

# PCIA FIVE YEARS ON: THE COMMODIFICATION OF AN IDEA

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Hoffman's article for the *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation* offers a timely opportunity to examine the idea and set of practices now established in an evolving area of activity sometimes labelled Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment or "PCIA". More broadly, this article presents an opportunity to enter into a *critical* discussion of the practice and politics of peacebuilding – a discussion that has been conspicuous by its absence, despite the rush of international donors into self-described peacebuilding projects, programmes and "operations".

The structure and content of the Hoffman article is straightforward. It consists of a general discussion of traditional donor evaluation, followed by brief overviews of the various methodologies employed in *A Measure of Peace*, the INTRAC study and the ARIA project. It closes with a one-page conclusion containing four relatively technocratic points to bear in mind in the subsequent development of PCIA.

While the Hoffman article does a fine job of summarizing some of the methodological details of a number of studies, I cannot help but be struck by the question: "Where are the politics?" PCIA, in its origins and implications, is fundamentally political. To treat it in a non-political, technocratic, manner is therefore just as dangerous as it would be to deal similarly with arms control mechanisms. A full examination of the evolutionary path of PCIA, either as an idea or as an evolving methodology, must be placed within the very political context of the "Development Industry". Only once this has been accomplished, can analysis profitably turn towards issues of power and control, as well as to the question of whether the empowering potential of PCIA can be realized through developmental structures which have been known to have net dis-empowering and anti-peacebuilding impacts. Two examples discussed at greater length elsewhere are the international response to Kosovo and the hundreds of international donor-sponsored conflict resolution workshops (so-called) in the Republika Srpska of Bosnia Herzegovina (see Bush 2001 forthcoming).

While my comments below address some of the specific methodological issues raised in the Hoffman article, this contribution further aims to employ a broader analytical focus, in order to consider a

larger set of political issues inherent in the ways the Development Industry, as it is currently construed, conditions – and often neutralizes the transformative potential of – new ideas whether this is gender, the environment or issues of peace and conflict. It will become clear that I consider methodological issues to be the least important dimension of the development of PCIA, especially when compared to the homogenizing impact of the overall Development Industry.

## I. The Origin of PCIA

It is worth reviewing the origins of PCIA, in order to provide a point of reference for examining the process by which ideas are introduced, appropriated, adapted, and often adulterated by mainstream development (read “political”) institutions. Such a historical glance also responds to the Hoffman article's (valid) observation that my Working Paper, *A Measure of Peace: Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment of Development Projects in War Zones* (Bush 1998) is, in some areas, lacking in specificity.

In 1996, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) asked me to, among other things, develop a discussion paper for the OECD / DAC Working Group on Conflict, Peace and Development Cooperation on what I labelled Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment of development projects in war zones. The Evaluation Unit of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) pushed the idea to the next step of development by supporting me to undertake field work on PCIA in Mozambique, Uganda and South Africa in 1997. *A Measure of Peace* was the result of over a hundred interviews and meandering conversations in the field – conversations often undertaken within a thin cocoon of candle light, ears cocked for untoward sounds outside barred windows.

While *A Measure of Peace* employs the painfully honed language of an un-recovered academic, any utility (or legitimacy) that it might possess derives directly from the experiences and insights offered by those development and humanitarian workers on the front lines of contemporary dirty wars. The objective of the study was to sketch out the conceptual parameters of PCIA. After this first step, the intention was to create the space for those *in the South* to re-engage the idea so that they *themselves* could develop appropriate, practical and more user-friendly tools (see Box 1) to monitor and assess the broader peace and conflict impact of their projects.

*A Measure of Peace* was never intended to be a full-blown kitbag of PCIA tools. Rather, it was an invitation to enter into an open-ended and on-going conversation. Up until that point, there had not been the *recul* necessary to hear (let alone listen to) the voices in the field – especially non-English ones outside the footprints of the international Development Industry. At best, there was the usual ventriloquism or tokenism, augmented by *ad hominem* appeals for considering the conflict context in development programming.

**Box 1: User-friendly tools.**

A fascinating simulation exercise was developed and tested at IDRC with the help of Rob Opp a research officer in the Peacebuilding and Reconstruction Unit at the time. The exercise assembled a wide mix of policy-makers, development and humanitarian NGO workers from the North and South and researchers which helped to refine our understanding of the PCIA respective needs of each of these groups as well as some of the modalities to be considered in PCIA development and implementation. In January 2001, this was tested again in Sri Lanka under the auspices of the Swedish Mission in Colombo.

But something quite interesting happened after the publication of *A Measure of Peace*. Instead of returning to the field, the idea of PCIA was seized upon by a number of bilateral and multilateral donors. Emphasis shifted from the original organic Southern-led learning process to a mechanistic Northern-led quest for mainstreamable products (tools, frameworks, manuals, indicators – especially indicators – *etcetera*). In some cases, Northern-based NGOs saw this as a good opportunity to bag some quick funding by starting up PCIA or PCIA-like (or ‘PCIA-lite’) projects – projects that were funded despite their conceptual incoherence or the questionable capacity of the implementing organisation.

The ultimate result in most cases was the limitation, rather than the expansion of PCIA, as it was forced into constrained pre-existing bureaucratic structures and made to fit the standard operating procedures of the Development Industry.

## II. The Question of Indicators

The Hoffman article takes particular issue with the fact that *A Measure of Peace* lacks a hard set of indicators to measure the impact of peace and conflict. It further calls for a “convincing case for alternative approaches is the articulation of useable criteria and indicators.” (Hoffman, in this volume, p. 34)

This is a common criticism of *A Measure of Peace*. However, a close reading of the text suggests a suitable response:

*“If the PCIA is to be user-driven and relevant, then ‘users’ should choose their own indicators - whether they are evaluators for multilateral organisations, or local partners, or the communities within which projects are undertaken. This goes against the grain of most conventional approaches to evaluation, which typically specify indicators in advance. However, conventional evaluations focus more clearly on a project or programme in a certain sector. Ostensibly, this approach has the advantage of allowing for greater comparability between projects by identifying and standardizing suitable indicators within projects. There is a danger however, that the a priori identification of indicators may obscure as much as it reveals by highlighting (and thus legitimating) some features of a project, while simultaneously burying (and thus delegitimizing) others.”* (Bush 1998, p. 16)

In essence, *A Measure of Peace* calls for a “kaleidoscopic” set of indicators that can accommodate the different needs, interests and worldviews of the different project stakeholders (in the broadest sense), as well as of the participants in an assessment process. This is essential if PCIA is to even stand a chance of having an empowering impact on communities affected by outside interventions. That you might have different – even incommensurable – indicators within the same monitoring / evaluation system certainly goes against the logframe logic that the Hoffman article rightly criticizes. Any willingness to accept such methodological messiness can only serve to highlight the paradigmatic difference between standard evaluation tools that create and then *capture a single reality* on the one hand, and the notion of PCIA as an approach that *interprets multiple realities* on the other.

The embrace of *competing indicators* is founded upon the understanding that there is no single socio-political reality or impact, but rather a multiplicity of realities and impacts that coexist and often clash with one another. The different stakeholders’ choice of these

different indicators allows for a clearer examination and understanding of these multiple, overlapping realities.

Is this a problem *for* traditional evaluation approaches? Definitely. However, it is also a major difficulty *with* traditional evaluation, because in the *a priori* identification such indicators almost always say more about the evaluation system than it does about the impact of a project. Hegemonically, it imposes the worldview and implicit interests of the evaluator's system over those on the ground. Is it possible to come up with a genuinely common set of indicators acceptable to all stakeholders? Maybe, but I suspect that the compromises involved in such an exercise might result in an erroneous, or at least a one dimensional, slice of impact-reality.

The suggestion in the Hoffman article that PCIA be developed further through “initiatives similar to the SPHERE project in the humanitarian field” (Hoffman, in this volume, p.34) elicits reservations similar to those applied to indicators. I worry here about large-scale proselytizing missions that descend on capital cities in war-affected countries around the world, and insist on holding workshops run by non-country experts with huge ‘frequent-flier’ accounts. I cannot help but recall briefing an apostle of the *Do No Harm* Project on the ABCs of inter-group and intra-group politics in Sri Lanka only days before his ‘mission’ and workshop there. This leads me to strongly advocate a position which allows for multiple efforts at multiple levels with variable (if any) linkages between them in the initial stages of PCIA development.

One final note on indicators: the Hoffman article proposes that they might be “articulated on the basis of the theories that lie behind particular types of interventions, as well as drawn from practical experience and case studies” (Hoffmann, in this volume, p. 34). In my experience, I have found that “interventions” at an international level are driven primarily by interests, rather than by theories. In some cases, “theories” have become no more than useful screens for underlying political economic motivations for interventions. While I believe that some interventions are justified, any serious attempt at their overall assessment is probably better served by an examination of interests, rather than at theories.

### III. Linkages and Interactions

*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? (Hoffman, in this volume, p. 25)*

My sense here, is that it is the case itself – the thick details and specificities – that will provide the necessary glimpses into the dynamic interaction between these "sectors". I do not believe that this can be specified *a priori* because it will vary so widely both between and within cases. So, too, will it vary over time.

If we understand PCIA as a set of interpretive tools, then its utility will become evident (or not) only in its application. Moreover, it is *in the application* that the nature of the interaction between the sectors will also become apparent (static, dynamic, inter-related, independent and so on). More importantly, a case-driven approach opens the space for going beyond the description of interactions, and towards a more fruitful examination of how and why these change over time – a prerequisite to any genuine attempt to nurture lasting peacebuilding.

Further, I fear that efforts to specify the “basis for looking at the interaction” may in fact serve only to limit the utility of PCIA by inhibiting its interpretive flexibility– indeed, by doing what logframes were criticized for earlier in Hoffman article. Namely:

*Many view them [logframes] as overly restrictive, forcing the implementing agencies to think 'in the box' rather than being innovative and thinking 'out of the box'. This results from their tendency to reinforce linear, 'if-then' 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. (Hoffman, in this volume, p. 17)*

The Hoffman article correctly notes that efforts to develop conflict early warning systems (EWS) “have fallen out of favour and into decline.” It continues: “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. . .” (Hoffman, in this volume, p. 34)

The comparison between the floundering efforts to establish conflict early warning systems and PCIA is a good one, but not for the reason that the Hoffman article asserts. The explanation for EWS “falling out of favour” is *not* to be found in the so-called “gap” between theory and practice. The failure of EWS was not due to technical problems, but rather to political obstacles. Indeed, whenever a problem is defined as a technical gap (whether in EWS or PCIA), then the logical response is to attempt to fill that technical gap with technical polyfilla™. In the case of EWS, it entailed countless proposals from “entrepreneurial” organisations seeking to develop (and often duplicate) ever more sensitive monitoring mechanisms and systems. Thousands of donor dollars were frittered away in support of extravagant ‘Buick Road Master’ visions of EWS in the unstated, politically naïve, belief that the ‘right’ information and the ‘right’ channels of communication would compel early action to early warning.

But Rwanda in 1994, the now-classic point of reference, clearly illustrates that the inaction of the International Community (like the refusal of the US representatives of the UN to label the systematic massacres a “genocide” – because that would then require action under the Genocide Convention, see Orentlicher 1999) was due fundamentally to political failures, *not early warning failures*. Since this has been so well documented, we can only continue to be baffled by continued technocratic discussions of “gaps” in EWS.

For the record: one of the principal findings of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda (JEEAR) was that “[d]etailed intelligence reports were passed to New York [UN] and Belgian authorities by the unofficial UNAMIR [United Nations Assistance Mission to Rwanda] intelligence unit documenting the military training of the militias, hidden arms caches and plans for violent action. Unequivocal warnings reached the UN Secretariat in January regarding a planned coup, an assault on the UN forces to drive them out, provocations to resume the civil war and even detailed plans for

carrying out genocidal killings in the capital” (JEEAR 1996, p. 19). Thus, in the months immediately preceding the genocide (beginning April 1994) there was every indication that massive and systematic violence was being planned: extremist rhetoric dominated the radio, public rallies and the Rwandan cocktail circuit; assassinations and organized violence were already taking place; weapons flooded into the country (see Goose 1994); militias were being trained and fed on a diet of extremist hate.

In Rwanda, inaction by the International Community enabled a civil war and genocide in which an estimated five to eight hundred thousand people were killed within a period of three months. Hundreds of thousands more were physically and psychologically scarred for life through maiming, rape and other trauma. Over two million people fled into neighbouring countries and around one million were displaced within Rwanda.

So, how is this related to the discussion of PCIA? Just as EWS get bracketed by larger political issues of national interest of the major powers, so does PCIA also become “compartmentalized”, so that donors can continue with foreign policies and trade practices which are patently peace-destroying or conflict-creating.

Without the compartmentalization of our Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment, we would be forced to confront the large and uncomfortable, contradictions (*not gaps*) between peacebuilding rhetoric and standard international practices. How, for example, can we take seriously the peacebuilding rhetoric of the permanent members of the UN Security Council when they are at the same time the world's largest arms traffickers? (See Guardian Weekly 2000b) Or what are we to think of the engagement of the US in East Timor, when it supported training programmes for the Indonesian military forces implicated in the recent atrocities (following in the US tradition of the School of the Americas in the United States, which similarly trained the military and paramilitary arms of human rights abusing regimes throughout Latin America)? (See Guardian Weekly 1999) Or the US in the Middle East in the fall of 2000, when it sat silently by while the Israeli State proceeded to use its helicopter gunships, tanks and other instruments of full military force against Palestinian children, women and men? Or of the UK, whose “Ethical Foreign Policy” seems to allow for the sale of military equipment to Pakistan only ten months after it condemned the military regime that overthrew the elected government and to the Mugabe Regime in Zimbabwe while it is embroiled in military adventurism in the Democratic Republic of Congo – not to mention the vicious attacks on internal political opponents and White Farmers? (See Guardian Weekly 2000a)

What are the implications of this discussion for PCIA methodology? Methodology – all methodologies – is perforated by politics. Whatever methodological conveniences we hope to fashion for use in PCIA must be placed in this political context.

## V. Peacebuilding as Impact: A Necessary Bias

*... 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 be relevant to explicit peacebuilding activities, there is a need to explore whether the particularities of such programmes or projects requires a distinctive PCIA approach.*

(Hoffman, in this volume, p. 17)

The Hoffman article is correct that the original study contains this “bias”. The bias derives directly from the study's understanding of peacebuilding as an *impact* or *outcome*, rather than as a *type of activity*.

As discussed in *A Measure of Peace*, the last few years have seen peacebuilding instruments typically focusing on such activities as human rights projects, security sector reform, democratic institution-strengthening, public sector reform, and, more nebulously, ‘good governance’ projects. While these activities *may* have had a positive impact on the peace and conflict environment, there are also cases where that impact has been negative.

It is also essential, in this context, that we consider (and even emphasize) the peacebuilding and peace-destroying impacts of those *development* activities that are not conventionally framed or analysed in this context – for example, activities and initiatives in agriculture, irrigation, health, education and so on. Not only are such initiatives or instruments far more prevalent than ‘peacebuilding’ projects, but also they are also less likely to be viewed as being as overtly ‘political’ and will therefore be less likely to encounter political flak. If we understand peacebuilding as an impact, then it is necessary to delineate the *peacebuilding* impact of an initiative, from its *developmental* impact, *economic* impact, *environmental* impact, *gender* impact and so on. As we do this, we will discover that positive humanitarian or developmental impacts are, at times, coincident with positive peacebuilding impact. Disturbingly, however, sometimes they are not.

The Hoffman article is quite right in arguing that the idea of PCIA, as sketched out in *A Measure of Peace*, can and *should* be applied directly to so-called ‘peacebuilding projects’. The first step in assessing the peace and conflict impact of such projects is the refusal to accept them at their self-described face value. Once we adopt such a critical perspective, and begin even a cursory review of so-called peacebuilding projects, we will see that there are indeed (many) instances where these have had negative peacebuilding impacts. This observation, combined with the recognition that there are other ‘non-peacebuilding’ activities which nonetheless have had positive peacebuilding impacts, should alone be sufficient to evoke a much more self-critical examination of so-called peacebuilding projects and programmes. Unfortunately, however, this has not been the case.

How do we know that any self-described peacebuilding instrument / initiative even works, aside from listening to anecdotal stories shared over warm beer in generic bars in war-prone regions around the world? An unsettling characteristic of proliferating self-described peacebuilding programmes and projects has been the failure to systematically evaluate them – a situation not unique to this particular set of international activities, by any means. There are many reasons for this, but three in particular need to be highlighted in the current context. One is political; the other two are technical.

The political reason is tied directly to the need for Northern donors to be seen by their domestic constituencies to be planning and executing effective programmes in the area of peacebuilding – a need heightened by (1) the public nature and the scale of so many post-Cold War massacres of civilians (epitomized in the hyper-violence of Rwanda and the Balkans); and (2) the conspicuous failure of Northern States to intervene effectively in such dirty militarised violence – or, worse, their tendency to implicitly fuel it both through acts of commission and omission.

It is for this reason that, in the mid- and late 1990s, Northern donors became quite desperate to be seen to be funding anything that could plausibly be construed as peacebuilding in intention. Under such circumstances, the profile of an initiative was more important than the potential impact. Accordingly, we saw the rise of a number of high-profile, media-savvy, low impact on-the-ground, projects such as the War-Torn Societies Project (WSP) and the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict. In some of these undertakings, a bizarre funding dynamic began to take root: the project’s very lack of substantive impact encouraged some donors to continue funding it, so as not to be seen to have been backing a loser – classic cases of good money chasing after bad. The absence of independent audits and

evaluations of these projects, in effect, served the interests of both the donor and the recipients.

But, it is the technical obstacles to the evaluation of self-described peacebuilding projects that are the principal subject of the Hoffman article. These are two-fold. The first is simply the absence of appropriate methodological tools, as well as of the means to apply them. The second is the continuing application of inappropriate programming and evaluation tools. Thus, some efforts to examine peacebuilding-related programmes, such as governance programmes, using conventional evaluation methods have generated rather bizarre indicators – such as the World Bank's use of “length of time it takes to have a telephone line installed” as a governance indicator (see World Bank IGRs).

## VI. Contextualisation and Under-Contextualisation

The Hoffman article notes correctly that there is a “need to further develop an understanding of contexts, conditions and circumstances, and of how these affect the likelihood of positive impacts” (Hoffman, in this volume, p. 35). In all places wracked by militarised violence, these are the essential “thick details” necessary for effective development and peacebuilding programming. It is also true, however, that pointing out the necessity of such contextual understanding does not answer the question of how exactly this might be done.

The brief answer is: through *immediate contact* and experience *over time*. Yet, problematically, when we examine the situation of donors and international aid agencies in the field, we tend to see a rapid turnover of personnel, as well as a general lack of prior country-specific experience. This poses huge obstacles to the incorporation of context into donor and operational decision-making in conflict-prone areas – let alone into policy-making in OECD capitals around the world.

When I reflect on what I have seen over the past few years in Sri Lanka (the country with which I am most familiar), I cannot help but remark on a growing trend among agencies to hire field staff with experience from other conflict zones around the world (the Balkans, the Great Lakes and so on). These noble souls face the two-fold challenge of, first, *unlearning* what they acquired in other ‘complex humanitarian emergencies’ around the world, and, second, *learning* a very different reality in Sri Lanka. Some have succeeded, albeit with considerable effort; others have not.

At the risk of appearing trite, it needs to be said: Sri Lanka is not Bosnia; it is not Rwanda; it is not Nicaragua. Sri Lanka is Sri Lanka. And this is what must drive the parameters, the possibilities and the limits on development programming on the island. This is not to suggest that there is not much to learn from systematic comparative studies between Sri Lanka and other violence-prone countries (from comparisons of child soldiers in Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka, for example). But it is to say that the applicability and utility of such efforts will be heavily dependent upon our ability to fit those experiences into the very particular and very specific reality of Sri Lanka, *not the other way around*.

Doing this will require an acute appreciation of the significance of details – political, economic, historical, biographical, anthropological, sociological, cultural and so on. While the failure to appreciate such details will certainly hamper development programming, it should also be emphasized that this “thick understanding” is still only a necessary – and not a sufficient – condition for successful development programming.

More generally, there appears to be a significant ‘gap’ between the country-specific background of most conflict resolution personnel assigned to the field and the corresponding need for specificity and contextual understanding. The obvious response to this shortcoming is to put a priority on hiring personnel with appropriate country experience and training, and perhaps to limit rotation regionally, so that cumulative learning can take place at an institutional and personal level. It also means hiring nationals *in positions with genuine decision-making authority*, instead of using ex pats. This is not an especially novel suggestion, but one which must, unfortunately, often be repeated. More problematically however, this approach will require donors to make a *long-term* commitment to communities and governments in war-torn (or war-born) societies. Longevity and commitment have so far not been a defining characteristic of the Development Industry. As a colleague of mine asked a UN official as he alighted from his blue-flashing monster jeep in Eastern Sri Lanka: “Are you here for good? Or are you here as usual?”

## VII. The Commodification of Peacebuilding

We are now at a critical juncture in the evolution of PCIA. This is not so much because of the cumulative efforts of different groups to fashion suitable assessment tools, but rather due to the growth of a developmental ‘sector’ or ‘field’ that has come to be known as ‘peacebuilding’. When I survey this field, I cannot help but notice the rise of a phenomenon I’ve called the “commodification” of peacebuilding – characterized by initiatives that are mass-produced according to blueprints that meet Northern specifications and (short-term) interests, but that are usually only marginally relevant or appropriate for the political, social and economic realities of war-prone societies. In a worst-case scenario, this leads to a process in which peacebuilding as an idea and as a set of practices is (to be churlishly provocative) simply stuffed into the standard operating systems of the standard international actors who do the same old song and dance.

Whenever ‘new monies’ are found, or existing monies reallocated, to support ‘peacebuilding activities’, the old wine-new bottle syndrome is as prevalent as the faces at the funding trough. In this process, PCIA has the potential to be used by donors as a mechanism of obfuscation (e.g. by compartmentalizing development initiatives from anti-developmental foreign and trade policy or military practices) or, worse, of domination (e.g. in order to impose projects and programmes that are not wanted or endorsed by local communities). The empowering potential of PCIA, which is one facet of *A Measure of Peace*, will be snuffed out unless such politics are placed at the very center of our discussions and of our analysis of methodology.

## VIII. Mainstreaming PCIA ?

The idea of ‘mainstreaming’ is an interesting one. It highlights the question of the degree to which the existing development structures shape the ideas being mainstreamed. It highlights the question of how the integrity of a new ideas is affected by the mainstreaming which includes, as Hoffman notes, straining them through logframe logic. However, can, for example, our mechanistic checklists for the participation of women (which are employed in this form because it is deemed to be standardized and efficient) really assess the impact of a project on women – and on gender relations more broadly?

From interviews conducted with development workers and policy-makers in War-Zones such as Sri Lanka and Bosnia, it is becoming increasingly clear that there is a fundamental mismatch between the planning, implementation and evaluation tools at the

disposal of international actors in conflict settings on the one hand, and the types of challenges they are ostensibly meant to address on the other. The current focus on so-called ‘gaps’ by many within the academic, policy and operational communities may inhibit us from critically assessing the structures, processes and standard operating procedures, that currently define and limit bilateral and multilateral developmental, humanitarian institutions / organisations.

The logic and rules of the conventional humanitarian, development and peacebuilding ‘game’ often serve to undercut peacebuilding impacts / outcomes. The conventional programming logic of efficiency, product-over-process, linearity, ‘results-based management’, Northern-control (under the guise of monitoring and accountability) are at odds with what is often required for sustainable, effective, humanitarian / developmental / peacebuilding initiatives, e.g. approaches which are organic, process-oriented, community-controlled, responsive and non-linear.

If our current approaches – our standard operating procedures – are so clearly in tension with our peacebuilding objectives, then we require a new and different approach to our work in conflict-prone regions – an approach that is very different from our standard operating procedures – an approach that may be antithetical to our current methodologies and tools.

## IX. The Problems of Standard Operating Procedures

The starting point for the casting of a new approach / instruments is to subvert / reverse the principles that, so far, have been guiding our work. This is suggested in the list below:

### Box 2: Standard Operating Procedure vs. Desired Operating Procedures

#### *Principles Guiding Present Approaches*

Structured  
External Control  
Predictability  
Mechanistic Product-Obsession  
Time Limitedness  
Absence  
Rigid Planning  
Routinisation

#### *Principles to Guide Future Approaches*

Unstructured / Less Structured  
Locally controlled  
Unpredictability  
Organic Process-Orientation  
Open-Endedness  
Sustained Presence  
Responsivity  
Creativity

We find ourselves at a unique moment in the development of PCIA and of the broader peacebuilding discussion. On the one hand, there are many allies within gatekeeper organisations that are committed to genuine peacebuilding impact. On the other hand, these same professionals frequently find themselves stymied by rigid and unhelpful bureaucratic structures and hampered by internal political feuding. One colleague at the World Bank explained that his biggest battles in the area of post-conflict reconstruction are the daily fights within his organisation – leading him to describe himself as a “bureaucratic guerrilla”. Thus, despite the obstacles, there are the opportunities to work both within and outside the ‘peacebuilding establishment’.