribes to a wide definition including changes that more closely resembles a state-building agenda, such as changes in governance, unemployment and rule of law. The second camp offers a more narrow interpretation, including only those activities that focus on issues and actors that are critical to stopping violence from re-erupting.

Evidence of the differing interpretations can be clearly seen if one compares the type of work that are recommended for application of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development Guidance on Evaluating Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding with the variety of projects which qualified for funding from the Peacebuilding Fund in Burundi. Pending the camp one finds oneself in, there is a danger that those in the other camp deem peacebuilding as ineffective as it has not achieved their perception of the intended peacebuilding purpose. The need is great to identify the boundaries of what is and what is not peacebuilding and, within that, which interventions are the most effective at catalysing the critical changes sought by peacebuilding.

This edition of New Routes does not take a uniform position on this question, as a consensus was not sought amongst the authors as to what qualifies or not as peacebuilding. This is not an ideological stand on the issue, but rather a pragmatic response to multiple authors in numerous countries with different perspectives.

As an introduction to the topic, this article provides an overview of the evolution of peacebuilding evaluation in an attempt to situate each of the following articles within the broader discourse. It should be noted that this article sits within the second camp referenced above, with a belief that peacebuilding needs to focus on the key actors or factors that can cause or stop violence.

Before discussing the field’s evolution, some time needs to be spent in understanding the meaning of evaluation. Generic definitions abound in the evaluation literature (see Rossi, Quinn Patton, Scriven, Weiss). This article proposes a definition that builds from, and is informed by, this body of knowledge, yet also reflects the field of peacebuilding.

As such, peacebuilding evaluation is the use of social science data collection methods to investigate the quality and value of interventions which seek to stop violence from re-igniting or promote a positive change in the conflict context.

Though the evaluation field itself often uses the terms merit and worth, in peacebuilding evaluation the quality and value of the intervention is more appropriate. In this case quality refers to the manner in which the programme is conceived and implemented. The conception component makes reference to the analytical grounding that the intervention is based upon as well as the articulation of a clear hypothesis as to why a particular intervention will catalyse a specific and explicit change (commonly called a theory of change).

The value concept captures the notion of significance of the change to the participant communities. In other words has the intervention effected a change that the participant communities identify as significant vis à vis the conflict in their communities.

Consider, for example, an evaluation that seeks to identify if a training module is easy to understand, accurately conveys key conflict resolution concepts and is based on an identified gap in skills and knowledge relevant to conflict transformation in the participants. These evaluations are focused on the concept of quality. There are a large number of evaluations that stop at this point without investigating the ‘value’ of the training itself. In this case including the complimentary ‘value’ focus would have the evaluation investigate what change was effected in participants who went through the training and whether that had an effect, positive or negative, on the conflict in their com-
munity. Looking at quality without value is like assessing how well a teacher performs in a school without testing the learning of their students.

**Being a teenager**

In the past five years, the field of peacebuilding evaluation matured from its infancy into an awkward, sometimes confused, at moments precious and other times disappointing teenager. Like any teenager, it is full of untapped potential that needs to be supported and nurtured if it is to develop.

- There are some aspects of the field which have rapidly grown, such as the attention on understanding impact at the societal level. This is explored in two articles in this edition. It is recommended to read the article by Christoph Spurk first, as it describes some foundational concepts in evaluation before arguing that the attention placed on impact is misplaced. Conversely the article by Chigas and Woodrow lay out the opposite sentiment advocating that evaluation must consider the effects of programming on the societal level.

A second area of notable expansion has been the infusion of evaluative language into the peacebuilding community. In 2000, terms such as output, strategic objective or impact were relatively foreign to this field. These terms are now common parlance amongst the majority of peacebuilding practitioners. However, they are often used without precision, either to their original meaning as defined by the evaluation community or to a peacebuilding specific interpretation. That said, there has been some effort to adapt some terms so that they have meaning within a peacebuilding context. For instance, modifying the standard impact definition of ‘the longer-term changes resulting from an intervention’ to ‘a change in the conflict’ adheres to the original notion whilst also grounding it within a peacebuilding reality. It should be noted, however, that this is not a commonly understood adaptation amongst peacebuilding practitioners.

Another area where there has been a real change is that of the acceptance of evaluation as a new fact of life in the average peacebuilding agency or project. In the late nineties there was an explicit resistance to any form of evaluation within agencies which has now decreased significantly. One of the reasons that the field has overcome its resistance is the emphasis on peacebuilding evaluation as a learning tool.

This decrease in active resistance however, cannot be equated to a whole-hearted integration of quality monitoring and evaluation into peacebuilding agencies. To be sure there are some agencies, such as the Life & Peace Institute (LPI) or Pact, who are proactively engaging and developing their own tools.

- LPI’s experience in engaging with evaluation is described in the article by Adrian Calvo-Valderrama.

However, the norm for peacebuilding projects is to treat monitoring and evaluation like North Americans treat eating healthy and exercise; everyone knows they should do it, but when the choice comes between the chocolate cake and the carrot, the cake normally wins. The same goes with the choice between allocating time and resources towards expanded or continued programming versus an in-depth evaluation or monitoring system; more often then not programming will be chosen. The current reality is that the average peacebuilding projects only do what is required by donor regulations and find that it gives them marginal, if any, return. This limited benefit often reinforces the notion that evaluation is simply a donor requirement that has limited utility for a practitioner and thus supports the negative sentiment of not investing further resources.

Another growth area of the field is the number of peacebuilding evaluators. In the past five years, the number of agencies who market specialised services in peacebuilding evaluation as well as independent consultants who claim expertise in this area has gone up dramatically. In 2001 finding people who had even indirectly been involved in conducting peacebuilding evaluations was difficult. Conversely the current number of companies bidding for United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Indefinite Quantity Contracts for evaluation services with conflict management and mitigation expertise required has increased. Having more people working and thinking on this issue should bode well to advance the field which can be seen in the increase in resource materials made available in the past few years.

- Further new methodologies are being developed or adapted, for example randomisation as a methodology for impact evaluation as described in the Svensson and Bratthberg article.

Though it is hoped that more heads are better for the field, there is also some evidence to suggest that claiming peacebuilding evaluation expertise and possessing quality evaluation skills and expertise are not synonymous.

Another area of growth, though still relatively nascent, is the new focus on change. In this case, the concept of ‘theories of change’ – why it is believed that certain activities will lead to certain changes – has received the most attention from both researchers and practitioners.

- The article by Chigas and Woodrow as well as Neufeldt both touch on the concept of theories of change.

Fewer strides have been made in specifying what exactly peacebuilding is seeking to achieve, despite it being part of the theory of change discussion. Generally that element is left very broad and is often conceptually ill-defined or too ambitious. Instead, peacebuilding practitioners have a tendency to discuss the activities – workshops, training, media campaigns – that they would like to conduct instead of identifying the specific changes that they seek to create. This complicates the work of an evaluator as it is rarely clear as to what the project sought to achieve, as the focus has been on the work the agency will do.

- Reina Neufeldt provides an insightful look at the two distinct schools of thought that have emerged with regard to designing peacebuilding projects – circulars and framewokers.

This lack of specificity is starting to be addressed, as work that identifies the different types of change that a peacebuilding agency can catalyse becomes more prominent. Whether drawn from the evaluation field (see Quinn Patton, Rossi) or from recent developments in the peacebuilding evaluation (see Church and Rogers or The Matrix Plus, Reflecting on Peace Practice) the different forms of change possible are being articulated. These range from the individual level – attitude, knowledge, skills – to the communal or societal level – structural, system and cultural norms.
The path to maturity

If the evaluation of peacebuilding field is to mature out of its adolescent years into a functioning, effective area that contributes positively to social change, then a series of developments need to occur. Four milestones have been identified that would help advance the field towards a state of young adulthood.

First, it is apparent to anyone who lurks on an evaluation listserv that the number of evaluations of peacebuilding interventions is on the increase. This numerical increase does not necessarily mark a percentage increase of projects evaluated due to the expansion of the number of peacebuilding interventions that the field has experienced. That said, what is not increasing at a proportional rate is the number of accessible evaluations that are circulating amongst the peacebuilding community. For instance, few agencies make their evaluations publicly accessible through their website. For those that do, Search for Common Ground (SFCG) being one, it is only after serious and oft protracted internal debate. Further, even fewer agencies have official policies that articulate the conditions that need to be met in order for an evaluation to be released to an interested party or be made public.

The consequence of this is serious and significant. First, it contributes to the often lamented ‘reinventing of the wheel’ phenomenon. Evaluations are a means of recording history – albeit in a snap-shot fashion. As international staff rotate through agencies the institutional memories tend to be quite short, with the result that projects can be developed that have already been implemented years prior. Secondly, evaluations can provide valuable injections of ideas as to what is possible for agencies to build upon. Finally, greater sharing of evaluations would enable some systematic analysis of both peacebuilding and evaluation process, with the hope of developing some knowledge contributions to the field.

Consider the situation in Liberia at present. The international funding for peacebuilding was at its height between 2003 and 2006 with numerous agencies having large peacebuilding multi-year grants. Around 2006, the donor focus turned to development and governance with only small pools of peacebuilding funding available. As such, all but a few of the agencies who were conducting peacebuilding programming in this period either closed their doors or shifted their focus to align to the development agenda of the donor community.

When the Peacebuilding Fund allocated 15 million dollars to Liberia, in January of 2008 to support peacebuilding projects, the international staff in the UN and non-governmental organisations were, by in large, not familiar with what has been implemented previously. This results in projects being developed without the benefit of the historical context which can lead to duplication or missed opportunities to build from previous efforts.

As such the first milestone is transparency. Peacebuilding agencies need to adopt official evaluation policies that enable the public to access evaluations. As holders of public money, it is the public’s right to know the effectiveness of the use of the funds. With the greater availability of evaluations some meta-analysis would be possible which could contribute to the debates referenced earlier on what is peacebuilding and which are effective strategies. Possibly an annual learning summary, similar to that currently produced by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action could also be produced.

The second milestone is the inclusion of monitoring as a regular and integrated part of programme implementation. If evaluation is a teenager, then monitoring is the baby brother. In order for monitoring to become the norm, a few things need to happen. First, a recognition that monitoring to meet donor reporting requirements will rarely inform the programme team’s decision.
making, because the points of relevance for the different actors rarely align. For instance, a donor may wish to know the reduction in inter-ethnic criminal incidents reported to the police over the past quarter, as they have an overarching agenda to reduce this form of crime. For a peacebuilding agency, this may be interesting, but not useful as their project is working on inter-ethnic dialogue which seeks to increase trust between the leadership of the two communities, which may or may not relate to criminal activity. Such agencies need to identify the information that would help them make better decisions during the implementation and collect data accordingly.

Further, peacebuilding lends itself very well to participatory techniques of monitoring that can be integrated into the intervention as part of the programmatic-effort rather than an additional activity. Generally this builds on the competencies that already exist amongst peacebuilding staff. Finally, with the production of quality monitoring data, evaluators will be able to focus on the thornier questions of sustainability or describing how the change occurred, instead of gathering information on what happened throughout the life of the project. This should produce more valuable and useful evaluations to agencies.

The third milestone for the evaluation of peacebuilding field is to start to develop some indexes for comparison. Related to the first milestone of transparency, this one would contribute to a greater ability to understand what is expected as ‘reasonable quality and value’, thus making the judgement element of evaluation less subjective and more based on industry norms.

An example may be useful in illustrating this point. In a SFCG Sierra Leone evaluation a survey was conducted of listeners to their radio programmes. One finding from this survey stated that, “53.8 percent of 2004 respondents felt that programmes improved the lives of children ‘very much’”, while “54 percent of respondents believe the information within the radio programmes is true”. Are these findings average — to be expected of a decent radio programme given the situation of post-war Sierra Leone? Or are they outstanding considering what is thought of other radio programmes or underwhelming? It is near impossible to know, as rarely do evaluations have the resources to compare against other active programmes. As such what is a professional evaluator to conclude from these findings?

It is clear that peacebuilding, unlike public health or education, will never have statistics, equations or matrices that specifically articulate success or not. That said some form of mechanism that enables greater comparison and takes into account the contextual factors would be enormously beneficial.

The fourth milestone is the professionalisation of evaluation practice as applied to peacebuilding. As a frequent attendee at the American Evaluation Association (AEA) annual conference, it is surprising how little cross-over there is between the AEA community and the peacebuilding evaluator community. To be sure the focus of the AEA is domestic. However, there is a vibrant group of development evaluation professionals who represent the majority of the multi-mandate agencies, such as CARE or Mercy Corps, within this grouping which then offer a strong set of panels and speakers on international development evaluation. Yet despite the increase in number of peacebuilding evaluations, as referenced earlier, there is not a subsequent increase in representation and/or presentations.

As such this work is not subject to debate and discussion with the broader evaluation community. A similar conclusion can be drawn if one reviews the major evaluation journals, where articles discussing advancements or challenges in development evaluation may be found, but to date rarely, if ever, peacebuilding. These are means of improving the practice through the peer review and input of other experienced practitioners that are not being utilised.

Much has been accomplished over the past decade in terms of evaluation of peacebuilding. The resistance to the concept has decreased, the number of evaluations is on the rise, the number of people contributing to the advancement of the issue has grown with the result that the field is no longer in its infancy. That said, there are several milestones yet to be achieved to continue this natural process of maturation. If evaluation is to fulfill its potential in terms of contributing to both learning and accountability, then the field must recognise the progress as well as the work that is still to be done. This edition of New Routes aims to contribute to this advancement and wishes every reader an informative read.

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1. A summary of the funded projects may be found at [http://www.unpbfl.org/burundi-projects.shtml](http://www.unpbfl.org/burundi-projects.shtml)
2. See What Difference Does Peacebuilding Make in Kosovo, by Diana Chigas et al, 2007, for an example of funding being formally allocated to peacebuilding yet being spent on a wide variety of standard social development projects.
3. This includes participatory methodologies.
5. See Church and Rogers, Designing for Results, 2006
6. The author hosted a two-day seminar on evaluation of conflict transformation and struggled to find individuals with actual evaluation experience on this topic.
7. Practical guides include Designing for Results by Church and Rogers, Monitoring and Evaluation in Fragile States by Social Impact and Reflective Peacebuilding – A Planning, Monitoring and Learning Toolkit by Lederach, Neufeldt et al.
8. The best place to find actual evaluations is through the databases available on some donors’, (e.g. USAID) website. Though these are often not comprehensive, it is currently the only source.
9. Monitoring is the systematic collection of data on context, implementation and progress towards results to inform the programme team’s decision making.

In the peacebuilding field the primary purpose of impact evaluation has become learning; leaving its twin purpose – accountability – out in the cold. Outside of meeting donor reporting requirements, accountability, as a concept and as an issue that needs practical and operational mechanisms, has been given scant attention by the peacebuilding community. A greater understanding of the concept of accountability and its unique adaptations as applied to peacebuilding is necessary. Within this, the peacebuilding field needs to grapple with its moral obligations to beneficiaries and the different mechanisms available to engage beneficiaries in the accountability discourse.

May I ask, Where is my reconciled heart?

OVERCOMING THE ACCOUNTABILITY IMBALANCE

In the humanitarian aid field, the functions of an impact evaluation are twofold: learning and accountability. Conceptually, these functions can be easily transferred to the peacebuilding field – in fact, they are already in the peacebuilding discourse and required by peacebuilding donors. However, of the two functions, the peacebuilding field has put an emphasis on the learning aspect where impact evaluation is largely presented as a task done in order to improve practice rather than to account for or ‘justify’ practice. The noteworthy 2007 Reflective Peacebuilding – A Planning, Monitoring and Learning Toolkit by Lederach, Neufeldt et al is an excellent case in point. The overarching theme of the toolkit is learning before, during and after implementation of peacebuilding programmes. Their approach, which seems to be the normative trend within the field, ‘places special emphasis on monitoring – and evaluation – as learning’.

Similarly, the donor consortium OECD has explicitly crowned ‘learning as the new frontier [in evaluation]’.

The distinction between ‘learning in order to improve practice’ and ‘accounting for practice’ is perhaps one of nuance, but an important one. As worthy of an ambition as ‘learning to improve practice’ is, the notion does not make the persons or entities rightfully demanding these improvements fully visible as actual decision-makers. On the other hand, the notion of ‘accounting for practice’ naturally lends itself to the critical follow-up question – accounting to whom? Accountability, in a clearer way than learning, has a built-in component of giving voice to those involved and affected by peacebuilding interventions as it highlights that improvement of peacebuilding programming and policies is not only desired, but a near-right of affected stakeholders.

Having said the above, the notions of learning and accountability should not be artificially juxtaposed as they are intertwined in important and reciprocal ways. If peacebuilding actors are not learning from their experiences, then their accountability is liable to be deficient. Likewise, being accountable to diverse stakeholders and managing that balance of accountabilities can be an important means of learning.

Questions related to accountability have not been completely untouched by the peacebuilding field. Especially notable in this context is the 1999 ‘Do No Harm’ approach developed by Mary B. Anderson, which gained wide traction and sparked some preliminary debate on aid actors’ negative impact on conflict dynamics and the need to account for and minimise the risk of those effects. The debate did not however blossom into a discussion on how these actors should be held accountable, who and how one blows the proverbial whistle, what consequences should be imposed on the actors’ bringing about these harmful effects nor who should exact the repercussions.

Instead, with the great push for aid effectiveness in the early 2000’s, the discourse ebbed out into a focus on result, risk and impact management. Results and reaching them effectively can be a critical aspect of accountability (by being a good steward of entrusted mandate and resources), especially if beneficiaries have approved or originated the intervention goals. Toiling over results and reaching them effectively can similarly have very little to do with accountability if they are created, monitored and evaluated (questioned and challenged) solely by the standards of peacebuilding, in other words donor headquarters in Western capitals, way above the heads of the people in the intervention contexts.

A story once told to the author1 proves the point eloquently. In the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide an agency provided high-quality psychological support to scores of women who had lost their entire families. The project was deemed a success by donors and the results were astonishing – in terms of the number of widows served, the quality of the counselling and even the measured ‘healing’ effect on the beneficiaries. But when the agency did the final evalua-
Overcoming the accountability imbalance

New Routes 3/2008

They were shocked to hear that the widows did not necessarily want to be healed at that time. Instead, they wanted Land Rovers to find possible loved ones who might have survived the genocide.

Accountability in different contexts

So while achieving measurable, good results is of undeniable importance, this article argues that it is time to place equal emphasis and urgency on reviewing whom the peacebuilders involve and lend their ears along the way to those results—questions that an accountability lens, more than learning perspective, reminds and obligates the field to assess.

Accountability is one of those contested notions that carry different meanings to different people, consequently almost losing its essence. One of the main reasons for the dilution of meaning is its appearance in diverse contexts. There is political accountability, with elections being the epitome of holding politicians accountable to the public, professional accountability where doctors and lawyers take oaths to serve their clients according to a certain code of ethics, legal accountability where anyone can ask for remedy in case of violations of law or of the fiscal kind where the responsible use of resources is reviewed.

The common trait which makes them all varieties of accountability is that they refer to processes by which individuals, organisations and other entities are answerable for their actions and the consequences that follow from them. According to the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership—International (HAP-I), in the humanitarian context, accountability means “that the power to help in situations of conflict and disaster is exercised responsibly... when implemented, it means that survivors of war or disaster are able to influence decisions about the help they receive and can complain if they feel the ‘helping power’ was not exercised well”.

This article argues that the above HAP-I definition can be applied to the peacebuilding field as well. It clearly indicates whom peacebuilders need to primarily answer to, the survivors of war, but is that the reality in today’s peacebuilding practice? There are, of course, other ‘audiences’ besides the beneficiaries that peacebuilders have to be responsive to for a holistic understanding of accountability. In that regard, there is donor accountability (emphasis on accounting for results and financial management), beneficiary accountability (not only account for outcomes, but also for practice and policies), internal accountability (to organisational mission, values, members/supporters and staff) and horizontal accountability (to peers, e.g., other peacebuilding actors).

Peacebuilders need to aptly handle the accountability concerns across the accountability spectrum, yet there is far more preparation and refined systems to address the needs of the ‘donor audience’ than any of the other mentioned audiences. For example, peacebuilding NGOs’ primary accountability is often perceived to be towards governments and institutional donors who provide them with a legal and financial base. This perception is derived from the fact that the understanding of account-
ability in the humanitarian/aid/peacebuilding world is largely based upon the traditional, state-based conceptions of accountability which work in favour of a heavier tilt towards donor accountability.

In that understanding, the accountability relationship exists when a principal delegates authority to an agent to act in their interests. Central to this view is that only those with formal authority over an agent – those that have delegated authority to it, like the relationship between politicians and their constituencies, have the right to claim accountability. In that respect, NGOs have to comply with the legal and regulatory (formal) frameworks of the countries in which they operate. Similarly, all have contractual obligations to their donors to spend designated money for agreed purposes.

**Contractual versus moral obligation**

If donor accountability is based upon contractual obligations, peacebuilders’ accountability to their beneficiaries is shaped by moral obligation. This moral imperative is generally derived from the peacebuilding entities’ mission and value statements. The problem is that morality leaves more room for interpretation and subjectivity than formal contracts, and as a result the degree to which peacebuilding actors are accountable to their beneficiaries and the quality of the mechanisms they use to ensure this varies considerably within the field.

The consequences for non-accountability towards beneficiaries tend to also be much more toothless as compared to non-accountability to donors. Although beneficiary accountability should be highly prioritised to uphold the reputation of the field and the values underpinning it, norms and standards around what constitutes good practice in this regard are often underdeveloped. Thus, the key identified challenge is not just increased over-all accountability of peacebuilders, but overcoming the accountability imbalance by creating a situation where the voices of those most affected by a peacebuilding actor’s activities are not overshadowed by the interests of the most powerful stakeholders.

In order to overcome this accountability imbalance in the peacebuilding field, it is important to understand the ‘peace-work-specific’ reasons behind its occurrence. Such an inquiry also sheds light upon the particular challenges of accountability questions in the peacebuilding context. This article proposes three ‘peace-work-specific’ reasons, stemming both from the conflict setting and the nature of peacebuilding itself.

One, as defined above, accountability is about answerability for actions and consequences; in other words, it is a two-way communication implying someone asking questions and receiving answers and explanations. In many of the highly insecure and volatile contexts where peacebuilders intervene, one may be hard-pressed to find people (beneficiaries) with the energy, noise and wherewithal to ask hard-nosed questions about the peacebuilders’ policies and practices. The main agenda is to survive the war and to struggle to meet one’s basic needs. In such a situation, securing entitlements and protecting one’s rights as a beneficiary may not be prioritised or even thinkable. Moreover, it is often uncomfortable and intimidating to voice concerns, especially if there are asymmetrical power/resource relations. If one adds the ever-present element of fear and (often due) mistrust of authority in conflict settings, there is little to encourage beneficiaries to speak up and demand accountability.

Second, conflict settings are signified by chaos and the breakdown of order. As such, it is an environment of low accountability. Peacebuilders with the aim of achieving a high degree of accountability in their dealings will be countercultural and in many ways work against the stream. Without a high level of self-motivation for accountability exercises and self-regulation on the part of peacebuilding agencies, there is little external or on-site pressure to be accountable.

The third reason relates to accountability for outcomes and impact of interventions ‘assured’ to beneficiaries. Despite a growing debate (Anderson and Olson 2003, Church and Shouldice 2002-3), the state-of-the-art of the peacebuilding field has not yet reached consensus on what the end goal of all peacebuilding interventions is – peace – looks like and how/what to measure if one has attained it. This may seem to be a theoretic puzzle, but it has real implications on the possibilities of beneficiaries knowing if they are getting their ‘investment’s worth” when taking part in peacebuilding programming, and blowing the whistle if they are not.

In humanitarian aid, this is fairly straightforward. In a drought situation, the intervention goal may be to feed the hungry in a specific locale. If a beneficiary has not received their allotted ration for the week, the beneficiary knows what to ask for, is clear on what s/he is entitled to and can thus demand answers from the humanitarian actor. What can the peacebuilding intervention beneficiaries be sure to gain if they blow the whistle? Is there a response today within our field to a beneficiary who says ‘I took part of your week-long cross-ethnic dialogue summit and I am even more resentful towards the other ethnic group than I was prior to your intervention. I hold your organisation responsible for poor planning and mishandling this opportunity – where is my reconciled heart?’

**Beneficiaries’ complaints**

Given these difficulties, are there any concrete ways to overcome the accountability imbalance? More to the point, what processes or mechanisms provide beneficiaries greater voice in how and what decisions are made by peacebuilders, and how can these processes be institutionalised?

One interesting avenue is the notion of a ‘beneficiary complaint and redress’ mechanism, borrowed from the humanitarian aid field. Blagescu et al define it as internal, institutionalised and non-legal ‘mechanisms through which an organisation enables stakeholders to address complaints against its decisions and actions, and through which it ensures that these complaints are properly reviewed and acted upon’.

A complaint is a grievance made when a beneficiary believes a peacebuilding actor has failed to meet a commitment. That commitment can be related to a programme plan, beneficiary criteria, resource utilisation, an activity schedule, a standard technical performance, an organisational value, a legal requirement or staff misconduct. A pre-condition for the mechanism is that beneficiaries have readily avail-
able information on where and how to complain, how the complaint will be managed as well as reasonable assistance to make a complaint by staff. The complaint can be made via a complaint box at the centre of the community, or through free telephone lines. The most important thing is that it is visible and easily accessible to the beneficiary communities as well as sensitive to their cultural practices and level of literacy.

Enabling beneficiaries to complain is, however, only half of what is needed in order to overcome the accountability imbalance. The adequate and timely redress to the complaints is the real test for peacebuilders; a good response should have the following five characteristics: it should come about through an independent, unbiased process (to the extent possible for an internal mechanism); it should be provided in a timely manner where the maximum wait time for a reply is communicated; the answer should be clear and its rationale provided and the complainant should acknowledge that s/he has understood the answer, and in case disagreement persists, there should be an opportunity for it to be reviewed.

A complaint and redress mechanism could very well be one way to overcome the accountability imbalance in most types of peace work, but it has to be adapted to the particularities of the peacebuilding context in order to be effective. One clear adaptation is that since the level of fear of retaliation if one complains may be higher in a conflict setting than in the traditional aid/humanitarian situation, safety and confidentiality measures of the mechanism will have to be boosted. Another adaptation is related to the incentives to complain, in the aid/humanitarian context the beneficiary’s tangible basic needs may hinge upon the response of the complaint – it may bring about an additional ration of food or larger tents so families can sleep together. The peacebuilding field needs to really ponder upon how peacebuilding beneficiaries could possibly formulate their concerns, given the fuzzy outcomes peace actors offer and what beneficiaries would actually stand to gain from lodging complaints.

In the final analysis, beyond complaints and redress mechanisms, overcoming the accountability imbalance is about realising who is indebted to whom. Should beneficiaries be grateful to peacebuilders for intervening in their situations (and thus, perhaps not voice loud complaints) or is it not an honour for peacebuilders to be entrusted with the stories, and perhaps even lives, of beneficiaries, to be witnesses of transformations and change? With a firm grasp of the privilege of serving, accountability is not seen as a burdensome, politically correct task – it is a way to give back to those who have offered their difficult experiences, believing that peacebuilders could make a difference.

Suggested resources for further information and inspiration (from the humanitarians):

- Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (www.alnap.org/resources/erd/ERD.htm)
- Humanitarian Accountability Partnership – International
- People in Aid
- Sphere Project
- Quality Compass
- Oxfam’s Good Enough Guide To Impact Measurement and Accountability
- Save the Children – UK’s Child Feedback Committees in Zimbabwe
- World Vision Sri Lanka
- CARE International Cambodia

1 In the context of this article, impact evaluation is defined as a way to evaluate (ex post facto) and to anticipate (ex ante) the effects, at both outcome and impact level, of interventions. More specifically, in the peacebuilding realm, one looks for effects that contributes to micro, mezzo and macro level peace or conversely effects that increase the likelihood of violence and conflict.
5 The author does not know if this story is true or a product of the peacebuilding grapevine. Regardless of its veracity, the example serves the purpose intended of illustrating how results without the voice of those intended to benefit is not true accountability.
7 Certainly impact assurances are made to donors as well, but the donor’s well-being does not usually hinge upon their fulfilment.

Put him back together again? Shoot, we can’t even figure out what his theory of change was.
The extensive focus on measuring the impact of peacebuilding interventions is setting evaluation up to fail in the eyes of the average peacebuilding practitioner, as generally the results of such an exercise are ambiguous and abstract. Instead the field needs to turn its attention to three key tasks: 1) utilising key terminology correctly 2) focus on evaluating outputs and outcomes and 3) allocating more time and attention to project planning.

Projects and programmes in peacebuilding and conflict transformation are increasingly confronted with the requirement to demonstrate their impact. In most cases, this requirement comes most urgently from the donor community. Evaluation of peace programmes is high on donors’ agenda and plays a role in public discussion in some Western countries, where development cooperation has been severely questioned by political parties and taxpayers. For example, in Switzerland and Sweden many doubts have been raised about its helpfulness at all. As a reaction to these requirements the peacebuilding sector has elaborated various evaluations tools and mechanisms to measure impact, yet their application is not yet common practice. Within this wider debate, the following article illustrates three main points:

- there is confusion in the peacebuilding sector on different evaluation concepts, especially the notion of impact
- that measuring the impact level of projects is the most difficult, and sometimes useless, step in evaluation
- that projects should concentrate on doing their homework in good planning and then on defining and measuring outputs and outcomes as precisely as possible (and only exceptionally on impact)

This new focus in evaluation, on measuring mainly outputs and outcomes instead of impact, helps both sides – the projects to improve their efforts and the donors to be sure about what these projects have achieved.

**Evaluation in peacebuilding:**

- **difficulties in terms**

Evaluation in peacebuilding has its own history and these efforts were only loosely connected to the elaboration of evaluation criteria and methods in other fields.

The term ‘impact’ entered the peacebuilding field by Kenneth Bush’s method of ‘peace and conflict impact assessment’ (Bush 1998), which was based on the idea of environmental impact: Bush asked how a development project (e.g. water, health or agriculture) influences the peace and conflict context, for example by sustaining unjust power relations, and calls this ‘impact’. This differs from the use of the term ‘impact’ in this article, as here the term references how a genuine peacebuilding project influences peace and conflict dynamics.

In the standard DAC terminology, outputs, outcomes and impacts describe various types of results of projects and programmes (see the example further down). The term impact is generally reserved for results on the highest societal level, such as the result in terms of improving democracy, and to the long-term time horizon, whereas outputs and
Evaluation in peacebuilding: some preliminary results

In terms of actually measuring the results of peacebuilding various studies and assessments have been conducted, for example d’Estree 2001, Paffenholz 2003, the Utstein study and the Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) project. In a nutshell some particular weaknesses in actual performance of peacebuilding initiatives have been revealed:

- Lack of planning: The Utstein study says that over 50 percent of projects surveyed had neither proper analysis nor an explicit intervention strategy. RPP mentions that in many cases a system-wide analysis of the conflict environment was not done as a basis to develop the peacebuilding intervention.
- Often there is a weak connection between conflict analysis and the intervention itself and in some cases it is completely missing.
- Project goals were often so general (‘contribution to peace’) that they were not measurable and overly ambitious.
- The need for a baseline study for the project was not shared or understood.

Evaluation in peacebuilding: current status

The current status of evaluation in peacebuilding is precarious: on the conceptual level major frameworks and methodologies for evaluation exist, are extensively described and ready for application. On the practical level, however, things look differently. The peacebuilding community continues to use different language than development cooperation, uses impact synonymous for all kinds of results without being aware of it, is overly ambitious in evaluation efforts and neglects basic planning work. It sticks to the misleading (often donor-driven) concentration on impact level which unfortunately supports the image of evaluation as being an artificial, academic, not-at-all useful exercise, and thus hinders the field from really learning from past experiences.

A way out?

To tackle these shortcomings, this article recommends that the field utilise the terms of evaluation correctly and concentrate on measuring those result levels that are close to the project and from whose results all stakeholders can learn. It is recommended to use the standard DAC terms for evaluation and project planning, which are based on the result chain (see graph 1 and 2). The result chain depicts the project activities and its intended results in a systematic way (Graph 1).

To illustrate, consider a journalist training project intended to increase the quality of reporting including such things as using more and different sources, presenting more viewpoints in a balanced way, utilising more background in articles, and covering more topics that concern ordinary people. Applying the result chain thinking to this example starts with the financial inputs leading to activities like the journalist training. The first result of this activity is the output. This could be that 80 journalists have been trained and know the content. It is recommended to use from whose results all stakeholders can learn. It is recommended to use the standard DAC terms for evaluation and project planning, which are based on the result chain (see graph 1 and 2). The result chain depicts the project activities and its intended results in a systematic way (Graph 1).

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With this improved knowledge amongst the audience the hope of the project is to create different behaviour of people, for example by starting civic initiatives or more participation in communal life or by campaigning actively in elections. This is the effect of outcome II on societal level and only this level is called ‘impact’. As one can see, the higher one climbs the result chain, the larger is the scope of the affected terrain: output is restricted to the project itself, outcome I targets the existing terrain and stakeholders outside the project, and so on. As shown in graph 3, the ellipse gets wider the more you walk from output to impact (Graph 3).

What does that mean for evaluation? It means that at the output and outcome I level one can, more or less, easily attribute these changes to the project. Such changes are, for example, how different is the knowledge of journalists before and after the training? How different is their writing after they have returned to their newspapers? The more one seeks to identify changes at the outcome II and especially at impact level, the more other factors in society, beyond the project, influence the issue that is being considered. For example, the goal of strengthening democracy is not only influenced by better media reporting, but by a lot of other factors, from economic forces to cultural beliefs to party politics. At this level, the project’s contribution gets naturally small, as many other factors play a role as well, and it is highly challenging methodologically to gather all data (from all these influencing factors) in order to isolate the effect of one small project.

Consequently, the impact level is the most complicated one to assess. Further in many cases evaluation at this level offers the least usable results, as the project’s contribution is small and only visible at an aggregate level that usually is very abstract. The project might, for example, contribute to an increase in a democracy indicator by three points, but what does this really tell the project leadership?

Therefore it is recommended for peacebuilding agencies to leave the quest to prove impact more or less aside and to first focus on measuring output, outcome I and – where possible – outcome II. The advantage of this approach is that the results of this effort are often very concrete and can be immediately integrated into learning and improving
the project. At the same time this information is highly useful for donors in assessing whether the project works.

**What is now needed?**

Peacebuilding initiatives need to develop systematic processes for planning like the one depicted in Paffenholz/Reychler's Aid for Peace. This framework starts with a comprehensive conflict analysis, identifies the peacebuilding needs for a specific conflict situation and chooses potential interventions by relevance assessment. Projects using this framework explicitly state how the planned intervention will influence its closer and larger environment by elaborating the result chain through the definition of outputs, the two levels outcomes and impact. The definition of outputs and outcomes in this case, must be very concrete, formulated in a practical manner and 'achievable'.

Once the intervention has been well planned, the decision on what to evaluate must also be made in these beginning stages. Why? In order to be able to evaluate later, it must be decided in the beginning what kind of data best represents outputs and outcomes and how to collect this data. In the ‘journalism training project’ mentioned above the content of newspapers or radio stations where training participants are working could be observed for quality through a systematic content analysis. This data would align to the assessment of the outcome I level.

In order to be useful in monitoring, this data must be collected once in the beginning. This forms the baseline study against which the changes achieved by the project will be measured. Thus, the journalism training project needs a baseline study including the quality of the media content in the beginning, and will later use the same method of content analysis and assess whether this content has changed for the better or not. For other projects the baseline study covers different data, but the principle is the same.

In conclusion, the focus of peacebuilding organisations should be:

- To do better planning, linking systematically conflict analysis to intervention through peacebuilding needs assessment;
- To do systematic planning that identifies all goal levels and uses precise definitions of the concepts outputs and outcomes;
- To monitor regularly through the collection of data on output and outcome levels; and
- To evaluate output and outcome levels, measured against the baseline study.

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“Dear Mr. Gandhi, We regret we cannot fund your proposal because the link between spinning cloth and the fall of the British Empire was not clear to us.”

Written by M Rogers and illustrated by Ariv R. Farizal, Wahyu S, Ary W.S. Creative Team Search for Common Ground in Indonesia
Circling and Framing Peacebuilding Projects

Reina C. Neufeldt

Project design is increasingly being dominated by a structured approach captured most frequently in the logical framework tool. This trend speaks to those who are systematic and analytical in their approach, a group referred to as Frameworkers in this article. It does not fit well with the approach of a second camp in the peacebuilding world, that of Circlers who view peacebuilding as a complex, evolving and dynamic process that cannot be captured. Determining how to incorporate the real concerns of Circlers into the Frameworkers approach is posited to offer a result that is greater than either approach individually.

In working with colleagues at a large relief and development international non-governmental organisation (INGO), great debates arose in the process of designing projects. The debates centered on whether or not logical frameworks (logframes) – required by the INGO for all types of programming – were useful tools for peacebuilding.

The opposing positions I have come to call ‘logical frameworkers’ and ‘complex circlers’. These two labels represent ideal types rather than actual people and their positions. In practice, people tend to blend elements of ‘circlers’ and ‘frameworkers’. However, I explore them in opposition here in order to highlight the often unspoken differences more clearly. The tensions between the positions matter because they point to concerns deeper than the difficulty of using a specific tool. The tensions suggest effective peacebuilding will be best realised when both approaches are used. However, there is a current push towards ‘frameworking’ which means we may undercut our efforts. In this article I briefly review the challenges of evaluation, as well as the frameworker and circler positions. I identify four points of tension where circlers raise important concerns for frameworkers and conclude by exploring methodologies that can bridge the tensions.

Those looking to design and later evaluate peacebuilding efforts confront a host of challenges, whether they are frameworkers or circlers. For example, peacebuilding involves complex social change processes in dynamic and unstable contexts. Transforming conflicts with socio-political and economic dimensions takes decades. Stakeholders also have different perspectives on what should change due to peacebuilding efforts. For instance, community members may highlight the importance of stopping cattle raids in their area, whereas an external donor may be looking to institutionalise a particular system of resolving conflicts that includes but goes beyond cattle raids. Finally, there are issues around lack of funding for evaluation.

Some, such as John Paul Lederach, look at the challenges and suggest the approach to evaluation needs to be reformulated. He argues that peacebuilding involves more art and soul than logical frameworks and formal project structures encourage. As a leading scholar and practitioner, Lederach is concerned that a project mentality oversimplifies and misunderstands complex and chaotic transformation processes.

Lederach’s perspective captures some elements of the ‘circler’ perspective. Circlers chafe at the linear causal thinking required for logframes, and the need for specific, measurable, time-bound indicators. They argue that cause and effect are interwoven in complex ways that are usually not linear. I think of circlers as operating on ‘jazz time’ where there are polyrhythms audible in jazz music. Circlers tend to focus on the specificity of the situation in which they work, and look to be flexible and responsive to the people and problems therein. Circlers also worry that logframes are part of a western worldview that is externally imposed on others in ‘the global south’ due to funding agency demands.

In contrast, those working of the logical framework perspective, or frame-
It appears that frameworkers are currently in the ascendance. Funders of peacebuilding activities now tend to ask for logical frameworks as part of applications, and demand thorough evaluations at the conclusion of projects – although implementation of those evaluations are often less than rigorous. This means large-scale peacebuilding initiatives are more and more intentionally framework-oriented. For many, this bodes well as it suggests workshop (either the curriculum or the ‘workshop’ format itself).

The second issue involves a more serious difference embedded in divergent world views. In the logframe structure, there is a direct causality between what we say we will do (activities, inputs) and what will occur as a result (outputs, results, objectives). Logframes are developed on an if-then logic; if we do X, then Y will happen. Things that may get in the way of this if-then sequence are noted as assumptions. Frameworkers, however, do not see reality as matching up to this neat cause-effect pattern and instead see multiple, intertwined causes and effects, and often chaotic processes at work in conflict contexts. Frameworkers, however, are likely to interpret this resistance to logframe planning as circlers avoiding the hard work of thinking through an intervention.

An example can help clarify. A project to document customary law was initiated by the Manobo, an indigenous group in Mindanao.6 The project designers felt that conflicts in the community could be resolved more easily if the laws were documented so people could equally access them. However, Manobo customary law is maintained as an oral tradition and there are strong cultural and spiritual taboos against its documentation. The belief is that once written the law will become the object of Manobo in-fighting and it will lose its essence – an inherent flexibility and adaptability.

The project was led by Manobo members, consultations held, and a final document in production, but inexplicably vanished. Despite not producing a final document, the consultation process, which involved storytelling and discussions amongst elders, tribal leaders, women, men, youth and children was deemed a great success by the Manobo. It provided them with an opportunity to gather their collective wisdom and to make traditions relevant to the present context. It helped them to articulate the traditions and laws for dealing with people and families in conflict. Another unintended, positive consequence was that through the consultations, a process of cultural regeneration gained momentum. Here, a western bias for written laws was helpful despite itself. The initial cause-effect logic of the documentation project did not hold, but the consultation process enabled a much greater change to emerge.

How we understand our world
How we understand our world affects how we think we come to know things about our world and how we act therein. As the music metaphor emphasises, there are different ways of viewing our world: classical versus jazz time. Some view our world as one single reality that progresses on a common, uniform clock. Others view our world as having multiple realities that may operate at different paces simultaneously and which we, through our lenses of culture and language, access differently. Frameworkers operate on the former understanding. There is one world and reality that we all uniformly access and therefore programming is designed to influence it in cause-effect sequences. Objective indicators, therefore, can be identified to show where there have been real, observable changes due to programming.

Circlers tend to operate on the understanding of jazz time and polyrhythmic worldviews.

Circlers tend to operate on the understanding of jazz time and polyrhythmic worldviews. In order to know things about our world and peacebuilding interventions, stakeholders need to develop shared meanings and understandings, which are shaped by various cultural lenses and values. The above example of the Manobo view of customary law provides a case in point. The Manobo’s orally maintained customary law is very different than the codified legal traditions and laws for dealing with the United States, or Great Britain. In the oral tradition, flexibility and adaptability are critical features. This view contrasts significantly to codified traditions, where documented precedents and judgements are critical for arguing cases and their merits. There are two different worldviews operating.

For circlers, it is important to engage in programming in ways that incorporate different views of the world and different processes of change. If only linear cause-effect frameworker perspectives are adopted, peacebuild-

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ers and other stakeholders may miss significant parts of what is going on in the context. This can happen when the questions that are asked and actions that contribute to peace in one context may be applicable, or transfer, to another location. This difference of opinion often arises as a tension around discussions of indicators. Frameworkers are often looking to establish global indicators to track progress over time. Circlers ask if this is the best use of time, when peacebuilding and social change is complex, locally-rooted and there are multiple worldviews operating simultaneously.

**Considerations of values, power and relationships**

Different values emerge as important for circlers and frameworkers in the preceding points of tension. These values affect how people go about the tasks of designing projects and monitoring and evaluation systems.

At one extreme, frameworkers seek to design monitoring and evaluation processes that use objective indicators, and assess outcomes in a ‘value-free’ manner – meaning that anyone could look at the data and verify it, just as a laboratory science experiment could be verified. There is an embedded value here in designing an observation process like the scientific method that is supposed to be ‘value-free,’ and an assumption that data can be collected without influencing the people and the community under the microscope.

At the other extreme, circlers view indicators and evaluation methodologies as possessing inherent subjectivity, and representing a set of values that typically comes from people outside of the community – most often ‘northerners’ in the global south. These are not ‘value-free’, but are methodologies and choices that are loaded with cultural assumptions, backed by the power of funding, and which influence the phenomena they seek to study.

For example, an outside agency may fund a local mediation project. An indicator for the project that is selected for the logframe is an increase in the number of cases referred to the new local mediation center. Frameworkers see this as being a value-free indicator of increased use and access of the mediation service center, which was ostensibly designed by a local group. Circlers, however, may see things differently. They may see the use of quantitative referrals as missing the most important information about conflict issues in the community (e.g. perhaps there is just one person who is seen as the most troublesome cause of major conflicts in the community and who does not go to mediation).

Further, circlers are concerned that the choice of establishing a mediation center undermined traditional patterns of communication, spirituality, mediation, and community relationships, which increased the number of conflicts in the community. These new conflicts were then referred to the mediation center and increased its reported rates of referrals – supposedly an indicator of success. A good evaluator – frameworker, circler or (more likely) some combination thereof – will certainly see this problem retrospectively. Peacebuilders may even have better participatory listening skills that help them to avoid such problems.

However, this mediation center example is not to suggest that the mediation project required better planning. It may have completed a very good, participatory planning and monitoring process, which simply could not account in advance for the interconnected, non-linear and co-evolving processes at work in the community. The time in which it took these processes to play out was such that the new problems were emerging just when the three year ‘final’ project evaluation was conducted.

Values, power and relationships are intertwined in difficult ways in peacebuilding design, implementation and evaluation processes. There are frequently hierarchical relations between donors, non-governmental organisations and communities which affect the local community members’ abilities to make decisions about things that affect their lives. While these concerns are not new or unique to peacebuilding, they are of particular concern because of the importance of building solid relationships based on trust and authentic engagement in situations marked by immense distrust. Power inequities can undermine efforts to build relationships, local decision-making processes, and reinforce and model processes that actually undermine peacebuilding efforts.

These four areas of tension point to significant differences between circlers and frameworkers in terms of how the world works and how peacebuilders can...
and should engage therein. Fortunately, there are a number of methodologies that offer the potential to bridge these two legitimate perspectives in practice which can strengthen our capacity to do good and effective peacebuilding.

**Four frameworker-circler tensions**

Three newer methodologies, which can help to bring circlers and frameworkers together, are a ‘theory of change’ approach, accountability circles and the most significant change approach. While these methodologies do not yet cover the full range of planning, design and evaluation needs, they offer considerable potential for helping practitioners be accountable and responsive to a range of communities, stakeholders and worldviews, and are therefore worth exploring.

**A Theory of Change Approach** focuses on how and why people believe their actions will contribute to change. Theories of change are an increasingly popular tool in peacebuilding. Divergent world views can be included by using narratives or stories of change rather than logframes, which appears to allow circlers to think elliptically and frame stories rather than logframes, which appears to allow circlers to think linearly. Over time, the theories of change can provide a point for comparison; people can re-examine their theories and reflect on whether or not things changed as they thought they would (as well as ask why or why not). Reflection on theories of change can enhance active learning, deepen understanding, and help ensure programming is responsive to the community.

**Accountability circles** are groups of people who represent stakeholders from within and outside of an intervention who provide feedback and guidance on interventions. Their composition will include the voices that need to be heard in a decision-making process in order to ensure greater balance and equity of power. For example, a colleague who is a committed pacifist and works with the military on peacebuilding has established an accountability circle of professors of religion, ethics and conflict resolution to gather their opinions about her work and check ideas with them. Accountability circles such as this can help people doing peace work to reflect and discuss their work, problems, changes and decisions that are occurring within the project. The purpose is not to bring together people who are like-minded, but rather to bring together people who can ask challenging and insightful questions to deepen reflection on an intervention.

A third bridging methodology is the *Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique*, developed by Rick Davies and Jess Dart. MSC provides a systematic storytelling, gathering and discernment process in order to identify changes or impacts in complex social change processes. The process has the advantage of using grounded stories and analysis for circlers, as well as offers the possibility for higher-level abstractions and analysis for frameworkers. MSC was developed as a baseline free form of monitoring and evaluation that can be applied to peacebuilding.

These are not the only possible bridging methodologies for circlers and frameworkers. They are a few, a foundation from which to develop additional approaches that respond to the significant insights brought by frameworkers and circlers. Peacebuilders already blend across circler and frameworker lines; some even argue that peacebuilders tend more towards the circler than frameworker approach. Whether this is the case or not, more needs to be done to purposively improve upon both circler and frameworker strengths in programming – from design to evaluation. Peacebuilding is challenging work that can only benefit.

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4. I am indebted to David Blaney and Naem Inayatullah for my usage of the jazz metaphor. They employed the concept in a somewhat similar way to discuss various perceptions of time at the 49th Annual International Studies Association Convention, Bridging Multiple Divides, March 2008.


8. An overview and guide to the Most Significant Change technique is available on-line at http://www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf.
The peacebuilding field has an obligation to assess whether their work is changing the state of a conflict, commonly called assessing the impact. Without effort to understand the connection between the project's work and the wider conflict, programmes that have good results but make no discernable difference on the conflict will continue, thus undermining the overarching purpose of peacebuilding. Through better project planning including the articulation of the theories of change and clear conflict analysis and the creation of linkages between efforts, peacebuilding projects can be evaluated for their impact.

Demystifying Impacts in Evaluation Practice  

Diana Chigas and Peter Woodrow

A dialogue process brought together advisors to the official negotiators, including journalists, parliamentarians and other influential policy makers. They held a session exploring ideas for the settlement of the conflict. The ideas generated in the informal sessions were provided to the official negotiators, and several agreements related to Internally Displaced People (IDP) return, economic transactions and basic services were reached, based largely on the ideas from the informal group.

In a divided city, the cemeteries of each ethnic group in conflict are in the area controlled by the other. An inter-ethnic youth group undertook a project to clean the vandalized cemeteries on both sides. The project was delayed due to opposition from religious authorities in the city. However, the issue was taken up by the church decision-making bodies, which precipitated broader discussions on what position the church should take with regard to reconciliation activities. The above examples originate from Peace Practice Project's field work.

Peace practitioners often assert that it is especially challenging to assess the impact of peacebuilding programmes. They frequently claim that while it may be possible to evaluate the immediate outputs or outcomes of peace efforts, assessment of impact is impossible or undesirable because impact — the effects on the broader conflict — is too far from the immediate programme sphere, too far in the future, or at too high a level (the whole society) to be measured effectively. They state that the further along the results chain, the harder it is to control a project’s effects, and, consequently, attribution of impact to any particular effort is difficult.

Further, those implementing projects often feel that evaluating impact demands too much of the project, raising expectations that the project should have effects beyond the immediate target population, when they are only operating in small communities or with limited constituencies. Consequently, some people have concluded that evaluations should ‘recognize that impact assessment at the project level is not proving to be viable and ... shift it to the strategic level’. In other words, they feel that project evaluations should be limited to immediate outcomes.

Consider this example: a project in a conflict zone, concluding that young men are an important group, aims to reduce youth-initiated violence across ethnic groups. To achieve this goal, it has conducted peacebuilding training for fifty groups of twenty-five youth, each group including representatives of three ethnic groups in relatively equal numbers. Following the logic of the ‘limited evaluation’ school of thought, one should assess only whether youth participants gained skills, changed attitudes and behaved differently and resist attempts to evaluate broader changes in the conflict dynamics at the societal level — in other words, whether changing youth skills, attitudes and behaviour had resulted in any discernable changes in the conflict dynamics and levels of violence.

Yet the stories cited at the beginning of this article suggest that impact is not always elusive and unreachable, too long-term or impossible to assess. Impact is not an extraordinary event; rather, it can be identifiable everyday occurrences. It does not have to be remote or at the level of full peace for a society. This understanding of impact is consistent with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee’s (DAC) own definition of impact as including ‘the primary and secondary, direct and indirect, positive and negative, intended and unintended, immediate and long-term, short-term and lasting effects of the effort’. And it challenges the assumption that it is only possible to assess impact at the strategic level, after a long time has passed — an assumption that too often makes it acceptable for projects to avoid assessing immediate effects on the conflict and to remain unaccountable for how their interventions relate to the larger peace (what Reflecting on Peace Practice project (RPP) calls ‘Peace Writ Large’). If projects are not accountable for how their interventions contribute to the broader peace, one runs the risk of investing a lot of time, resources, and effort in programmes with excellent outcomes, but that make no measurable difference to the conflict.

The RPP, one effort of Collaborative for Development Action (CDA) Collaborative Learning Projects, has focused on impact evaluation as a key area of inquiry. RPP recognises the real difficulties (in terms of attribution, timing, scale and level) of assessing the impact of projects and programmes, as opposed to strategic level evaluations of
the impacts of multiple programmes in an overall strategy. Nevertheless, RPP has developed an approach to evaluation of impact at both the programme and strategic levels. The approach is informed by RPP’s work for the DAC8 and the DAC Guidelines that incorporate
rate much of CDA’s approach.7 It is also shaped by CDA’s engagement with practitioners in the field regarding programme planning, design, monitoring and evaluation, and CDA’s own work in programme evaluation.

The RPP experience suggests several approaches that facilitate assessment of programme impact

1. Define goals clearly.

RPP has found that peacebuilding goals are often vague, amorphous and unattainable, making it difficult to evaluate impact. For example, a project stated the following goal: To achieve community harmony and security by addressing the needs and concerns of former soldiers, their families, and community leaders. This goal has the advantage of showing a clear desire to influence Peace Writ Large, but the notions of ‘community harmony’ and ‘security’ remain vague. This programme sought impacts in three major goal areas: to strengthen constituencies for peace, mitigate conflict and violence and address causes and consequences of violence. Each of these imply multiple sub-objectives and results, all within two years. This programme clearly claimed too much! Although the programme did make some smaller contributions to the major goals, it was clear to both the donor and the implementers that the impact claimed could not be achieved. In such a situation, evaluators will need to work with the programme team to identify, in more specific and achievable terms, the positive conditions (social change) to which the programme hopes to contribute. A reworking of the goal above might state: To work with former soldiers, their families and the communities to which they are returning to ensure that the former soldiers are accepted by the communities, gainfully employed, and participating positively in community life.

This goal is perhaps less grand, but it would be possible to develop a monitoring system to see if ex-combatants were employed and participating in community life. An evaluation could also determine the rates of success of such a re-integration effort. The programme does not need to give up the loftier goals of community harmony and security; rather they need to be expressed in more concrete and measurable terms. A further step in evaluation might also develop a way to test whether acceptance, employment and positive participation do, in fact, contribute to the broader goals of harmony and security (with good definitions of those concepts).

2. Establish relevance to the conflict.

Robust programme goals draw both on good conflict analysis9 (to determine what needs to be done) and on an articulation of a vision of Peace Writ Large, or the desired social change. The impact of a programme or project will depend, in the first instance, on whether it is addressing the major driving forces and/or actors of the conflict – in other words, its relevance. If it is not addressing such factors, it may be a good programme for other reasons, but it would not necessarily be an effective peacebuilding programme. In Kosovo, for example, peacebuilding programming following the 1999 war focused greatly on returns of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs), initially Kosovo Albanians who had been forced out before the NATO bombing, and later Kosovo Serbs who were forced out during the violence after 1999. Programmes also worked on bridging relations between ethnicities in multi-ethnic areas. A conflict analysis, however, developed by programme implementers themselves, identified as key driving factors of the conflict: a) issues of the status of Kosovo (i.e., whether it would become independent or remain part of Serbia), b) resentment about allocations of resources and aid, c) feelings of injustice related to past and present relations, and d) youth desperation. It also identified veterans’ groups, who were largely based in mono-ethnic areas, as key people in the conflict.

The donor strategy and the programmes implemented were good programmes, in that they helped improve the lives of the beneficiaries, but they missed the mark in terms of their relevance to the factors that mattered most to the conflict. Returnees were not central actors with respect to violence, although they were important victims of the conflict. Indeed, the channelling of aid to returnees and communities with returns, it turned out, prompted further resentment, increasing inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic divisions rather than improving relations between groups.

In order to determine relevance, evaluators will have to explore whether the programme team performed a conflict analysis during the initial programme design phase, while the evaluators should not substitute their own analysis for that of the programme team. It is important that they check the team’s analysis to assess whether it is up-to-date and accurate. In many cases, programme teams do not have an analysis, or the analysis is too general to serve as a basis for determining relevance and impact. In that case, the evaluators will need to conduct their own analysis. This can be done in a variety of ways, and for single projects or relatively contained programmes, a short and simple analysis based on information gained through existing documentation, interviews with key informants, and facilitated discussion with staff would be sufficient.

3. Identify the theory of change of the programme and assess its relevance to the context.

A theory of change10 describes a programme’s assumptions about how and why the initiative will contribute to the larger peace; it is the assumed causal relationship between the programme’s goals and its impact on the broader peace. In the example of the youth programme cited above, the implementing organisation assumed that by changing youths’ skills, attitudes and behaviours, they would contribute to reductions in violence and increase security – all aspects of Peace Write Large.

It is important for evaluators to identify and assess theories of change underlying a programme, because these theories are often unexamined and untested. In fact, they are called ‘theories’ precisely because they represent assumptions that must be continually tested to see if they prove valid or not.

Peacebuilding goals are often vague, amorphous and unattainable, making it difficult to evaluate impact.
They are often explicit or obvious, even if unstated, in the project documents. More often they are implicit and even unconscious, and evaluations need to uncover them through interviews with staff, donors and relevant stakeholders.

RPP has found that many programmes assume they are contributing to peace because they are being conflict-sensitive, addressing critical structural areas (e.g., rule of law, economic development, human rights, etc.), or addressing the consequences of conflict (e.g., refugees and IDPs). In fact, such efforts might make a positive contribution, have little or no impact, or actually exacerbate tensions and conflict, depending on how they are done and to what extent they actually focus on conflict dynamics.

Especially when the impacts on the broader peace are longer-term, more indirect, or complex, evaluations can use the theory of change to assess whether a programme is likely to attain its intended impact. In other words, what difference will it make to the conflict if the project meets its objectives? How will programme outcomes lead to the desired impact? What needs to happen in order for the impact to occur? Are these assumptions about what will happen valid in this context? By collecting data to examine how each step of the causal chain in the theory is borne out in practice, an evaluation can assess whether the theory is correct and, therefore, what the impact is likely to be.

Two examples illustrate how examination and testing of theories of change can help to assess actual and potential impacts on the broader conflict. In a West African country, an NGO implemented a programme to develop Community Peace Councils (CPCs) – a community-based mechanism for resolving disputes – and CDA was asked to evaluate the programme. Through interviews with staff CDA identified several theories of change about how the CPCs would contribute to peace in that country. One of the more important theories was: A community-based mechanism will resolve incidents that have a potential for escalating into serious violence. The project asserted that the overall level of violence associated with the civil war in the country could be reduced if disputes could be settled peacefully at the community level. The evaluation team then assessed whether this theory of change was appropriate for the context, beginning first with an updated conflict analysis based on interviews and focus groups with a range of people in the communities themselves. The team identified what kinds of conflicts the CPCs handled, to assess whether they were having the effects envisioned in the theory of change. If the conflicts handled had the potential for escalating into widespread violence, then the CPCs would be stopping a key driving factor of the conflict – even if at the community level. The evaluation found that, while the CPCs were successfully resolving a number of disputes, they were not dealing with the most serious issues concerning land – and thus were having little effect on community security.

A similar process was used in Kosovo to assess whether peacebuilding programming had contributed to the absence of violence in some communities during the riots that engulfed Kosovo during March 2004. The team first conducted an analysis of the patterns of violence and absence of violence, as well as the reasons for the absence of violence over three years leading to March 2004. This was done using international agency and police data on violence, focus groups with practitioners and interviews in the communities themselves. The study then examined whether peacebuilding programming had made any contributions to the factors that led to communities’ resisting or avoiding violence in 2004. A major finding was that inter-ethnic relationships did not play a significant role in the absence of violence.
role in the prevention or avoidance of violence in 2004. However, many peacebuilding programmes were based on the theory that strengthening minority rights and inter-ethnic relations at the community level would address grievances that could lead to violence and encourage people to choose nonviolent means for dealing with conflict.

The study did not conclude that the theory of change was entirely wrong – as it also found many other faults in the ways the programmes were designed. But it did find that one major theory was inadequate: the theory that participatory decision making and promotion of inter-ethnic cooperation on practical issues of common concern (e.g., economics, HIV/AIDS, women’s rights, infrastructure and livelihoods, etc.) would lead to breakdown of stereotypes and improve trust. In both Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serb communities, intra-community pressure, or “rules of the game”, restricted the boundaries of permissible interaction to generally non-visible business interactions, and made maintenance and expansion of inter-ethnic linkages difficult.

4. Focus on contribution and linkage, not attribution.

For evaluations, it can be hard to assess an individual project’s impact when there are multiple societal factors and many other programmes that influence the achievement of the broader goals. However, it is possible to assess whether the project or programme has made connections, or linkages, to these other factors and therefore increased the likelihood that it will have an impact on the broader peace.

The DAC Guidelines advise evaluators to ‘look at the big picture’ to identify important constraints or effects at the level of the overall system. They also have incorporated ‘linkages’ as an evaluation criterion. There is evidence that some kinds of linkages are particularly important for enhancing the cumulative impacts of peacebuilding:

- Are individual and grassroots projects or programmes linked to higher levels (national, regional) and to parallel efforts in other domains or sectors?
- Do interventions that focus on key decision makers or power brokers link with efforts to engage larger populations and constituencies, and vice versa?

As an example of this last point above, in Central Africa it is widely acknowledged that political developments and inter-ethnic relations in one country have an almost immediate effect in neighbouring countries. Military forces (official and unofficial) move across porous borders and fighting spurs over as well. While various intergovernmental bodies have discussed these dynamics and civil society groups have, on occasion, attempted to address them, they have made little real progress, undermining, in turn, the effectiveness of peacebuilding efforts in Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The linkages do not need to be direct cooperation or coordination. They may involve working with similar constituencies, building on the work of others or encouraging programme participants to connect with programmes that work at other levels. Or organisations that are good at promoting individual change (through training, etc.) can link with organisations that work for change at the socio-political level.

Conclusion

In RPP’s experience, performing evaluations of a range of peacebuilding programmes, it is possible to discover impacts. The notion that impact is remote and unattainable and that attribution problems present insurmountable difficulties is a myth. Those in the peacebuilding and conflict prevention field have a responsibility to account for their effects, including the immediate and tangible contributions and the longer-term impacts one can project into the future. 2


4 DAC Guidance, p. 41. The DAC Guidance goes on to note that “[i]t is not necessary to hold a conflict prevention and peacebuilding intervention to an ultimate standard of ‘achieving peace’. Rather, the evaluation should identify the effects of the intervention on the key driving factors and actors of the conflict.” Id.

5 For more on RPP, see the CDA website at www.cdainc.com.

6 In the spring of 2006, OECD/DAC commissioned RPP to research and write an ‘approach paper’ concerning how to evaluate peacebuilding and conflict prevention programs – as a joint initiative of the DAC’s Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation Network and the Evaluation Network. The full approach paper, ‘Encouraging Effective Evaluation of Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities: Towards DAC Guidance,’ OECD Journal on Development 2007, Vol. 8, No. 3, is available on the CDA/RPP website (see footnote #1) and the OECD website: www.oecd.org/dataoecd/14/24/39341279.pdf. The approach proposed by CDA in this paper has been incorporated, in large measure but with some variance, into the official DAC Guidance (see next footnote).


8 A conflict analysis looks specifically at tensions, inter-group dynamics, competition for scarce resources (etc.) that constitute the dynamics that contribute to violence. This should not be confused with context analysis, which considers all of the social, economic, judicial, security, (etc.) needs in the society.

9 The concept of a ‘theory of change’ is described in full in an appendix to CDA’s Approach Paper for the OECD DAC, and is also included in the DAC Guidance. See footnotes number 2 and 3.


Anecdotal stories, though important in understanding the significance of change to individuals involved in peacebuilding projects, is not enough evidence to understand the impact of this work. Using randomisation as an approach to determine the causal links between peace practice and change offers the field a new methodological option that could provide a more robust answer to the question: what difference have we made?

**RANDOMISATION:**

**A New Approach to Measure Impact of Peacebuilding Interventions**

*Isak Svensson and Erik Bratthberg*

Conflict transformation is about change. Programmes to build peace, prevent violence and peacefully manage conflicts are in essence about making an impact (that is, having a positive effect) on individuals, groups and larger societies. But, does it work? Are peacebuilding and conflict transformation efforts successful in achieving the anticipated changes? These are pertinent questions and given the importance of the objectives of conflict transformation, efforts to find reliable answers to these questions should be given the highest priority.

This article explores how to apply **randomisation** as an approach to impact evaluation of peacebuilding programmes. Randomisation is a particular methodological approach that can give the field convincing estimates of causal relationships, that is, a reliable basis for determining the effect of a peacebuilding programme. Before discussing the promises and limitations of randomisation, this article will start by giving an overview of the different ways of conducting peacebuilding evaluation in order to situate randomisation within a broader methodological field.

**Types of evaluation**

The different types or methods of peacebuilding evaluation all have different purposes. One can distinguish between evaluations taking place before a project starts, evaluations taking place during an ongoing project (formative evaluation), and evaluations taking place after the completion of a project (summative evaluation). Currently there are four main types of evaluation each with its own purpose.

First, **project appraisal** takes place before a programme starts. This method tries to assess what are the special characteristics of a situation, for example by identifying actors, interests, and previous conflict transformation initiatives in a conflict. Based on the results of this initial assessment, it is possible for donors to, for example, pre-select its project partners, and also for local partners to feel involved in the programme design process.

The second approach to evaluation is reviews of ongoing projects. Here evaluators look at whether the available interventions are going the way they were expected to and whether inputs turned out the way they should. The underlying assumption of this type of evaluation is that peacebuilding is an ongoing process requiring refining of original goals and fine-tuning of strategies.

**Process evaluation**, which is the most common form of evaluation, can help to inform the field about deviations in project implementation, inputs used and whether the needs of the target group were met after the completion of a programme. Using this method one can determine the efficiency (the quality of outcome) of a programme by asking which approaches were used, which problems were encountered, and which strategies were seen as successful. However, one cannot determine the causal effects. In other words, using this approach one cannot say with certainty if the programme has achieved any changes.

**Impact evaluation**, on the other hand, is a measure of the level of impact of a particular project. Impact here means the difference on a situation if the project is implemented, to a situation where it is not. This method can help the field assess programme achievements and to understand what aspects of the programme contribute most to success and whether there were any unintended consequences.

When evaluating impact two strategies are generally available. The first strategy compares the situation of a group or an individual after the project to that of the baseline situation (that is, the level before the project). The second strategy seeks to obtain an average impact of the programme by comparing participating individuals (i.e. the treatment group) with a similar group who were not exposed to the programme (i.e. the comparison group). When employing the second strategy of impact evaluation, a critical component is to establish a credible comparison group that could give the evaluators an idea of what would have happened to the members of the treatment group if they had not been exposed to the programme.

There are two different approaches to establishing a credible comparison group: **retrospective impact evaluation** and **prospective impact evaluation**. Taking advantage of the fact that in many cases not all individuals or groups participated in the project, retrospective impact evaluations use various statistical methods to define and measure impact in a comparison group. Conversely, during the intervention design stage prospective impact evaluation – also called randomisation – analyses impact by using randomised assignments of potential participants into treatment and comparison groups.

**Randomisation**

Having presented and discussed the different forms of evaluation, the article...
will now take a closer look at the practical application of prospective impact evaluation. Depending on the context of the proposed intervention, several diverse approaches to randomised interventions might be employed. The first approach would be to carry out a pilot project in order to test the impact of a project before it is scaled up. If there are limited resources or implementation capacity, or if demand exceeds supply, then it may be a ‘fair’ method to draw lots to determine participation. However, financial and administrative limitations often imply that projects must be phased in before one can draw lots. Another approach is to employ randomised choices within a group using control and treatment groups. Finally, there is the ‘encouragement design’. If an existing programme is implemented in a given area where not everyone participates, then one can randomly decide to encourage some to participate.

Limitations and risks

One shared limitation of all these approaches is that impact evaluation must be planned and designed before the project is implemented. As has been described, one must first create the treatment group and the comparison group before the project is implemented. Moreover, in order to compare a group or an individual’s change before and after a project, one must also define the objectives (such as to improving trust and reducing hostility between two warring parties) against which progress can be assessed and comparisons made.

There are some ethical restrictions connected to randomisation that should always be considered. For instance, if there are enough resources for all potential recipients to participate in a project, then choosing not to include some of these could be controversial. Yet, this is very seldom the case for peacebuilding programmes. The starting-point for a randomised intervention is the identification of a group of potential project recipients. Potential participants should be asked to participate voluntarily in the project, and when possible or desired, be informed about the peacebuilding process. From this group of potential recipients, the partner organisation of the average peacebuilding NGO, in dialogue with the research team, then randomly selects who will belong to the treatment group and who will belong to the comparison group.

Using randomisation is ethically defendable if it is not possible to include everyone at once in a project, which is, as said above, commonly the case, as resources are restrained for the average peacebuilding non-government organisation’s partner organisations as well as for most peacebuilding interventions. If the programme is implemented in phases, it is possible to use randomisation in the first steps of the process, but allow everyone to participate in the end. While a larger part of the population in the end will be exposed to the programme, there will be initial variation between individuals or groups in programme exposure that can be used to assess impact. It is important to stress that any compensation for participation in the research project should be offered equally to both participants and non-participants.

Benefits of randomisation

Certain settings pose challenges to the usage of randomised intervention. Despite these challenges, the potential benefits of employing randomised intervention in evaluation of peacebuilding programmes must not be overlooked. On the contrary, successful randomised intervention is an objective and reliable assessment of the changes caused by a peacebuilding programme. Moreover, randomised intervention can help the field understand the line of causality (that is, what the effects of the actions of a programme are) and give counterfactual evidence, which one can use in order to determine whether or not an intervention enabled change.

How is ‘success’ measured?

Since conflict transformation is about change, one can observe a range of different signs at different levels – from individual to societal – through which this change comes about. Consider one case illustrating potential signs of success on a group level.

In this example, the project involved a human rights training for police forces, which had the aim of increasing the respect of human rights among the police. The selection process started first by an open invitation to districts willing to participate. If 60 districts would be willing to participate, respect of human rights in these districts is observed. Of the 60 districts interested, 30 districts would in the end participate in training by drawing lots. A sign of success could be that districts participating in the training had positive attitudes among the policemen and fewer abuses than those districts that had not participated in the training. The differences between the districts, in attitudes or behaviour, can then be attributed to the programme. The randomisation in the selection will guarantee that there are no other factors that can explain the differences.

Methodological pluralism

The field of conflict transformation should utilise multiple methodologies in their evaluations, allowing it to view the dynamics of change from different angles. Illustrating the dynamics of conflict transformation by anecdotal evidence from stories from individuals and local settings is one important approach, which can enhance the understanding of the complexities. Yet, if one really seeks to know more about the change of conflict transformation, one must admit programmes to be scrutinised in a much more systematic fashion than is done today.

To assess whether peacebuilding and conflict transformation efforts are successful in achieving the anticipated changes, the field needs a convincing estimate of causal relationships. Randomisation holds a great potential for the field of peacebuilding and conflict transformation in this regard. Using this methodological approach to carry out impact evaluation, one can learn more about how our programmes build peace, prevent violence and peacefully manage conflicts on an individual, group and societal level.

The evolution of the Life & Peace Institute (LPI) is interwoven with the development of the peacebuilding field and the introduction of monitoring and evaluation. Starting with its first intervention in Somalia, the Institute has engaged in a reflective process to identify lessons and clarify its approach. This process has recently led to the creation of an internal tool: a planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning framework.

During his internship at LPI, the author was involved in the development of this tool. In this article he pictures the evolvement of the Life & Peace Institute from its early days up until now.

The Life & Peace Institute (LPI) is an international and ecumenical institute for peace research and action. Based in Uppsala, Sweden, LPI has field offices in Kenya, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Republic of Congo and is currently in the process of opening two more offices in Africa. Since its foundation in 1985, by the Swedish Ecumenical Council, the Institute has been present in several conflicts around the world as a facilitator, or through its conflict transformation programmes.

Promoting community-based peace-building and the reinforcement of conflict transformation capacities for grass root level organisations, LPI has evolved since its first major intervention in Somalia in the early 1990’s. LPI has reflected on its mandate, as well as the results of its interventions, with a strong emphasis given to drawing lessons from its work. The evolution has occurred in parallel to the development of the field of peacebuilding and the subfield of monitoring and evaluation. This article seeks to tell part of the story of the reflection process, from LPI’s early years to the present.

The reflection on monitoring and evaluation at LPI increased after its intervention in Somalia, during the 1990’s. This period saw intense development in the field of peacebuilding and the growth of organisations (operational agencies, research institutes and donor communities) who were more actively engaged with peace and conflict-related issues. This intense development can be seen in the international reaction to the Somalia war, and the subsequent creation of the United Nations Operation for Somalia (UNOSOM). In this context UNOSOM asked LPI to assist with building relations with civil society and with the creation of district councils: groups of local actors in charge of finding solutions to the conflict.

Besides the growth in actors in this field, many factors led to a growing interest in the assessment of peacebuilding interventions. The general development of studies on the impact of interventions (not necessarily peace-related interventions), with Mary B. Anderson’s Do No Harm as a main reference was one. But also, the growing interest worldwide in peace and conflict-related issues increased pressure on agencies to demonstrate results, which lead to greater competition between agencies for funds and legitimacy. But more than seeking accountability and the assessment of the positive effects of peace projects, it became critical for the implementers of these projects to continuously learn from their actions in order to increase the positive and reduce the negative effects as a responsibility to the individuals and communities involved.

This context was one of the catalysing factors that spurred LPI to engage in reflection on its intervention in Somalia. As a result of LPI’s dynamic and challenging experience in the country, the purpose of the reflection was to evaluate the methods used by the Institute and identify the lessons that could be learned.

The chain of events that characterised this intervention, the collaboration with the UNOSOM, the withdrawal of the latter and the departure of the American army, forced LPI and its staff to adapt their action, sometimes questioning their mandate and approach.

As a very young organisation in the 1990’s, with a particular approach, principles and conceptual framework, based on conflict transformation and grass root organisations’ capacity reinforcement, the Somalia experience represented a test for LPI. Even though the knowledge and experience in the field of peacebuilding was rather narrow at the beginning of the 1990’s, it was commonly recognised by practitioners and researchers that the Institute’s principles and methods were of a strategic importance with regards to the construction of a sustainable peace.

The emphasis given to a long-term engagement and the reinforcement of internal actors’ capacities marked a certain difference with other organisations that left Somalia, and gave LPI a positive image of an organisation with a constructive approach within the local population and civil society organisations. Unlike the United Nations or other organisations and government representatives, LPI focused its work on the lower levels of society (Track 2 and 3), instead of working on the highest diplomatic level (Track 1).

**Studies on Lessons learned**

This recognition, mainly by local organisations and authorities (including clan elders), of its approach motivated the Institute to evaluate its work and draw lessons from it. If community-based peacebuilding and the reinforcement of grass root level actors’ capacities was the way forward, it was necessary to improve the knowledge and increase the research on these concepts.

Consequently, two major studies were requested, which were conducted by two scholars, Wolfgang Heinrich’s Building the peace: Experiences and reflections of collaborative peacebuilding: the case of Somalia (1997, republished...
but once I got in here, it was like I ceased to exist.

During the design phase the courtship was exhilarating, but once I got in here, it was like I ceased to exist.
the drawing of lessons, feeding into further analyses and projects. The PME&L tool has recently been shared with LPI’s field offices.

Since LPI’s first intervention in Somalia to the present things have substantially changed. Besides many challenges and difficulties, it has drawn lessons from the past, and is now engaged in an important process to practise what has been learned, while standing firm to its founding principles and purpose.

Further reading and references:

LPI News

Workshop in Bukavu
Life & Peace Institute’s field office in the Democratic Republic of Congo (LPI-DRC) organised an eight-day workshop with the Canadian consultant André Bourque. The overall goal of the workshop, which took place in June, was an in-depth reflection by the LPI staff on their ambitious strategic plan that has recently been put in place.

During the workshop, LPI-DRC staff and Adrian Calvo-Valderrama – intern at the LPI Uppsala office – exchanged thoughts on how to define the next phases of implementation of the plan, resulting in a clear and complete working plan for the coming months, and clear objectives for the coming years.

The workshop was very successful, thanks to the dynamic input of the new, young and ambitious team and the working method used by André Bourque: Socrates’ ‘Maieutique’.

‘La Grande Messe’ in Bukavu
At the end of July LPI-DRC organised a three-day workshop with all of its seven national partners (Adepae, Arche d’Alliance, ASP, Padebu, Rio, Sofepadi and UPD), inviting – for each partner – a member of their General Assembly, a member of their Board and a member of their Executive Committee. Given the ecumenical nature of LPI and given the symbolic importance of this workshop, the meeting was commonly (and ironically) referred to as ‘la Grande Messe’ – the big mass.

The overall goal of the workshop was to include the different structures of the partners’ organisations in a reflection about how to proceed in the coming months: How will the reinforcement plans be put into place and implemented? How can we systematise the approach on Participatory Action Research? How can we structure and facilitate communication between partners and LPI? How can we divide roles between partners and LPI?

The workshop also provided a forum for teambuilding and allowed the partners of LPI-DRC to get to know each other in a better way.

Participatory Action Research around ethnic tensions in DRC
Since several months, three of LPI-DRC’s partners (Adepae, Arche d’Alliance and Rio) are working on a Participatory Action Research in the highly conflictual area of the Minembwe Highlands and the southern part of South Kivu. Characterised by a long history of rebellions and violence, the area is more than ever torn apart by strong ethnic tensions opposing the different communities. These tensions become manifest in a hard – and often armed – struggle for power, political recognition (or domination), and control of local economical resources.

In order to help the bogged Amani peace process to produce more effective results and to achieve positive conflict transformation in the field, the research is particularly focusing on the link between the community leaders, the populations and the persistence of the different ‘ethnic based’ armed groups. This research is the first step of a long term conflict transformation process which will involve a wide range of strategic actors.

Common peace research in Somalia
At the beginning of August the Life & Peace Institute’s office in Nairobi (LPI-Nairobi) had a four-day meeting...
in Hargeysa, Somaliland, with five top representatives of Somali Peace Line (SPL). SPL is a well known Somali NGO based in Mogadishu, Somalia, with a core focus on peace building.

The partnership between SPL and LPI moved its first steps in March 2008, when the former emphasised a clear desire to develop a research capacity and a more analytical approach to peace building. SPL and LPI have developed a common interest in critically examining the concept of civil society in the Somali context and its engagement in peace building. LPI will support SPL to develop a research capacity through joint engagement in a concrete initiative.

LPI-Nairobi and SPL are now developing the research protocol and tools, while undertaking literature review. Primary data collection will start in October/November 2008. The process – from design to dissemination of findings – is planned to take one year.

Resident representative meeting

The heads of two of LPI’s three field offices and key staff at the Uppsala office came together for a so-called resident representative meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in July. Resident representative meetings give an opportunity to discuss a number of issues, both more long term about strategy and vision and shorter of more day-to-day character.

Participating representatives from the field offices were Michele Cesari, LPI-Nairobi (Kenya), Pieter Vanholder, LPI-Bukavu (Democratic Republic of Congo), Linda Forsberg, LPI-Sudan, and Christian Grassini, LPI-Ethiopia. LPI President Gustaf Ödquist also took part in the meeting.

Field visits by the LPI President

Connected to the resident representative meeting the President of LPI and a number of Uppsala staff visited the three field offices of Bukavu (Democratic Republic of Congo), Nairobi (Kenya) and Brazzaville (Republic of Congo). In Bukavu the visit included a chance to meet with representatives from six out of LPI’s seven partner organisations.

– It was very interesting to get some insight in LPI’s work in the field and to meet with the staff, says LPI President Gustaf Ödquist. I am impressed by their presentations and glad to see their commitment to LPI’s work.

In Nairobi LPI representatives met with Bishop Mvume Dandala, All Africa Conference of Churches, and Rev. Fred Nyabera, Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa, who both expressed their expectations for increased collaboration with LPI in the future.

The LPI President and the Executive Director Peter Brune also made a short visit to Brazzaville.
Next step towards an LPI programme in Sudan

As part of a consultative process in preparation for Life & Peace Institute’s Sudan programme, a workshop was held in June, in Uppsala, Sweden. The workshop brought together competent Sudanese and international actors such as Samson Wassara (University of Juba/Khartoum), Peter Nyaba Adwok (Council of States, National Legislature, Sudan), Marlene Masclée (Joint Donor Team, Sudan), Marianne Nolte, consultant, and Sture Normark, Horn of Africa specialist, who provided their perspectives and highlighted possible opportunities for LPI in the Sudan.

The workshop included a social dinner with representatives of LPI, the Sudanese Embassy and the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, among them Mohammed Idriss (First Secretary Sudan Embassy), Viktoria Li (Sudan Team Leader, MoFA) and Marika Fahlén (Special Envoy to Horn of Africa).

Staff changes

As the process of finding a successor to Peter Brune as Life & Peace Institute’s Executive Director is still ongoing, Lena Furberg has been appointed Acting Executive Director on part-time 15 August-31 December.

Ms Furberg has long experience from various senior management positions within the field of international development cooperation. She worked for Church of Sweden for more than ten years and has experience from other ecumenical and secular NGOs. Since 2002 Lena Furberg is an independent advisor and consultant in methods of development, capacity building and organisational development.

Two new resident representatives are about to take up their positions: Linda Forsberg who will be heading LPI’s future Sudan office, and Christian Grassini for LPI-Ethiopia.

Linda Forsberg has a professional background in governmental, international and non-governmental organisations, working with technical assistance and capacity building on peacebuilding, management, coordination, psychosocial development to gender mainstreaming.

Christian Grassini holds a PhD in socio-political studies in Africa from Universita’ Orientale di Napoli, Italy. He has worked with conflict mitigation and prevention, relief and development programmes and micro finance programmes within international NGOs and UN’s Food and Agriculture Organisation in Ethiopia, Mali, Angola and Afghanistan.

Yvonne Rowa has been hired by the Life & Peace Institute-Nairobi as Research and Learning Advisor. She has previous research experience with medical research institutes and international NGOs. Yvonne Rowa has played a crucial role in designing the protocol and tools for a research initiative aiming at exploring the Somali Ulama-u-Ddin (religious leaders) engagement with conflict.

Senior Researcher Anne Kubai is leaving LPI after four years to take up a position as researcher/lecturer in mission and international migration at the Theological faculty of Uppsala University.

LPI on the OECD-DAC list

The OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) Development Aid Committee decided at a meeting in June to accept the proposal by Sweden to include the Life & Peace Institute on the list of main international NGOs that are eligible for core funding under ODA (Official Development Assistance). For the Institute it is a great achievement to be included in this list, covering only a few selected NGOs, and will hopefully be helpful in the fundraising efforts.

Bi-annual meeting against arms trade

The bi-annual meeting of states focusing on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons was organised by the United Nations in New York, USA, in July. 155 NGOs were accredited to the meeting, and the International Action Network on Small Arms was given the floor to speak.

In connection to the meeting LPI co-organised a workshop together with the World Conference for Religion and Peace entitled Faithful voices: Religious advocacy and action to reduce the proliferation and use of small arms. The event included a panel with LPI board member Bishop William Kenney from UK, Ambassador Ochieng Adala, currently Deputy Executive Director of Africa Peace Forum, and Daniel Luz from the Brazilian NGO Viva Rio.

Horn of Africa Bulletin moving back to Nairobi

The Horn of Africa Bulletin (HAB) originally started in 1989 and was re-launched in a new format in March 2007. This September, the production of HAB is moving back to Nairobi, Kenya, in order to be closer to the partner organisations All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa (FECLAAH). One of the current HAB editors, Charlotte Booth, has for this purpose been assigned to work at the LPI office in Nairobi.

Connected to the relocation, LPI is together with AACC and FECLAAH currently conducting an internal evaluation of HAB with the aim to assess in how far HAB is meeting its objectives and how subscribers and partner organisations perceive it. The evaluation includes a readers’ survey, in-depth interviews of key stakeholders and a content analysis of the issues that have been published since March last year.

It was very rewarding in that we met with the whole Christian Council, who told about their continued work for reconciliation in the country, says Gustaf Ödquist.

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Reviews

Interviews from a war


Although the current devastating conflict in Darfur has been haunting the region’s inhabitants for a number of years now, there are still aspects of the conflict, which are misconceived or remain in the public shadow. With the intention of attaining a deeper knowledge of the Darfur conflict and its relationship with the rest of Sudan, the author of *Darfur - Dimensions and Dilemmas of a Complex Situation* travelled to Sudan in late 2007. There, Johan Brosché interviewed a number of actors including politicians, academics, traditional elders, students, and rebel leaders of various factions, NGO representatives and UN staff. By doing so, the author aimed to fill one of the research gaps in existing literature on Darfur by taking on a comprehensive view. At the same time he could take the opportunity to portray the often uncared for views of various national and international residents of Sudan.

The report starts off with a short background of Sudan and a more comprehensive analysis of events leading up to the initiation of the Darfur conflict. Subsequently, the author presents the primary actors, the humanitarian situation on the ground and the heatedly debated UN peacekeeping force. Then, Brosché continues by analysing the negotiations, the international response to the conflict and concludes by recommending further areas of research.

According to the author, communal conflicts together with centre-periphery conflicts and conflicts between local elites constitute core elements of the Darfur conflict. However, the interaction between these inter-linked, parallel conflicts and conflicts of communal and traditional nature in the region need further analysis. In addition, the Brosché stresses the importance of taking into account other parts of Sudan that have experienced conflicts. These are areas that largely share the same history of neglect and marginalisation and consequently constitute part of the solution.

Because the author disentangles common misconceptions and complex occurrences of the Darfur conflict in a condensed and accessible manner, the paper becomes informative and useful. In that respect, it can certainly complement already published material on Darfur. What is also of interest is the interviewees’ valuable perspectives, some of which can now be added to the ongoing debate.

Catrin Rosquist

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Peace is the goal, reconciliation the process


*Pursuing Just Peace* is one of the latest contributions of succinct conceptual analysis accompanied with rich empirical input aimed to aid peacebuilding among faith-based organisations. The opening chapter ‘An Introductory Overview to Faith-Based Peacebuilding’ is a well-researched piece written by Dr. Steele, an experienced reconciliation facilitator. The essay reviews some literature on the meaning of peace, particularly as it relates to the Abrahamic traditions expressed as Shalom and Salaam, which “convey a desire for wholeness, fulfilment, completion, unity and well-being, thereby encompassing reconciliation and justice”.

Compared with Lederach’s model of the four core concepts ‘truth, mercy, justice, and peace’ woven together in the pursuit of reconciliation (Lederach 1997:23-30), Steele’s essay depicts peace “as the central concept that encompasses justice and reconciliation”. Peace must be seen as the end goal while reconciliation is the process. However, he underlines, whatever schema one uses, no concept should be emphasised to the detriment of the other.

In practice peacebuilding has to integrate ‘social justice building’ and ‘violence reducing methodologies’ – to include universal human rights, social and economic development, solidarity with the entire human family and a world order based on nonviolent response to conflict. The intervention distinguishes three levels – prevention, mitigation and post-conflict reconstruction. Five dimensions/peacebuilding efforts are identified: grief and trauma healing, hospitality, apology/confession, justice and forgiveness. Four different roles are pointed out: observation and witness, education and formation, advocacy and empowerment and conciliation and mediation.

The book presents case studies from various parts of the world on education and capacity building, networking on gender-based violence, and ecumenical and inter-religious collaboration.

The theoretical discussion of the book gives the needed rationale and normative basis for faith-based peacebuilding as it adopts the inclusive meaning of Shalom/Salaam of faith traditions (Judaic-Christian-Muslim) resonating with the social scientific conception of ‘positive peace’. There are valuable suggestions about approaches, methodologies, strategies and roles clearly delineated particularly for faith-based intervention. No doubt, the book relies largely on the experience of the Catholic-Christian tradition, however, its value goes beyond boundaries – all readers in the business of conflict transformation can immensely benefit from it.

Tarekegn Adebo

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To bear the unbearable


Valentino Achak Deng ... I will never forget this name. His face is burnt in my mind, even though I have never seen him. His courage is burnt in my heart and will leave a scar forever.

Rarely have I read a book that managed to tell a story of cruelty, inhumanity and pain with so much humour, wit and perspective. And this is the approach that Dave Eggers uses to tell the story of Valentino Achak Deng, one of the famous ‘Lost Boys’ of Sudan. By compensating a tear of sorrow with a tear of laughter, by altering screams of outrage with small glimmers of hope, he makes What is the what almost bearable to read. This is a huge achievement, and confirms Dave Eggers as one of the biggest writers of today, since it seems almost impossible to add lightness to the unbearable ‘lifelessness’ of being a refugee.
And What is the what is the story of a refugee. It’s the ‘fictionised’ autobiography of a young Sudanese boy, who – after a devastating attack on his village – has to run away from the horrors of war, not knowing whether his family has survived the attacks. Barely seven years old, thinking the entire world is no bigger than the few South Sudanese villages he knows about, he takes up an agonising journey surrounded by loneliness, pain, fear, hunger and death, that leads him to Ethiopia, Kenya and, finally, the USA.

The story shows the realities of the Second Sudanese Civil War, which started in 1983. It took place, for the most part, in southern Sudan and was one of the longest lasting and deadliest wars of the later 20th century. Roughly 1.9 million civilians were killed, and more than 4 million were forced to flee their homes at one time or another since the war began. The conflict officially ended with the signing of a peace agreement in January 2005, yet fighting continues to the present day, and hundreds of thousands remain internally displaced.

The endlessly exhausting journey of Valentino Achak Deng confronts the reader with the realities that hundreds of thousands of people are facing nowadays in Darfur.

Television shows us a glimpse of the fate of millions of refugees worldwide, we can more or less imagine the suffering they go through. But rarely do we get the chance to penetrate that deeply into the life of a person, of a boy who grows up to become a man, whilst going through these humiliations. What is the what can only be referred to as a must-read, since it’s an absolute eye opener.

Finally, some might wonder what is the what, but I’m afraid the answer is too complicated for this short review. But please read and find out. You will not regret!

Pieter Vanholder

Armed conflict to the very end?


Gershom Gorenberg is a US-born journalist, who decades ago went to look for his Jewish roots and then stayed. For many years he was a columnist and associate editor at The Jerusalem Report and wrote articles for prestigious international newspapers and magazines. However, he has turned more and more towards analysis and research, first demonstrated in his very informative book The End of Days, which reveals the thinking among Jewish and Christian fundamentalists struggling for a take over of the Temple Mount. To a large extent it was based on revealing interviews with themselves, while The Accidental Empire builds upon interviews, books, articles and archive studies.

He shows convincingly that the settler movement was the strange child of Labour Party socialism and religious extremism, while the US administrations preferred to turn a blind eye to the development in the occupied territories. As a matter of fact they did more; they asked the Israeli government to prevent press coverage of new settlements.

Gorenberg can further show that already in September 1967 the skilful legal counsel Theodor Meron in the Israeli Foreign Ministry stated that “civilian settlements in the ... territories contravenes ... the Fourth Geneva Convention”. However, the government ignored Meron and – pressured by the passionate settlers and their inside supporter Shimon Peres and later Yigal Allon – they gave in to the settlement movement. The result has been devastating. The temporary occupation has become the accidental empire, a continuing nightmare for both occupier and occupied.

When Gorenberg focuses on the political history of the first settlement decade, the focus of Lords of the Land is the settlers themselves – their messianic religious zeal, their politics and strategy and their cult of death. The aim of the authors – Idith Zertal, a leading Israeli historian, and Akiva Eldar, one of the most respected Israeli journalists – is to show how the settlement movement has created a stalemate, which has shaken the very foundations of Israeli society and – of course – the lives of the Palestinians too.

Eldar and Zertal are also able to show how the religious settlers have been inspired by the earlier, secular Zionist movement and how deeply involved the governments – both Labour and Likud – and their institutions have been in the illegal endeavour. In the final chapter – The Pace of Apocalypse – they give a persuasive analysis of Sharon’s destructive heritage. As the father of the settlements and even more of the outposts, created by the ‘hilltop youth’ he has seen to that the route of the wall/barrier/fence – “this megalomaniac project” – demonstrates that its primary aim is not security for Israel but to perpetuate the occupation.

In another chapter – Everything Is Legal in the Land of Israel – they look into the legal system and its application in the territories in line with the decision in 1967 by the then president of the Supreme Court of Justice, Meir Shamgar. Even after thirty years of occupation, “which brought upon the inhabitants of the territories confiscations, expulsions, house demolitions, closures, encirclements, arbitrary death, and various sorts of collective punishment”, Shamgar was obviously proud of his legal model. It is no doubt that the Supreme Court is not only guided by the law but also by political considerations as, e.g., in the case of the route of the barrier. For a country, claiming to be a democracy ruled by law, this is a very dangerous situation.

It has been said that the settlers have kidnapped Israel. Both The Accidental Empire and Lords of the Land confirm this view. For anyone interested in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the obstacles to a sustainable peace agreement these two books are most valuable. Unless the settlers are deprived of their political clout there will not be peace but armed conflict to the very end, a disaster for both Jews and Arabs between Jordan and the Mediterranean Sea.

Bernt Jonsson
Lord of the Ocean
Grant us the courage and faith
To face the tidal waves of our time

Lord of the Reefs,
Grant us the courage and faith,
To face the erosions of our time

Lord of the Islands
Grant us the courage and faith
To face the cyclones of our time

From WCC Resources for Pacific Focus 2008

In 2001, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution 55/282 declaring 21 September of each year as the International Day of Peace. The intention of the resolution is to have the entire world observe a day of peace and nonviolence. Former Secretary-General Kofi Annan asked all United Nations departments and agencies to expand their observance this year, extending a special invitation to civil society as well.

The idea of celebrating 21 September as an International Day of Peace is launched by a growing number of organisations around the world.

World Council of Churches (WCC) member churches worldwide are once more invited to pray for peace on 21 September 2008 or the closest Sunday. The International Day of Prayer for Peace offers an opportunity for church communities in all places to pray and act together to nurture lasting peace.

The Day of Prayer is one of the initiatives of the WCC’s Decade to Overcome Violence 2001-2010.