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Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment Methodology

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1. Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the international community has been confronted with a number of ongoing conflict situations. These have included: a series of protracted conflicts that pre-date the demise of the Cold War international system (Sri Lanka, Kashmir, Northern Ireland, Cyprus, the Middle East); post-Soviet transitional conflicts (Nagorno Kharabakh, Georgia/Abkhazia, Moldova/Transdniestria); violent conflicts entailing horrendous acts of ethnic cleansing (the Balkans) or genocide (Rwanda); complex emergencies (Sudan, Rwanda); and, finally, situations in which clear political objectives have been supplanted by a political economy of violence (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Angola). In addition, there are a number of situations that are characterized as conflict prone or where the potential for violent conflict lies just beneath the surface.

These conflict situations, and the need to be seen to be responding to them, now occupy a central place on the international agenda (Carnegie 1997). The responses have ranged from short term humanitarian assistance to long term and more traditional development programming and to projects aimed at promoting good governance and enhancing the various capacities of the civil society. Over the last five years, a significant and increasing amount of bilateral and multilateral funding in support of such initiatives has been channelled through non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The bulk of these funds go to development and humanitarian NGOs, but there has also been an increase in the level of funding going to projects and/or NGOs with a specific conflict resolution and peacebuilding mandate.

This has been in recognition of the need to develop ‚joined-up‘ integrated responses based on the complex interrelationships between conflict dynamics, development and humanitarian provision, and the prospects for a sustainable peace. Increasingly, development and humanitarian agencies have accepted the need to think and act beyond narrow, technical mandates. At a minimum, many have now adopted a ‚do no harm‘ orientation (Anderson 1999).

A number of donor countries (notably Sweden, Canada, Norway and the UK) and NGOs (CARE, Oxfam, and Save the Children Fund) have started to move beyond this minimalist way of thinking, instead developing a more holistic approach. These efforts are geared more towards mainstream peacebuilding within the more traditional mandates of humanitarian assistance, poverty alleviation and sustainable development. Increasingly, concepts, ideas and practices are migrating across the once clear demarcations between the traditional fields of development, humanitarian assistance, conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The content of these responses, however, has not been unproblematic. As Anderson (1999), Smillie (1998) and others have shown, the nature of these programmes and projects, as well as the manner of their implementation, have all too often exacerbated conflict dynamics as much as they have enhanced the opportunities for sustainable development and peace. It is thus not surprising, given the number and range of projects funded, as well as the levels of funding involved, that there has been a growing critical interest in assessing the impact of such projects. These efforts at identifying lessons learned and developing best practices have taken the form of individual programmes or project evaluations undertaken by the donors (see Danish International Development

Assistance (DANIDA) and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)) and, more rarely, through multi-donor evaluations of a broad range of responses to a single situation or crisis (Borton et al. 1996; Lautze et al. 1998).

While the number of such evaluations has been increasing, their quality, scope, depth and methodology continue to vary significantly. Niels Dabelstein has characterized the situation as one of „methodological anarchy" (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 1999). He notes that „historically, humanitarian assistance has been subjected to less rigorous and extensive monitoring evaluations procedures than development aid" (OECD 1999, 2). One might well add that evaluations of conflict resolution and peacebuilding practices are even further behind. It is only relatively recently that practitioners or organisations involved in peacebuilding have even bothered with them. Those that did often regarded such evaluations as an irrelevance or a necessary burden, performed only to satisfy their donors, or even as a positively dangerous set of practices in which ignorant outside consultants are encouraged to engage in unqualified pejorative judgments.

Current PCIA Projects

Among those contributing to developments in this area are:
- Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP); based at Overseas Development Institute (UK);
- The Clingendael Institute (Netherlands);
- International Alert (UK);
- Department for International Development (DFID) / INTRAC (UK);
- Mary Anderson's Collaborative Development Action (Cambridge, USA), ,Reflecting on Peace Practice' – a follow up to ,Local Capacities for Peace' project;
- International Development Research Centre (IDRC) (Canada);
- European Platform for Conflict Prevention and Transformation (Netherlands);
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) / Development Assistance Committee.

Nevertheless, as the number of conflict resolution and peacebuilding oriented interventions and NGOs engaging in such practices increase, the interest in knowing whether or not they are producing beneficial results is likely to increase. While there is considerable anecdotal evidence concerning such practices, we are only just beginning to see the development and consolidation of systematic knowledge regarding the impact of these activities (see Box 1).

It is in the interests of donors, practitioners and end users that appropriate evaluation methodologies be developed, techniques that are able to accommodate the complex, multi-actor and highly interconnected nature of most conflict resolution and peacebuilding activities. In developing such methodologies, we must ask the following questions:
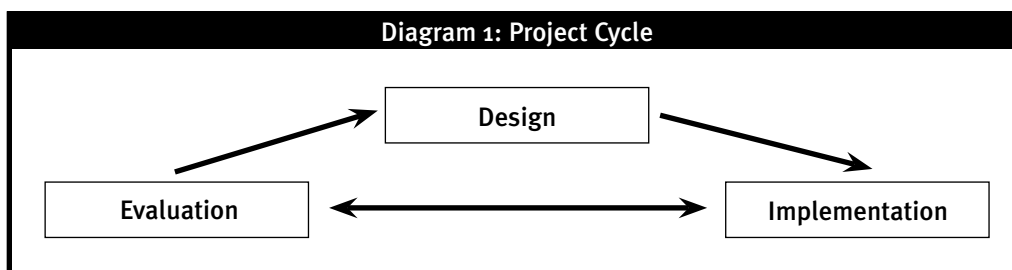
What were the intended outcomes of these interventions? Were they successful? Under what conditions or circumstances? If they failed or produced unintended negative consequences, why was that? What are the criteria, standards and indicators that might profitably be applied in such an evaluation? Given the frequently intangible nature of intended outcomes, how is evaluation possible at all?

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a snap shot of some of the current initiatives or approaches to developing ,peace and conflict impact assessment' (PCIA) methodologies. It will provide an overview of three approaches to PCIA: those that deploy standard donor evaluation

criteria; those that develop methodologies for assessing the peace and conflict impact of development and humanitarian programming by multi-mandate organisations; and those that focus explicitly on interventions by NGOs with specific conflict resolution and peacebuilding aims. The article will conclude with some comments on the problems and prospects for the consolidation of these into an integrated, operational methodology.

2. Traditional Donor Evaluation

The dominant donor approach to evaluations locates them within the ‚project cycle management' (PCM). While the details and nuances of this terminology will vary from donor agency to donor agency, PCM will always include the same basic components: project identification and design, project implementation and project evaluation. These are often represented as being in a dynamic, interactive relationship with a built in feedback loop (see Diagram 1).

Diagram 1: Project Cycle

Design

Evaluation

Implementation

The nature and purpose of such an evaluation is: „Analysis of results and impact of the project during or after implementation with a view to possible remedial action and/or framing of recommendations for the guidance of similar project in the future" (European Commission 1993, 12).

The reality, however, is much more linear. Evaluations often take place only at the end of the project cycle. In the more thoughtful implementing and donor agencies, the summative nature of these evaluations may then lead to ongoing monitoring or feed into overall programming guidelines. More often than not, however, institutional practices inhibit the transfer of lessons learned and rarely are the insights from the evaluation of one project transferred to the design stage of similar or related projects. An interesting effort at institutionalising the follow up to evaluations was the Joint Evaluation Follow up Monitoring and Facilitation Network (JEFF). This was established after the Rwanda joint evaluation with the intention of ensuring that the report's recommendations were taken seriously and acted upon. Another example is the quarterly monitoring by the Operation Lifeline Sudan consortium (see OECD 1999, 27).

While many donor agencies maintain their own internal evaluation units, it is often the case that they commission outside consultants to carry out this work. Indeed, a small cottage industry of professional evaluators has now sprung up in response to this donor led demand. Over time, the best practices of these professional evaluators have started to coalesce into something approaching a standardised methodology and set of criteria. On the basis of a number of DANIDA and SIDA evaluations, as well as the guidelines of the Development Assistance Committee of OECD (OECD/DAC), the criteria most frequently invoked are:

1 Impact and coverage

Measures the lasting changes which are a consequence of the project activities. It addresses the question: what real difference has the activity made and to whom? Impacts can be positive or negative; intended or unintended; immediate or long term; and take place at the micro, meso or macro levels. Coverage refers to the differential nature of the impacts which can be seen across particular sectors (e.g. social, economic, political, and environmental) and/or target groups (e.g. individuals, particular social groups such as the elderly, children, women, or communities and institutions).

2 Relevance and appropriateness

The former criterion assesses the extent to which the overall goal and purpose of a project is in line with policy needs and priorities; the latter focuses more on the activities and inputs level, assessing whether the project activities are properly tailored to local needs. This distinction allows an evaluation to conclude that, while the overall programme or project aim may have been relevant, the particular activities or projects pursued were not the most appropriate, and that better alternatives could or should have been identified.

3 Effectiveness and efficiency

Measures the degree to which the intended results are actually what was achieved, and whether maximum results were reached within the given level of resources. This allows for a judgment as to whether the same or better outcomes might have been achieved through the use of different inputs.

4 Timeliness

Were the activities pursued at the most opportune or appropriate moment?

5 Sustainability

This measures the extent to which the impact of a project is likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn. It brings the longer term focus to bear on the project, highlights the possible impact on local power structures, dynamics and social capital and emphasises the need to be cautious about creating situations of dependency between the outside actors and the internal structures, processes or organisations (either in terms of funds, resources, ideas or processes) (Ebata 1999).

6 Sustainability

Here, the evaluation assesses the degree to which programmes, projects or activities were designed and implemented in a manner that is likely to ensure that their objectives and outcomes are mutually reinforcing rather than at cross purposes or even undermining one another.

In developing their evaluations in each of these areas, evaluators are likely to turn to the ‚logframe' for the project. This will provide them with the overall rationale for the programme and the intended outcomes for the particular project, the activities that will achieve these outcomes, the human and material inputs to these activities and the ‚observable verifiable indicators' (OVIs) that indicate progress towards achieving desired outcomes. The logframe also identifies the risks posed to the project from externalities beyond the control of the project. There are obvious connections to the criteria above.

Of particular importance in the assessment of impacts are the OVIs. In the myriad of logframe training manuals (EC; DANIDA; DFID) the relevant OVIs are often characterized as

quantity, quality, target group(s), time and place. In other words, they are meant to indicate the quantity and quality of the product being delivered, to whom it is being delivered, when and where, and with what intended impact.

In contrast to this, almost anyone who has ever attempted to construct a logframe or who has ever been involved in an evaluation will have first hand experience of just how difficult the identification of appropriate indicators can be – particularly those that are qualitative rather than quantitative. Within the humanitarian field, there has been considerable effort at standardising the relevant indicators through the SPHERE project. It involved a coalition of over 225 European and North American NGOs in developing minimum standards in five key sectors of humanitarian response: water and sanitation; food security; nutrition; health services; and shelter and site selection. These are now widely used in drawing up logframes in emergency situations and are also likely to be used in subsequent evaluations. However, even in the SPHERE project, the overwhelming majority of indicators are quantitative in nature. This partly reflects the nature of humanitarian responses (such as the delivery of tents, medical supplies, safe water and sanitation infrastructure), but it also makes evident what many feel are fundamental weaknesses in both the logframe methodology and the standard donor evaluation processes.

The use of logframes undoubtedly offers certain benefits. It helps to clarify and to set the project objectives and the assumptions underpinning specific interventions. It highlights the need to consciously link planned activities with desired outcomes, and to clearly identify the type, range and amount of inputs required for each. Most importantly, it can highlight the need for and the prospects of project sustainability.

However, logframes also have limitations. Many view them as overly restrictive, forcing the implementing agencies to think mechanistically rather than being innovative. This results from their tendency to reinforce linear causal relationships between inputs, activities and outcomes. It is this tendency that also leads to an emphasis on the quantifiable when it comes to measurable indicators. It further produces a focus on the project level rather than on the overall policy goals or purposes.

The result can be a rather static analysis that does not fully engage with the risks or assumptions identified in a logframe. Nor is it a methodology that does much to highlight opportunities which exist. Thus, the problematic nature and structure of the logframe methodology almost invariably leads to conflict being located as a risk – often as a ‚killer assumption' that poses a serious potential threat to a project – rather than being viewed as something the project might seek to address directly through its activities. Its defenders might well argue that this not inherent in the methodology itself, only in the manner in which it has been deployed.

A recent OECD/DAC overview of humanitarian evaluation methodology recognised some of these limitations and argues that evaluations must move beyond a narrow ‚project only' focus and develop a wider, policy oriented approach (OECD/DAC 1999). This expanded orientation would focus not just on the rationale and objectives of individual projects but on the mandates, underlying beliefs, assumptions and ideologies that have led evaluators to deem them worthwhile in the first place. It would also allow for a more pointed assessment of the tensions that can well exist between these and the successful implementation of particular projects. It is argued that such an approach would better capture the fluidity, complexity and interconnectedness of a situation and the range of responses to it.

In shifting away from a narrow, linear focus on cause/effect relationships to one that puts forward textured narrative accounts of events, processes and structure, an evaluation would aim at validation rather than verification. While this shift in orientation to the wider policy level would

provide the basis for a more strategic assessment of the impact of policy on conflict dynamics and peacebuilding opportunities, it would still leave a gap in project level assessments. Moreover, although there is much that is relevant and helpful for PCIA in the standardised criteria being devised for the development and humanitarian fields, these cannot, in themselves provide an adequate foundation for the creation of an operational methodology unique to PCIA.

3. Development Projects, Conflict and PCIA

One of the most significant attempts to develop a workable PCIA methodology was Ken Bush's „A Measure of Peace" (1998), produced for the Canadian International Development Research Centre's (IDRC) Peacebuilding and Reconstruction programme. In his thoughtful and provocative paper, Bush asserts that efforts at developing PCIA methodologies entailed a fundamental misconception. The difficulty he identifies is that most approaches tend to view peacebuilding as a specific type of *activity* rather than thinking of it as an *impact*.

Bush (1998,7) defines PCIA as:

A means of evaluating (ex post facto) and anticipating (ex ante, as far as possible) the impacts of proposed and completed development projects on: 1) those structures and processes which strengthen the prospects for peaceful coexistence and decrease the likelihood of the outbreak, reoccurrence, or continuation of violent conflict, and; 2) those structure and processes that increase the likelihood that conflict will be dealt with through violent means.

Bush argues that, unless we manage to develop the analytical tools to answer such questions, „we can only hope to list, assert or guess at the positive or negative impacts of our actions" (Bush 1998, 4).

Bush's repositioning of peacebuilding as impact and his characterization of the nature and purposes of PCIA produces a number of interesting implications. First, the emphasis is placed on location: we have to know where to look for conflict and peacebuilding impacts, i.e. at which societal sites, sectors and levels.

Second, and following from the first, is the implication that, while developing appropriate indicators is an important task, developing an understanding of the *conditions* under which these impacts might occur is equally important. This means that a PCIA must always be sensitive to context (for example, the nature, type and stages of conflict dynamics, and also to the question of whether programming is taking place within a situation of directly militarised violence, protracted but stalemated conflict, or latent conflict).

A third implication is the undermining of the sharp demarcation between development and peacebuilding projects. For Bush, *all* development projects, not just the overtly political ones in areas of good governance, have a potential or actual peacebuilding impact.

Fourth, Bush stresses the need to differentiate between pre-project assessments that aim to anticipate likely impacts and post-project evaluations that assess actual impact but do not do so in narrow developmental terms and rather look at wider peacebuilding impacts. This is important, Bush argues, because „…a project may fail according to limited developmental criteria but succeed according to broader peacebuilding criteria… (and conversely) a project may succeed according to pre-determined developmental criteria but fail in terms of a beneficial impact on peace" (Bush 1998, 6).

Bush gives the example of an education project that fails to achieve its targets in terms of numbers of students passing exams, yet succeeds in reducing inter-group/communal tensions. In narrow terms, such a program would be deemed a failure; but in wider peacebuilding terms, it would be a success. Bush also points out that the opposite case might well apply: while most of the students

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might pass their exams, inter-communal tensions might in the process have been exacerbated, especially if they were all from a particular group, or section of society reinforcing the perceptions of a group that they were being marginalised. The positive developmental outcomes thus might produce negative peacebuilding consequences.

Bush characterizes the pre-project assessment as a screening exercise that examines the dynamics of the conflict environment and its likely impact on the proposed project (Bush 1998, 12-19). He identifies four broad areas of concern for such a pre-assessment: location, timing, political context and other salient factors. These provide the basis for a general characterization of the conflict, its dynamics, its legacies in the proposed project area, including its impact on political structures, processes, and relationships, its impact on the economic and physical infrastructure, and its impact on human and social capital. Once such a broad assessment of the conflict dynamics has been carried out, evaluators should then focus their attention on three specific categories of questions:

1 Environmental / contextual considerations

- Are minimally predictable and stable political, legal and security structures in place? This assesses the damage that a conflict may have caused to the functional competencies of these structures, and whether the level of damage and non-functioning poses an acceptable risk to the project.
- What are the infrastructural conditions? This assesses how a project will work within existing damaged and/or decaying infrastructure and how will it contribute to its development/ reconstruction.
- Is the window of opportunity opening or closing? This assesses the ebb and flow of the political, economic and social dynamics and whether they will facilitate or hinder a project. Drawing on experiences in post-apartheid South Africa, for instance, Bush notes that an open situation does not necessarily ensure a successful peacebuilding impact.

2 Project specific considerations

- Does the project have the right mix of resources?
- Does the lead organisation have the requisite experience or comparative advantage in the region? This assesses the track record of the implementing organisation, its network of partners; and the extent to which it brings to bear unique skills, capacity, or expertise to the project.
- What are the project's ,tolerance levels'? This assesses the capacity to respond to uncertainty, indeterminacy, risks, losses and change.
- Are suitable personnel available? This assesses both narrow technical capacity as well as the capacity to find, create and optimise political space within which to manoeuvre.

3 Project – environment correspondence

- What is the level of political support for the project? This gauges the support from local, regional and national political actors, as well as from other interested parties (donors, IGOs, other NGOs). Further measured is the support within one's own organisation.
- Does the project have the trust, support and participation of the relevant authorities and the community? This assesses the degree and character of the participatory dimensions of the project.
- Is the project sustainable? This assesses the ability to continually generate the resources (institutional, human and financial) necessary for the continuation of the project.

Once an assessment is made based on the above criteria, questions and concerns, it may then be necessary to alter the timing, structure or objectives of a project. A decision can then be made either to proceed with a project as planned, replace it with a revised, different or complementary

project, or do nothing until the situation becomes more opportune to the project's specific objectives. Most importantly, this also provides a baseline from which to assess actual peacebuilding impacts.

In pursuing post-project evaluations, Bush identifies four broad areas in which to explore the wider peacebuilding impacts of a project (Bush 1998, 22-24):

1 Did the project produce substantial or politically significant changes in access to individual or collective material and non-material resources

For example, did it facilitate access to water, land, food, political institutions and processes, economic resources, social and/or cultural status, information, legitimacy, authority?

2 Did the project create, exacerbate or mitigate socio-economic tensions

Did it serve to reinforce privileged access by one group over others in economic, educational, agricultural, industrial sectors or did it serve to reduce hierarchies and dependencies in these areas?

3 Did the project produce substantial changes in the material basis of economic sustenance or food security

For example, did it provide new techniques/technology that directly affect livelihoods? Did it affect the logics of the political economy that minimise opportunities for or the impact of warlordism? Did it create local economies that opt out of the political economy of civil conflict (Anderson 1999)?

4 Did the project produce challenges to or changes in content of or control overexisting political, economic and/or social systems

Did the project serve to empower individuals/groups to assert control over the political, economic, social aspects of their lives; to challenge existing systems of control and develop alternative systems of governance?

In the final part of his paper, Bush identifies five concrete points of reference as an example of a PCIA framework that might lead us to look in the right locations and ask the right questions (see Box 2). These would provide the basis for assessing past or potential impact on peace and conflict conditions (Bush 1998, 25-31). Bush notes that his lists of question are suggestive rather than comprehensive. The specific questions employed in a particular evaluation would of course need to be determined on a project by project basis, as would the assessment of the specific impacts.

This is also true of the indicators that might provide a basis for measuring such impacts. According to Bush, these should be „user driven". Donors will have different questions and indicators from those that an implementing agency might identify. These in turn would be different from those that the recipients or participants in a project might identify. Bush argues that a priori indicators often obscure as much as they reveal, often saying more about the evaluation system employed than they do about the project being evaluated. He calls instead for a „kaleidoscopic" set of indicators that can better accommodate all the varied needs of the different project stakeholders and participants in an assessment process.

There are several points worth noting regarding Bush's efforts at articulating a viable PCIA framework. First, what Bush offers is a multi-layered, almost cascading series of interpretive PCIA frameworks that move from the broad and general to the ever more specific. The precise nature of the linkages between the different frameworks, however, is not particularly clear. Although

Bush suggests that his pre-project assessment would provide a baseline for post-project evaluations, there does not appear to be a ready correspondence or correlation between the factors identified in the pre-project phase and the PCI areas identified towards the end (cf. Leonhardt 1999).

Even Bush's more specific framework is still rather broad and general, offering a very limited amount of detail. Bush regards this as one of the strengths of his approach. While he is correct in arguing that fixed, a priori indicators may say more about the evaluation system than about the project to be evaluated, it is also true that the lack of clarity on indicators can also speak volumes about an assessment system. In particular, it may well hinder the ability of donors, implementing agencies, stakeholder, participants or external evaluators to effectively operationalise such a PCIA framework.

There needs to be a balance struck between the loose approach of letting the evaluation criteria be generated on a case by case basis and the pre-determined, pre-judging set of indicators. What is needed is the development of broad typologies of indicators, with suggestive detailing of indicators within sectors, levels, types of projects, and conflict situations – which interestingly Bush starts to do in his discussion of indicators relevant to good governance and human rights projects (Bush 1998, 21-22).

Second, Bush's identification of five PCI areas or sectors does push PCIA methodologies in the right direction. Differences might arise over the precise characterization of these areas and, clearly, work is needed in identifying and agreeing these categories and refining their content. It is interesting to note, however, that efforts in this area seem to be converging on what might be characterized as a „revised human security approach to peacebuilding" (Cockell 1998; Leonhardt 1999). The UN Staff College training programme on early warning and preventive measures uses a revised human security approach. It identifies six sectors: human rights and personal security; governance and political processes; societal and communal stability; socio-economic; military and external. These are used as the basis for engaging in dynamic sectoral conflict analysis, scenario building and the identification or risks and opportunities for preventive action, including peacebuilding (www.itcilo.it/UNSCP/programmefocus/earlywarning).

Leonhardt, in her overview for International Alert, identifies four thematic areas – governance, economics, socio-cultural factors and security – that she deploys in developing indicators for conflict analysis, project risk assessment and project monitoring and evaluation.

The real limitation of Bush's framework as it stands at the moment is that it offers no way to examine the dynamic interaction between sectors. It is not only what is unfolding within a particular PCI area but also what are the implications of the interaction of these different areas with one another. How does social empowerment inter-relate with, reinforce or undermine military and human security? What is the relative weight that we should give to each sector at any particular juncture?

Third, although Bush does note the need to distinguish between development projects that have a peacebuilding potential and those projects that are explicitly concerned with peacebuilding, his framework is still biased towards the former. While Bush might well argue that much if not all of what he has outlined would also be relevant to explicit peacebuilding activities, we still need to explore much more thoroughly whether the particularities of such programmes or projects require a distinctive PCIA approach.

4. Linking PCIA Frameworks

One current endeavour at developing and deploying a working PCIA methodology is that being developed by INTRAC for the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Noting that none of the various efforts at developing PCIAs to date have had much success in translating

| Box 2: Areas of Potential Peace and Conflict Impact ||
PCI Areas	Examples
Institutional Capacity to Manage/Resolve Violent Conflict & to Promote Tolerance and Build Peace	Impact on the capacity to identify and respond to peace and conflict challenges and opportunities; organisational responsiveness; bureaucratic flexibility; efficiency and effectiveness; ability to modify institutional roles and expectations to suit changing environment and needs; financial management.
Military and Human Security	Direct and indirect impact on: the level, intensity, dynamics of violence; violent behaviour; security and insecurity (broadly defined); defence/security policy; repatriation, demobilisation and reintegration; reform and retraining of police and security forces/ structures; disarmament; banditry; organised crime.
Political Structures and Processes	Impact on formal and informal political structures and processes, such as: government capabilities from the level of the state government down to the municipality; policy content and efficacy; decentralisation/concentration of power; political ethnicisation; representation; transparency; accountability; democratic culture; dialogue; conflict mediation and reconciliation; strengthening/ weakening of civil society actors; political mobilisation. Impact on rule of law; independence/politicisation of legal system; human rights conditions; labour standards.
Economic Structures and Processes	Impact on strengthening or weakening equitable socio-economic structures/processes; distortion/conversion of war economies; economic infrastructure; supply of basic goods; availability of investment capital; banking system; employment impact; productivity; training; income generation; production of commercial products or services; food insecurity. Impacts on the exploitation, generation, or distribution of resources, especially non-renewable resources and the material basis of economic sustenance or food security.
Social Reconstruction and Empowerment	Impact on: quality of life; constructive social communication (e.g. those promoting tolerance, inclusiveness and participatory principles); displaced people; adequacy of health care and social services; incompatibility of interests; trust/distrust; inter-group hostility/dialogue; communications; transport; resettlement/ displacement; housing; education; nurturing a culture of peace.

(source Bush 1998, 25)

these into „frameworks and tools that can be integrated into donor policy", the INTRAC project sets out to develop a „smart planning and management tool that can assist policy makers and practitioner to mitigate conflict and promote peace in a more systematic manner" (INTRAC 1999, 6). Drawing on an earlier DFID discussion paper (Warner 1999), it identifies three different components of an overall „conflict assessment methodology": strategic conflict assessment (SCA), conflict impact assessment (CIA), and a peacebuilding framework.

The first component, the strategic conflict assessment, is designed to offer an analysis of the conflict environment and would be conducted at a regional or country level. Similar to Bush's pre-project assessment and the OECD/DAC proposal for ‚narrative analysis baselines', it offers a

contextual analysis of the conflict dynamics within a particular situation, an assessment of the risks associated with pursuing development and humanitarian programming in such an environment, and an assessment of the peacebuilding opportunities.

The second component, the conflict impact assessment, is intended to be a tool for desk officers in the screening, appraisal, monitoring and evaluation of projects. This second tier focuses especially on the project level, and establishes a basis for better assessing their capability to mitigate conflict related risks and to support peacebuilding opportunities. Such a tool also enables the conflict proofing of projects (minimising the impact of the conflict on the project), minimisation of harm (the impact of the project on the conflict) and maximisation of benefits (enhancing opportunities for conflict prevention and peacebuilding). Thus, evaluators could carry out the initial project assessment based on the information generated in the SCA and, if risks or opportunities were deemed to be high, a more detailed CIA could then be undertaken.

The third component is the peacebuilding framework. This would be used to assess, monitor and evaluate projects with an explicit and dedicated focus on peacebuilding. It would build upon the detailed project CIA, but also examine stakeholders' perceptions as the basis for developing indicators that could be used to assess impacts. The distinction between the second and third tiers is that the former focuses on ‚risk mitigation' while the latter on ‚exploiting opportunities'.

Interestingly, rather than attempting to pre-determine the specific content, categories or indicators that the three different methodologies would be likely to deploy, the INTRAC project sought to develop these in the course of the work, as undertaken by specialist consultants engaging in four pilot case studies. In order to better explore the question of context specific as opposed to general frameworks, four different conflict situations were chosen for analysis: post-Soviet stalemate/transition; open and escalating conflict; escalating but not yet widespread open conflict; and latent or pre-escalatory conflict.

To date, only three of the four case studies have been completed, so that any insights and conclusions must still be regarded as preliminary. Yet, it is certainly possible to point to some interesting features of the results produced so far.

The first of these is the realisation that the most important contribution of these evaluations is likely to come in the form of the SCA. This would make donor country policy more sensitive to political dynamics and, carried out on an ongoing basis, allow programming to be adjusted accordingly.

Second, while it is of course important to be able to properly identify and analyse the dynamics within the different sectors of a conflict situation, it is equally important to analyse the interplay between them. As Woodward notes in her report on Moldova, „the interactive effects of the different sectoral areas are the most difficult to analyse, but the greatest contribution that a conflict impact assessment methodology can make" (Woodward 2000, 25). Linked to this is the need to be alert to the cumulative impact of different interventions.

Third, the SCA needs to make explicit the various assumptions underpinning the aid programming: what approach does it take towards conflict and conflict resolution and what outcomes are expected. This resonates with the OECD/DAC proposals for policy wide evaluations as noted above, and would effectively expose the potential contradictions between underlying assumptions, actual programming, expected outcomes and actual outcomes.

Fourth is the importance of context. Universal tools might be easier to apply, but will have only limited validity, as they will almost certainly fail to capture the complexity of a given situation. As Goodhand notes, „The challenge is to find the right balance between ‚off the peg' tools that are too general and ‚customised' tools that are too specific and make comparisons difficult" (Goodhand 2000, 9).

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Fifth, conflict impact assessments must always be the product of a dialogue between the assessment team, the local stakeholders, the implementing agencies and the donors. Effective assessments will adopt a process oriented, learning approach. Only through such participatory methods can evaluators hope to overcome the formalism of standard assessment and evaluation methodologies.

Sixth, is the need to be cautious about the possibilities of assessing specific impacts. At best, PCIAs deal in probabilities, identifying the general direction and overall pattern of change.

Nevertheless, it is also clear that there are limitations to the INTRAC approach. First, it has so far been unable to identify or even clearly articulate a policy tool or set of criteria for the evaluation of programmes or projects. Like the Bush model, its usefulness has been limited to the suggestion of some types of questions that might be worth asking or some issues which should be explored, and this with even less specificity than Bush provides. This shortcoming is likely to significantly inhibit the institutional internalisation of the methodology, leaving it in the hands of a pool of expert external consultants.

Second, its emphasis on the strategic level of analysis has unfortunately left the second two tiers of the initial methodology underdeveloped. Indeed, as the project has progressed, it would seem that efforts at pursuing the peacebuilding framework have been more or less abandoned. There are several attendant dangers in this almost total reliance on strategic level analysis.

At the broader level, it may well leave the PCIA producing nothing further than ‚conflict mindfulness‘ on the part of donors. Given the still serious lack of conflict awareness amongst many donors, this would not be an insignificant outcome, but it does unnecessarily limit the potential of PCIA methodologies. At the project level, the reliance on strategic assessments may easily degenerate into seemingly ad hominem evaluations of individual projects or, at the very least, create a greater weight of expectations regarding impacts on wider socio-economic or political dynamics that few individual peacebuilding projects could easily bear. An over reliance on strategic assessment may stymie support for innovative, small scale peacebuilding projects.

Third, there is the danger of ‚over-contextualisation‘. While the INTRAC project, along with Bush and others, is certainly correct to stress the importance of context, this merely serves to highlight a further set of important questions that PCIA methodologies need to address: namely, what is it about different contexts that produces different outcomes? What works (or doesn‘t), where and why? It is here that the possibilities of developing generalisations across cases may be the most productive and enlightening.

Finally, there is the potential difficulty that with its emphasis on the strategic level, the INTRAC approach could become donor dominated so that it becomes a tool that will only meet the needs of donors, but not those of implementing agencies and NGOs or stakeholders on the ground.

5. PCIA: A Peace Practitioner Perspective

One of the most interesting and innovative efforts at developing evaluation methodology and criteria is the Action Research Initiative (ARIA) project under the direction of Jay Rothman and Marc Ross (Ross & Rothman 1999). What is especially interesting about this project is its focus on small scale conflict resolution and peacebuilding initiatives. This differentiates ARIA markedly from most other PCIA efforts, as the latter usually tend to focus on the conflict and peace impacts of development or humanitarian programming, and often do so from a donor rather than from a practitioner perspective. What is also innovative about ARIA is its explicit use of ‚action evaluation methodology‘.

Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment Methodology

The purpose of the ARIA project is to develop „contextually appropriate means for the evaluation of conflict resolution activities" (Rothman 1998, 119). Rothman argues that these approaches require new methodologies that are consistent with and even constitutive of the normative values and goals of conflict resolution itself. The project seeks to create a seamless connection between evaluation processes and conflict resolution practices such that the former is no longer viewed as an external imposition on the latter. Instead, it becomes an integral part of any intervention, helping third parties to clarify their goals, activities and outcomes (Ross & Rothman 1999). Far from being a burden or imposition, evaluation should instead be seen as a source of innovation and creativity (Ross & Rothman 1999).

The impetus for the ARIA project came from the growing sense of frustration both with existing approaches to evaluations and with the inability of many conflict resolution projects to articulate explicit project goals linked to a set of concrete activities. Often, project goals were formulated in such vague and grandiose terms (such as promoting peace) that it made them meaningless as far as evaluation was concerned. In addition, projects would end up pursuing activities that were not clearly directed at the project's goals, further muddying any attempt to discern what types of conflict resolution activities and projects were successful under what circumstances. Rothman argues that the better interveners and stakeholders explicitly articulate, individually and interactively, the goals that drive their involvement in conflict resolution activities, the more readily will they define and realise success.

The ARIA process consists of three phases: establishing a baseline; negotiating interventions; and articulating evolved criteria. These are not discrete and sequential, but are rather overlapping, iterative and ongoing throughout the project.

The first layer – establishing a baseline – addresses the following questions:
- What are the project goals?
- To whom do they matter and why?
- How will they be achieved?

The intention is to make as explicit as possible the processes of goal articulation. This will make apparent the diverse range of goals and objectives that inform any particular intervention. The questions help to elucidate the different agendas and motivations that a donor may have compared with the implementing organisation as compared with the stakeholder recipients.

The second layer – negotiating the intervention – involves a presentation of the various project goals back to the different aggregations of stakeholders. This allows the points of convergence, differences and tensions to be captured, articulated, fully communicated and understood by the different project stakeholders. The intention is to make participants reflective and fully aware of the stated aims of the project, as well as to provide a baseline of objectives, so that any changes to them over time can be mapped and recorded for discussion.

The third layer – articulating evolved criteria – is a tracking and monitoring process designed to produce contextualised criteria for success. These can then be employed internally in order to modify the project as it unfolds, or applied externally to assess whether the goals are relevant and if they are being achieved. For Ross and Rothman, the most successful projects are those that adapt and evolve over time, in flexible response to the changing dynamics of the context within which the project is taking place. These changes, however, need to occur in a systematic and clear fashion, and to banish any impression of a purely ad hoc approach to the intervention.

Drawing on Banks and Mitchell (1997), the ARIA project identifies three areas in which impact or change can be assessed:

- those that occur in the workshop participants themselves;
- those which result from the workshop directly; and
- those that can be observed in the behaviour and relationships of the parties involved.

These three are then linked to a further distinction between internal and external criteria. Internal criteria relate to the direct impact the project has on the people or groups involved with it. External criteria link these specific, direct effects to the wider conflict dynamics. Rothman and Ross concur that no single conflict resolution initiative (these are often only small scale in nature) is likely, by itself, to fully resolve a conflict. Nevertheless, they argue that any project can be investigated for the impact it has on its own or on a cumulative basis, in combination with other initiatives.

The difficulty, as is often the case with developing PCIAs, is finding the appropriate criteria or standards for evaluation. As Ross and Rothman point out, no project on which ARIA has been working has yet progressed to the point at which „clear standards have been produced for evaluating a project's success" (Ross and Rothman 1999). Yet, it would not be difficult to discern the nature of possible criteria linked to the specific nature of particular types of interventions, exemplified by facilitated problem solving workshops (see Box 3).

Box 3: Possible Evaluative Criteria for Facilitated Problem Solving Workshops
The extent to which the workshop:
1. fosters interactive conflict analysis;
2. fosters relationships between parties;
3. encourages improved communication between parties;
4. performs an educational role/transference of ideas, concepts, processes;
5. plays a pre-negotiation role;
6. enhances the willingness to compromise;
7. assists in the negotiation process;
8. supports implementation of negotiated agreements.

(source Hoffman 1995, 16-17)

However, as is the case with the methodologies developed by Bush and INTRAC, the ARIA project is cautious about invoking generic or prescriptive criteria. Instead, it argues that these need to be specific to the intervention and are best elicited from and with the participants in the project. Such an approach, they argue, will produce more detailed, nuanced and realistic criteria, as well as generating commitment from all those involved in a project.

The criteria also need to be adjusted depending on the type of intervention taking place: those for training or skill building workshops will be different from those for a facilitated problem-solving workshop. Nevertheless, working with insights gleaned from their collaborative research efforts and ongoing case studies, Ross and Rothman have identified „illustrative standards for international or ethnic conflict resolution" (see Box 4). In addition, they are optimistic about the prospect of developing a contingency based model of the types of goals sought in specific types of conflicts and interventions (Ross & Rothman 1999, 250).

> **Box 4: ARIA Illustrative Standards for Conflict Resolution Projects**
> **Long term outcome goals:**
> 1. Institutionalisation: develop local capacity, establish structures that will perpetuate and deepen the work;
>
> 2. Reverberation: influence specific micro-level interventions so that they reverberate to the society at large;
> 3. Demonstration: establish credible and replicable models for addressing ethnic tension.
> **Methods to accomplish such goals:**
> 1. Needs assessments: identification of issues;
> 2. Dialogue: meaningful, regular, sustainable;
> 3. Confidence building: mutual trust and understanding;
> 4. Empowering: recognition of the power to achieve creative and peaceful change;
> 5. Partnering: cooperation with other programmes;
> 6. Engaging: engaging disputants to engage in creative conflict management;
> 7. Localising: identifying leaders of local conflict management;
> 8. Catalysing: initiating concrete collaborative project between disputing parties;
> 9. Training: local leaders/activists in contextually appropriate concepts and skills of CR;
> 10. Evaluation: development of credible and useful methods for evaluating CR interventions.
>
> (source Ross & Rothman 1999, 251)

While there is much about the ARIA project to be positive – including its focus on projects that have a direct conflict resolution/peacebuilding remit, its innovative methodology, its effort to explicitly link theories of conflict and conflict resolution with project design, implementation and evaluation – there are potential problems with the approach.

The first of these is the obverse of those confronting the various approaches discussed above. Whereas these alternative approaches fail to provide an adequate explanation of how analysis should move from the broad and strategic to the project level, the ARIA approach has yet to develop a clear account of the linkage in the opposite direction.

Second, however commendable its inclusive approach to goal articulation may be, ARIA carries with it the danger that the agreed goals will remain those of the lowest common denominator. Thus, the nature of this evaluative process might actually serve to stifle the very creativity it seeks to foster.

Third, despite its emphasis on contextual and cultural sensitivity, it is arguable that the ARIA approach is in effect a consequence of the prominence it gives to problem-solving methodologies and their associated emphasis on goal articulation, rationality and dialogue. These are deeply imbued with Western conceptions of the individual, of rationality and the nature of communication and dialogue that may be at odds with non-Western societies.

6. PCIA: Issues, Problems, Dilemmas and Ways Forward

Where does all this leave endeavours to develop PCIA methodologies? There are a number of possibilities.

One is the view that all of the experience reviewed above only indicates that current efforts at developing PCIA methodologies are slowly grinding themselves into the ground. The multiplicity of efforts, the various difficulties they have encountered, and the promises that remain unredeemed are strikingly similar to the fate that befell the high hopes for various conflict early warning systems that have since fallen out of favour.

As was the case with the efforts at early warning, it is also clear with PCIA that this indeed should be an important and useful tool for any practitioner in the international community that must respond effectively to conflict situations. At the conceptual level, there may even be general agreement about what such an approach should try to accomplish, at least in broad terms. Nevertheless, as with early warning, the translation of these worthy aims into a practical, usable tool has so far failed to materialise. The gap between theory and practice has not yet been closed; the various efforts at PCIAs are, so far, a practical dead end.

A more hopeful reading of the above would point instead to the inroads that are slowly being made in efforts to articulate the details of a workable PCIA approach. It would emphasise the growing number of cases in which the nascent approaches are actually being applied to real situations – whether it be Bush's ongoing work on Sri Lanka, the four pilot studies underway at INTRAC, or the range of rich empirical action research that is included under the ARIA project.

However, in the process of developing and refining a truly workable PCIA approach, there are a whole range of issues that will need to be addressed. Some of these are finding better ways to differentiate between interventions by multi-mandate as opposed to niche peacebuilding actors; resolving questions of accountability (who are PCIAs for?); setting proper time frames for evaluating impacts; and establishing to whom projects should be held accountable (donors? recipients?). But several further issues are perhaps even more important.

The first of these is the issues of indicators. While the reluctance to produce a set of indicators cast in stone is understandable, and correct, the limited success so far in detailing any sort of even illustrative, suggestive indicators for use in PCIAs is regrettable. If the desire is to move away from inappropriate evaluation methodologies and criteria, and transcend the constraints of logframe methodology and similar approaches, then part of making a convincing case for alternative approaches is the articulation of usable criteria and indicators.

These can be based on the theories that lie behind particular types of interventions as well as drawn from practical experience and case studies. This is not to argue in favour of ‚magic bullets‘, but rather to suggest that broad, contingently related patterns and categories need to be identified. It is simply not good not enough to invoke the contexts and the particularities of particular situations, important as those are, as a defence against the failure to name such indicators.

One possible way forward in dealing with this lacuna in PCIAs might be to set up an initiative similar to the SPHERE project in the humanitarian field. A similar array of agencies, NGOs, practitioners, stakeholders and recipients could be involved in generating such a document.

Second, practitioners pursuing PCIAs must develop a far more sophisticated sense of the linkages and interconnections that properly exist between the different types and levels of evaluations: those at the broad policy level, those at the strategic country level and those at the project level. As should be evident from the above survey of approaches, currently the various efforts at developing a working PCIA tend to focus on one at the expense of the others. The danger

in this is that the pressures of time and scarce resources will eventually lead to an over-reliance on the broader, more general strategic level analysis, thus effectively inhibiting a more sophisticated understanding of what particular types of projects can or can't do in particular circumstances.

Third is the need to further develop an understanding of contexts, conditions and circumstances and of the effect that these can have on the likelihood of positive impacts. Again, this points to the need to move beyond the mantra of the importance of contexts, and the implication that nothing more general can be drawn from a particular set of experiences in a particular set of circumstances. We must come to understand how and why contexts matter, not simply that they do.

Fourth is the need to develop an agreed and well-differentiated account of both the different sectors of PCIA and the dynamic interaction between them. A deeper exploration of the interrelationships between the different sectors will not only provide a more robust means for evaluating the positive or negative impact of particular interventions, but also to better evaluate the cumulative and spill over effects of projects.

Finally, in pursuing all of this, it is important to recognise Goodhand's injunction about the need for proportionality and humility with regard to peacebuilding endeavours, and especially about the claims we make as to their measurable impact and to our capacity for their effective evaluation (Goodhand 2000).

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