Peace and Conflict
Impact Assessment

Critical Views on Theory and Practice

Edited by Alex Austin, Martina Fischer and Oliver Wils

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Preface and Acknowledgements

This collection of articles and response papers is published in the Internet version of the Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation (www.berghof-handbook.net), a project which was developed as a "work in progress" by the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management in the period 2000-2003. We recognised a continuously high demand for the articles, and since we regard them as a very useful contribution to the PCIA debate in general, we decided to publish them in a separate hardcopy version. PCIA is still an ongoing concern for practitioners and researchers alike and the question of how to evaluate peace practices and conflict transformation activities will remain on the agenda of future Handbook editions.

This publication represents the starting point for the new **Berghof Handbook Dialogue Series**. Based on the Internet version of the Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation, this series will document debates on current conflict transformation topics for scholars, practitioners and other interested organisations and individuals working in the field of peacebuilding, human rights, development and humanitarian work.

Ploughing Through the Field: An Introduction to the PCIA Handbook Debate

Martina Fischer & Oliver Wils

Over the last ten years, interest in conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities has increased significantly. Relief and development organisations working in places of civil war have raised awareness of conflict-sensitive planning and are seeking to integrate peacebuilding activities into their work. They have learned from recent experiences in war-torn societies that well-intended activities might have unintended outcomes and that development cooperation is never neutral in conflict situations. Under unfavourable conditions it may further entrench unjust power structures and prolong situations of war. This is also true of humanitarian aid. A series of problematic side-effects has been identified, showing that the influx of resources can induce dramatic changes in the political and economic situation on the ground and can cause turmoil in local markets. Equally dangerous are implicit messages conveyed by development or relief agencies and inappropriate or ill-reflected behaviour of the project staff which, often unintentionally, can fuel conflicts.

Whereas some humanitarian and relief agencies are interested in avoiding unintended negative impacts, others have engaged intensively in reflecting on the impact of their strategies. They want to contribute actively to peace processes and overcome structures of violence. State and non-state actors in these fields started to discuss how to combine strategies, methods and instruments of conflict resolution and transformation with their traditional approaches and working programmes. Moreover, in the late 1990s, organisations and institutions, which have gained experience in peace work and conflict resolution, began to reflect on the impact of their work. The question of how to evaluate activities aimed at peacebuilding and conflict transformation gained importance not only for researchers and scholars but also for practitioners. They wanted and still want to know which strategies work under which conditions, and they are asking themselves: Are we doing the right thing at the right moment? Could we do other things which could be more useful instead?

Finally, donor organisations which have opened up new budget lines earmarked for conflict resolution and transformation activities are also interested in improving practices and evaluation methods for

serious assessment of programmes and projects. Some donors even oblige their partners to deliver evaluation reports on their interventions. Others have become actively involved in discussions on the conceptualization of evaluation.

As a result of this interest, there is a high demand for "model" projects, good practices and "lessons learned" which are transferable to other projects and regions. At the same time, however, supply does not match this demand. There are still no quick and easy answers to the question of how best to assess, monitor and evaluate peace practices. On the contrary, experience shows that assessing and measuring the impact and outcomes of peacebuilding activities is actually a very complicated task. There are at least three major reasons for this: *First,* conflicts are by nature highly complex and dynamic. *Second,* the field of peacebuilding is a relatively young one as many organisations only emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. It is therefore not surprising that many strategies, methods and instruments still remain in a test phase and therefore need further elaboration and investigation. *Third,* under the label PCIA, we find quite different concepts and approaches. For some users, PCIA is a toolset that is applied for programme planning, while others regard it as a framework for evaluation and cross-country comparison. Similarly, some view it as a method to contribute and monitor the contribution of an intervention to peacebuilding, while others use PCIA for screening the impact of a conflict on the project itself.

The articles and response papers in this collection reflect the state-of-the-art in the debate on PCIA. The authors are scholars and practitioners involved in peacebuilding and / or development cooperation. They all have extensive experience in project and programme evaluation and can thus provide the reader with an excellent overview of the issues and questions at stake. The articles cover most if not all of the contested concepts and perspectives that PCIA offers so far. Nevertheless, the readers should not expect documentation which provides final answers. Rather, some contributors aim to challenge current assumptions and raise new questions rather than creating recipes or toolboxes.

Indeed, the initial intention of the Berghof Handbook Team was to initiate a discussion that drew out critical issues by holding contending positions next to each other. By "ploughing through" the stony field needs were identified for further investigation in the field of Action Research.

Mapping the Handbook Debate

In order to create a lively debate, the editors of the Handbook asked Mark Hoffman to write a comprehensive article that was then distributed for comment to other scholars and practitioners. Initially, Kenneth Bush and Christoph Feyen were asked to respond. Other authors such as Manuela Leonhardt, Marc Howard Ross and Jay Rothman joined the debate and offered their comments. The task given to the contributors was that (a) anything could be written as long as it was substantiated, taking a "free writing" approach, (b) any form could be used, whether inserted comments or a complete new article, and (c) within the parameters of the exercise – to be extremely provocative.

As already mentioned, the authors of the articles and response papers use quite different approaches to PCIA. Nevertheless, there are some basic topics that all articles focus on or, at least, touch upon. In order to map the debate, we can identify six topics or clusters of argument:

1. The question of **ownership** is a frequently debated issue in most of the articles. Kenneth Bush argues strongly that PCIA has the potential to empower actors from the South. He asks whether mainstreaming PCIA in (northern) donor organisations will not lead to substantial depoliticisation and commodification and control. Manuela Leonhardt cautions against oversimplifying the matter. According to her, different stakeholders have very different interests in and needs for PCIA, which includes potential for both empowerment and control. Thus, it is not the mainstreaming of PCIA *per se* which is at stake, but rather the underlying objectives and expectations. These should be brought into the open.

2. The question of ownership goes hand in hand with the **level of participation**: Are local stakeholders only information givers or do they play a central role in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of the projects? All authors emphasize the benefit of local participation, but to different degrees. The most radical perspective is given by Marc Howard Ross and Jay Rothman, who argue in favour of designing peacebuilding initiatives on the basis of local perspectives and knowledge.

3. Another area of discussion revolves around the **question of attribution**, especially addressing the **gap between micro and macro level**. Mark Hoffman argues that PCIA does not provide for a logical relation between the impacts of peacebuilding projects (micro level) and the structural (macro) level of the

conflict. This problem is, however, not new to evaluators. Leonhardt suggests evaluating projects on a realistic proportionality given their limited resources and scope of intervention. By drawing from experiences in development cooperation, she suggests measuring impacts on the macro level by combining empirical research and the use of "logical plausibility".

4. What is strongly disputed is the quest for **generally applicable indicators** as suggested by Hoffman. All other authors stress the importance of **specificity and context-relatedness**. The necessity of embedding indicators into the local and specific situation is clearly outlined. On the other hand, there are also benefits in more generalised sets of indicators that would allow for cross-country comparison or, as Hans Gsänger and Christoph Feyen mention, for practical application. It is only fair to mention that Hoffman asked for broad typologies of indicators, instead of a set of "pre-cooked" indicators independent from time and space.

5. Related to the dispute of generality versus specificity is the question of **standard operation procedures versus open and flexible approaches**. Hoffman's plead for a set of standardised criteria is strongly criticized by Bush. He emphasizes the importance of principles such as open-endedness, unpredictability and creativity in peacebuilding. However, Hoffman's point that a lack of clarity might hinder any serious effort of evaluation is not really solved.

6. Another topic touched upon in all articles is the **role of theory** and the **explicitness of hypotheses and assumptions**. All authors agree that the expected outcomes and impacts of projects are guided by underlying hypotheses and theories of social change. All contributors point out that it is important to make these underlying assumptions explicit. However, although the perspectives of the authors differ – some, for example, use a deductive methodology while others follow an inductive approach – there was only very limited discussion on how to make best use of theory.

What lessons can be drawn from the debate?

The debate allows us to draw some general conclusions that inform the further elaboration of PCIA:

- The variety of concepts and methodologies of assessing and measuring impacts makes it unlikely that a single concept of PCIA will emerge soon. In principle, there is no disadvantage in this multitude of approaches. However, confusion starts when similar methods have different labels, while very different approaches are summarized under the same heading, as is the case with PCIA. Assessing impact of projects *on* conflicts, for example, should be clearly separated from methods that focus on how projects are affected *by* conflicts. These are two different methodologies. Similarly, post-project evaluation tools should not be mixed with a monitoring and evaluation approach that is integrated into project cycle management.

- Most of the authors prefer a PCIA approach that takes the micro level of the project as the point of departure. The preference of the micro over the macro level is based on a) the uniqueness and specificities of local situations and projects, and b) an increasing tendency to involve local stakeholders in project planning and management. The challenge of PCIA is to link these individual projects with other initiatives and to develop a set of objectives and indicators at the meso and/or macro levels of conflict. Complex frameworks might result in a monitoring and evaluation design far too ambitious for most projects. Rather, a disaggregation is needed, with the levels and sectors which projects aim to have an impact on being clearly stated.

- The debate on PCIA demonstrates a deep cleavage between practitioners and scholars. Gsänger and Feyen argue that "PCIA is far from being a useful tool as the gap between the conceptual design and the practice has not yet been closed". Thus, a certain degree of pragmatism is required. In the first place, PCIA needs to be applicable in the field, and must be capable of being communicated to local partners and integrated into work routines. PCIA will be a dead end if it remains an academic exercise. Research can assist practical approaches by developing tools and methods to narrow the gap of attribution and to develop a more common framework for (cross-country) comparison.

- This leads us to the assumption that PCIA should be developed as an essential element of Action Research and within a

participatory framework guaranteeing that all relevant stakeholders in a project will be included in the evaluation process. In order to develop PCIA further, it is necessary to use it as a learning tool from the outset, not as a means of control. A culture of transparency and the willingness to share results would greatly enhance this prospect. Donors should motivate this process and create positive incentives for agencies, encouraging them to reflect critically on their peacebuilding activities. As long as projects are rewarded for good practices only, the willingness to discuss "failure" or negative consequences is reduced – and a learning opportunity missed. Funding criteria and "fashions" set up by donor agencies often contribute to inflexible or harmful practices as agencies are often reluctant to admit if conditions have changed and strategies they once suggested are no longer practicable. In order to create space for learning processes, donors therefore need to establish more flexible mechanisms and criteria.

Follow-ups and further discussions

It should be mentioned that the debate initiated by the Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation represents a cluster within an ongoing international discussion. Some partners of the European Peace Liaison Office (EPLO) have developed similar debates on PCIA and evaluation. Moreover, first results of the "Reflecting on Peace Practice" (RPP) project are under way and will be published soon. The RPP process was initiated by the US-based organisation "Collaborative for Development Action" (Mary Anderson) and the Swedish Life and Peace Institute three years ago as a follow-up of the "Do-no-harm" approach and the "Local Capacities for Peace" project. RPP has emerged as a joint learning project for agencies involved in working on Conflict. Scholars and practitioners from all continents and very different conflict areas have contributed studies to this endeavour.[*] This has included highly creative gatherings of experts and activists from around 100 "peace agencies". Among the most exciting conclusions from these events were the following:

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- The majority of participants agreed that although evaluation and self-reflection on interventions are definitely needed, projects have to face the unavoidable problem that even if PCIA is applied, unintended effects might occur and projects could fail. Conflict-sensitive project assessments in the planning and implementation phase are necessary. But focussing too

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[*] The RPP process is based on 26 studies. The Berghof Research Center contributed two cases (Bosnia and Cyprus).

extensively on the analysis of the project context and possible impacts might negatively affect the motivation of the people involved, if not paralyse the whole project. There is no ready-made recipe to overcome this dilemma. Rather, each organisation and its project staff have to solve it individually.

- Another open question which arose during the RPP process was how to measure success. Most agencies had no difficulties in identifying negative impacts (even if most of them were reluctant to admit failures openly and in public). But identifying positive impacts caused much more difficulty. One reason is the above-mentioned difficulty of attribution. Another problem is the lack of adequate criteria. What seems to be most important, however, is to answer the question about what should be looked at when trying to measure peace practices: "outcomes" or "processes"? It has become clear during the RPP process that this answer differs according to the different cultures, origins and histories of organisations involved.

The state-of-the-art in theory and practice of PCIA shows clearly that more debate is needed to foster exchange between different cultures of organisations, to widen perspectives and to bridge the gap between theory and practice. The Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation offers a forum for further discussions on and studies of PCIA. We invite scholars and practitioners to contribute to this debate with innovative papers and think-pieces.

PCIA Methodology: Evolving Art Form or Practical Dead End?

Mark Hoffman

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' 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 taken on board the need to think and act beyond narrow, technical mandates. At a minimum, many have now adopted a 'do no harm' orientation (Anderson 1997).

A number of donor countries (notably Sweden, Canada, Norway and the UK) and NGOs (CARE, Oxfam, Save the Children Fund) have

started to move beyond this minimalistic 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, humanitarianism, and conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

The content of these responses, however, has not been unproblematic. As Anderson (1997), 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 DANIDA and 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, Jones & Duffield 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' (OECD/DAC 1999). He notes that "historically, humanitarian assistance has been subjected to less rigorous and extensive monitoring evaluations procedures than development aid" (OECD/DAC 1999, p. 2). One might well add that evaluations of conflict resolution and peacebuilding practices are even further behind the curve. 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.

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 immaterial nature of intended outcomes, how is evaluation possible at all?

The purpose of this contribution to the Handbook 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 'niche'

conflict resolution and peacebuilding NGOs. The article will conclude with some comments on the problems and prospects for the consolidation of these into an integrated, operational methodology.

I. 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 Box 2).

Box 2: Project Cycle
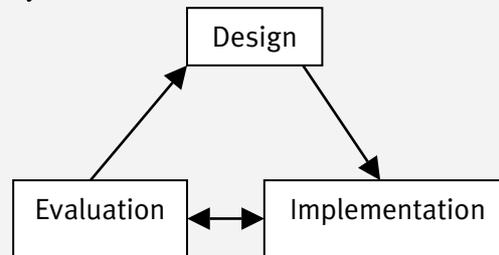
The nature and purpose of such an evaluation is:

> *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.* (EC 1993, p. 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 (see Box 3) or feed into overall programming guidelines. More often than not, however, institutional practices inhibit the 'lessons learned' process and rarely are the insights from the evaluation of one project transferred to the design stage of similar or related projects.

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 OECD/DAC guidelines, the criteria most frequently invoked are:

- **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, environmental) and/or target groups (e.g. individuals, particular social groups such as the elderly, children, women, or communities and institutions).

- **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.

- **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.

- **timeliness:** were the activities pursued at the most opportune or appropriate moment?

- **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).

- **coherence, coordination and complementarity:** 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 manual; 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 (see Box 4). 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.

Box 4: The SPHERE Project

The SPHERE project 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 being used in drawing up logframes in emergency situations and are also likely to be used in subsequent evaluations.

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 '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. 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 the right-hand columns of a log-frame. Nor is it a methodology that does much to highlight 'opportunities'. 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 (though its defenders might well argue that this is 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 (OECD / DAC 1999). The OECD / DAC paper argues that evaluations must move beyond a narrow 'project only' focus and develop a wider, policy oriented approach. 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 'thick' 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 under development in the development and humanitarian fields, these cannot, in themselves provide an adequate foundation for the development of an operational methodology unique to PCIA.

II. 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 IDRC's 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 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 1998, p. 7)

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 impact 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 does not do so in narrow developmental terms but looks at wider peacebuilding impacts (see Box 5). 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, p. 6)

> **Box 5: Development vs. Peacebuilding Criteria**
>
> 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 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, pp. 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 'conflict dynamics' assessment 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 it will 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, pp. 22-24):

- **Did the project produce substantial or politically significant changes in access to individual or collective material and non-material resources**: for example, access to water, land, food, political institutions and processes, economic resources, social and/or cultural status, information, legitimacy, authority.

- **Did the project create, exacerbate or mitigate socio-economic tensions:** Did it serve to reinforce privilege access by one group over others in economic, educational, agricultural, industrial sectors or did it serve to reduce hierarchies and dependencies in these areas.

- **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 1996)?

- **Did the project produce challenges to or changes in content of or control over existing 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 6). These would provide the basis for assessing past or potential impact on peace and conflict conditions (Bush 1998, pp. 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.

Box 6: 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; in/security (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; impact on economic infrastructure; supply of basic goods; availability of investment capital; banking system; employment impact; productivity; training; income generation; production of commercial product or service; food in/security; 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; in/adequacy of health care and social services; in/compatibility of interests; dis/trust; inter-group hostility / dialogue; communications; transport); resettlement / displacement; housing; education; nurturing a culture of peace.
(source: Bush 1998, p. 25)	

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 / 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 base-line 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 (see 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 'let the evaluation criteria be generated on a case-by-case basis' and the pre-cooked, pre-judged 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, pp. 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 (see Box 7) 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).

Box 7: Alternative Characterizations of PCI Areas

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.
(see 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.

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 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, p. 6). Drawing on an earlier DFID discussion paper (Warner 1999), it identifies three different components of an overall 'conflict assessment methodology': strategic conflict assessment, conflict impact assessment, and a peacebuilding framework.

The first component, the *strategic conflict assessment* (SCA), 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* (CIA), 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 vs. 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 drawn and conclusions made 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, p. 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, p. 9)

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.

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'.

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 the 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 stakeholder 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, iterant 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 points 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 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 8).

> **Box 8: 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, concept, processes:
> 5. plays a pre-negotiation role:
> 6. enhances the willingness to compromise:
> 7. assists in the negotiation process:
> 8. supporting implementation of negotiated agreements.
>
> (source: Hoffman 1995, p. 16-17)

However, as is the case with the methodologies developed by Bush and INTRAC, the ARIA project is cautious about invoking generic or prescribed 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 'buy-in' 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 9). 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, p. 250)

Box 9: 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, p. 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 anything but 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.

V. 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 vs. 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 what will make a convincing case for alternative approaches is the articulation of usable criteria and indicators.

These can be articulated 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 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,

stakeholder / 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, and 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 take on board Goodhand's injunction (Goodhand 2000) 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 ability for their effective evaluation.

PCIA Five Years On:
The Commodification of an Idea

Kenneth Bush

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.

Bush

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 be 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.

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 delegitimating) 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.

*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)

Bush

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.

… 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?"

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.

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	*Principles to Guide Future Approaches*
Structured	Unstructured / Less Structured
External Control	Locally controlled
Predictability	Unpredictability
Mechanistic Product-Obsession	Organic Process-Orientation
Time Limitedness	Open-Endedness
Absence	Sustained Presence
Rigid Planning	Responsivity
Routinisation	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'.

Towards a Unified Methodology: Reframing PCIA

Manuela Leonhardt

The debate between Mark Hoffman and Kenneth Bush has brought up a range of issues regarding the politics and practicalities of PCIA, which to date have not yet been comprehensively discussed. Instead of rephrasing the exchange, I will briefly introduce five issues with extensive reference to Bush's and Hoffman's work.

First, the debate on PCIA should give *greater consideration to the needs of aid agencies*, particularly as their interest in reflection and institutional learning has largely been overlooked. Second, *generic peacebuilding frameworks for evaluation are likely to be flawed* due to the variety of conflict situations, peacebuilding approaches and processes. Third, PCIA has not yet developed convincing approaches to tackle the issues of *causality and attribution*, which constitute the main reservation of the PCIA sceptics. Fourth, the *PCIA methodology is not empowering in itself* but has a critical potential that should be pursued. Finally, to assess its potential, *PCIA must be placed in the wider context of instruments* that aid agencies use for mainstreaming peacebuilding.

I. Ownership, Purposes and Approaches

Much of the unease expressed by both Hoffman and Bush concerning the present state-of-the-play in Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) can be attributed to the lack of consensus in the field about the purposes and ownership of the approach. As long as these are not clarified, there remains much scope for complaints about the lack of conceptual coherence or worries about the appropriation, alienation and distortion of the original idea. What, then, is the practical usage of PCIA? Who should, and moreover who is actually employing it?

Hoffman's article represents the quest for a unified theory and practice of PCIA: a single methodology that serves the needs of "donors, implementing agencies and end-users" (Hoffman, in this volume, p. 13). Hence, he identifies partiality as the major shortcoming of the IDRC, INTRAC/DFID and ARIA approaches. In this view, DFID's strategic conflict assessment runs the risk of focusing too much on the macro-context of conflict, thus only being of use for donors. Rothman and Ross' action evaluation approach remains too much tied to the

effects of a single NGO activity (e.g. a conflict resolution workshop). This call for a theoretically sound, universally applicable methodology for assessing and evaluating the conflict impact of development interventions does certainly have its merits. Such a methodology would go some way towards basic scientific tenets such as intersubjectivity, compatibility between different locations and types of projects, and perhaps a better chance to systematically accumulate knowledge. I wonder, however, whether such a project is realistic. Despite Hoffman's valid observations on the above-mentioned approaches, they neglect the fact that the respective methodologies were developed with and for specific end-users. His detailed analysis shows very clearly just how much the three approaches have been tailed towards the specific interests and ways of working of donors (INTRAC), implementing agencies (IDRC) and civil society organisations (ARIA). Are they therefore less valid? Is this not rather a necessary step for making PCIA attractive and applicable for its intended users?

Who are the intended users? Kenneth Bush, who was one of the first to promote the idea of conflict impact assessment, claims that PCIA originally was meant to be an emancipatory tool for Southerners, which was subsequently appropriated by donors and their entourage of NGOs hoping to gain money and reputation by taking up a promising idea. He even describes this as the "mechanistic, Northern" quest for mainstreamable products replacing and obfuscating the original "organic, Southern learning process" (Bush , in this volume, p. 39) upon which PCIA was based. I do not want to comment on the question of whether a paper prepared for an OECD/DAC committee is not also part of the mechanistic, Northern processes. I myself still recall the period when these questions of PCIA ownership were a real issue. With the increasing differentiation and sophistication of the field, luckily, this made way for more open and cooperative approaches. Yet Bush's issue remains: Who should be using PCIA, and what are the implications? As it is so eminently mainstreamable into the tool-oriented logic of donors and many implementing agencies, there is a justifiable worry that it will become a fig leaf for agencies that in the end are not prepared to change any of their basic ways of operation.

I suggest an empirical approach to answering this question. It is good development practice to start any type of activity with a needs assessment among the intended beneficiaries. In the course of these assessments, it often becomes evident that there are different stakeholder groups, who all have their own set of interests and needs. A good agency will customise its products and services according to the specific needs of each group. Who are then the actual users of PCIA? What are their expectations and purposes? Let us first look at the methodologies that agencies have developed over the last years called

PCIA (CIDA/IDRC), Conflict Impact Assessment Systems (CIAS) (Reychler & EC), peace and conflict analysis (Oxfam), conflict prognosis (Clingendael), conflict vulnerability analysis (USAID), strategic conflict assessment (DFID), benefit-harms analysis (CARE), and Do No Harm (LCPP) among others.

What all these approaches have in common is the idea of providing non-specialist donors, aid agencies and local organisations with accurate, yet user-friendly methodologies to integrate a conflict perspective into the planning, monitoring and management of development and humanitarian assistance in the context of armed conflict. Many of them have been tailor-made or customised from more general approaches (usually the Do No Harm framework) to the specific information needs and ways of operation of the particular agency. In general, donors are more interested in countrywide, strategic approaches, while international and local implementing agencies require methodologies allowing a more fine-grained, situation-specific analysis. The closer to the grassroots, the more participatory elements are usually included. Lastly, the term "impact assessment" is actually misleading. Most of the tools mentioned above are not about projecting programme impact on conflict or about evaluation, but support country or project-level conflict analysis and strategic planning. Impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation tools are still the minority. This may be partly due to the conceptual difficulties linked to evaluating peacebuilding, but probably more to organisational cultures that emphasise doing over reflection and learning.

The following table provides an overview of the different levels and purposes of PCIA tools to date:

Table 1: Levels and Purposes of PCIA			
	Planning	Monitoring/ Evaluation	Advocacy
Country level	DFID, EC, USAID, Clingendael	CIDA, Clingendael	IA/SW, FEWER
Programme/ Project level	Oxfam, CARE, GTZ, LCPP	USAID, GTZ, CARE, LCPP	SW
Community level	RTC, IEPADES	RTC	IEPADES

We can still go a step beyond the simple distinction between conflict analysis/planning, monitoring/evaluation and advocacy purposes. By focusing on the area of evaluation, which is the central topic in this

debate, we can explore stakeholder interests in evaluation in even more detail. In general, there are four basic functions of evaluation: control and legitimisation (by demanding or demonstrating visible impact), marketing (by showing success), project/process management (on the basis of new information and reflection), and institutional learning (enhancing effectiveness by learning from experience). Each of these functions has different methodological implications.

Donors' primary interest is with conflict analysis and strategy at the country level. Where they make a serious commitment to conflict prevention, donors want to know how to manage their aid programmes in order to maximize their positive influence on the conflict. This also includes evaluative studies about the performance of the present programme and project portfolio. Towards the implementing agencies, donors need to know whether taxpayers' money has been spent effectively and efficiently. Therefore, their interest focuses on output and impact orientated legitimisation (and control). Institutional learning, which is reflecting on the lessons learned from particular programmes, is undertaken on a irregular basis.

Implementing agencies and their **partners** are also interested in demonstrating impact for the sake of legitimating and marketing their activities. Yet they also know that on the ground things are often not so clear-cut. Changes tend to be more qualitative than quantitative, effect attitudes and relations rather than concrete structures, and usually bear fruits only in the long-term. Therefore, their focus usually concerns process management and institutional learning. Agencies require information for the conflict-sensitive day-to-day management of their projects as well as for critical feedback and reflection. In this regard, evaluation is expected to provide the space to step out of the daily routines and reflect on the own reaction to the evolving conflict situation. This can serve as a basis for improving future work (learning).

For **civil society** organisations and **affected communities**, evaluation can represent an opportunity to provide critical feedback on the agency's work in the region both in terms of process and impact. It can also provide the basis for advocacy initiatives targeted at decision-makers in their own country and abroad.

From this brief overview, I would conclude that the debate on PCIA so far has focused too much on issues of legitimisation/impact at the expense of process management and institutional learning on working in conflict situations, which are of greater interest to many agencies.

No evaluation methodology can do without a clear set of parameters that allows for the structuring and assessment of the multiple elements of local reality. If it refrains from setting these parameters beforehand, the methodology should at least contain a process for reaching an agreement on these parameters. For PCIA, this means that we need a peacebuilding framework that aids us to operationalise peace and conflict impact and the tracing of the peacebuilding process. This is one of Hoffman's major points. His prophecy is that if PCIA cannot provide a series of widely applicable evaluation criteria and indicators, it will have no chance to establish itself in the toolboxes of development agencies (Hoffman, in this volume, p. 34). Although this may be true, I nevertheless wish to give three reasons why the development of such a generic peacebuilding framework seems unrealistic at the moment. These are: the contested role of aid agencies in peacebuilding, the contested nature of peace itself, differing 'theories of action', and the dynamics of the peacebuilding process itself.

II.1   What can be the role of aid agencies in peacebuilding?

In order to set evaluation criteria and indicators, agencies need to be clear about what they want and realistically can achieve. Yet the debate on these issues has just started. First of all, there is the question of the *role of aid agencies* in conflict situations. In various contributions, Jonathan Goodhand and others have framed this debate as the question of whether agencies should try working *in* or *on* conflict (see Goodhand & Lewer 2001). Working *in* conflict signifies that development and humanitarian organisations retain their original mandate, but take care to deliver their services in ways that do not further exacerbate the conflict. When agencies work *on* conflict, they broaden their mandate to address political and conflict issues, thereby consciously compromising humanitarian principles such as neutrality and the priority of saving lives and livelihoods. Even if these positions rarely exist in their pure form, aid agencies need to take decisions about how far they are prepared to go in their political engagement. Do they want to limit themselves to "do no harm", work on structural conflict issues, empower peace constituencies, engage in mediation and Track II diplomacy, or dedicate themselves to international advocacy on the conflict? Each choice will have implications for the scope of the evaluation, the evaluation criteria and the evaluation process itself.

The next question concerns the *definition of peacebuilding*. The challenge is to translate terms such as "conflict-sensitivity", "avoiding negative impact" and "promoting positive peace" into agencies'

strategies and practice. Recently (2001), George Wachira of the Nairobi Peace Initiative outlined the dilemma of his organisation towards donors: some donors expected from their investment a demonstrable contribution to the cessation of conflict or violence. NPI themselves, however, understood peacebuilding as "qualitative, liberating and humanizing change" (Wachira 2001, p. 5) that involved empowering people "to fully engage with and understand better all aspects of social, economic and political structures that give rise to violence and how they could be changed" (Wachira 2001, p. 5). Both positions involve very different evaluation criteria and time-frames. These are certainly two extreme views with much ground to cover in-between. The example shows, however, that there are not only different ways to define peacebuilding, but that stakeholders to the same initiative may hold widely varying expectations and approaches to it. Therefore, part of the PCIA process should involve bringing these expectations into the open and help stakeholders to find a shared approach.

This does not yet exhaust the issue of peacebuilding. Agencies operate within a highly politicised environment, in which the conflict parties will have differing opinions of the *type of peace* they wish for the future. While, for example, the conservative elite of the country may regard peace as the successful 'pacification' of the rebel areas, the uprising peasant groups may expect major political and economic reforms from the peace process. An aid agency seeking to become involved in conflict resolution and peacebuilding work will not be able to avoid finding its own position within this debate. Impartiality is rarely an option. The agency's position will be largely determined by its own values and mandate, which therefore should be clearly articulated and understood among staff and other stakeholders.

II.2 How does the agency want to engage in peacebuilding? What are the explicit or implicit theories of action?

Aid agencies, their partners and other stakeholders hold specific views on how they can bring about change to the conflict situation. These *theories of action* are usually implicit rather than explicit, but, as Hoffman (in this volume, p. 34) notes, they strongly influence indicators of process and success. Just to illustrate the variety of approaches one can find, I will here give three examples: root causes, attitudes and relations, and political economy.

The *root causes approach* is based on the assumption that people fight because they have suffered material and political grievances. These usually include socio-economic inequality, cultural discrimination, marginalisation, lack of political participation and also

general poverty. The idea is that conflicts will end when these root causes are addressed or people are empowered to address them in non-violent ways. This approach is sometimes associated with the notion of *just war* and an emphasis on the transformative powers of conflict. The favoured instruments are development aid, political and economic reform, and different forms of political advocacy.

The second approach focuses on individuals, their *attitudes* and *relations*. It assumes that violence occurs when relationships have been disturbed by prejudice, past experience and lack of communication. Consequently, building trust, enhancing personal relations and fostering communication between the conflict protagonists is considered priority. Popular methods are active mediation and facilitation, problem-solving workshops, dialogue programmes, joint study trips, media work and joint action projects.

A recent newcomer is the *political economy approach* (LeBillon et al. 2000), which highlights the factors prolonging the violence. Inspired by the *greed and grievance* debate, it tries to affect the incentive systems, which motivate politicians, warlords and others to continue with the war effort against the objective interest of their group as a whole. Methods to achieve this range from supporting internal opposition to the war and cutting the arms supply to changing international trade regimes such as the case of the 'blood diamonds'.

It is clear that each of these approaches have different criteria of progress or even success. Therefore, a good evaluation process should try to elicit the often unconscious, underlying assumptions or theories of action from the participants in order to generate shared indicators.

II.3   What are the characteristics of the peacebuilding process? What does this mean for evaluation?

Peacebuilding is not the same as building wells or equipping hospitals. Peacebuilding is always long-term! It is about building trust and relationships, about hope and empowerment, about incremental change, about discovery, unpredictability, flexibility and serendipity. Faced with the adversities of many short-term setbacks, peacebuilding still maintains the hope of having a positive impact in the long-term. Certainly, it is not a linear process that external Track II and III actors can influence to any large degree. There are times when it may even be more important to sustain the process than to prematurely insist on concrete results. All this moves against conventional project management logic, which assumes a clear hierarchy of goals, a

demonstrable relationship between inputs and outputs, and a defined timetable. It also challenges traditional evaluation with its relatively short-term timeframes and search for 'objectively verifiable indicators'. There are no simple solutions to this issue. Peacebuilding frameworks, however, should be able to make a clear distinction between short-term, mid-term and long-term impact, allowing for a set of indicators that is evolving with the intervention, and pay particular attention to the dynamics of the process itself.

Box 1: Principles of Good Process Design

1. Good process requires careful thought, consultation and planning.
2. Good process asks "Who should be involved?" not "What are we going to do?"
3. Good process calls for joint information gathering, joint education and joint problem definition.
4. Good process is conducted under auspices acceptable to all.
5. Good process involves key parties (or their representatives) not only in the process of negotiation and decision-making but also in the design of the process itself.
6. Good process offers more than one kind of forum for those people affected to express and evaluate problem-solving options.
7. Good process maintains trust through careful reporting back to the people affected.

Source: Ron Kraybill 2001

How do we recognize good process, and how can process be integrated into a peacebuilding framework? Here, we can learn from the experience of many dedicated peacebuilding organisations, which have engaged in reflecting on their own practice in the last years (see Galama & van Tongeren 2001).

III. Causality and Attribution

Both Hoffman's and Bush's contributions to the methodological PCIA debate focus on the issues of evaluation criteria and indicators as well as, importantly, on the role of the context in shaping particular impacts. They fail, however, to address the main reservation of many PCIA sceptics: the difficulty of establishing and attributing the peace and conflict impact. Indeed, most recent evaluations of peacebuilding initiatives do not only conclude that their impact was relatively small; they also stress the hypothetical nature of this conclusion (see Goodhand 2000, Lund et al. 2001). Due to the importance of this

argument, it is worth examining it in more detail and briefly reviewing the major responses evaluation science has been able to provide.

PCIA methodologies need to be able to answer (most of) the following questions:

1. How to relate individual peacebuilding projects to the wider conflict context? What are the appropriate levels of evaluation? What are the micro-macro linkages?
2. How to attribute observable changes in the conflict situation to third-party interventions?
3. How to monitor the unintended, positive and negative, effects of the intervention?

How to relate individual peacebuilding projects to the wider conflict context? The equation peacebuilding = reduced violence raises expectations that by far exceed the actual potential of a single initiative. This lesson has already been learned in other sectors: no development project would nowadays claim to be able to prevent desertification, change gender relations or reduce poverty in a country. Similarly, we need to develop a sense of proportion in the peacebuilding field. Projects can only be evaluated for what is realistically possible to achieve given their resources, scope and level of intervention. For this, it helps breaking the conflict down in its different dimensions, levels, issues and actors as well as identifying actors and capacities promoting peace. Then it is possible to separately examine the initiative's short-term and long-term impact on them. An even more demanding problem is to piece the micro-impacts of various initiatives together and trace their synergetic effects on macro changes.

How to attribute observable changes in the conflict situation to third-party interventions? Conflicts change over time. General factors influencing the course of conflict include geopolitical dynamics, regional and global market forces, changing perceptions and priorities among the main conflict sponsors, pressure from inside the conflicting groups, economic and physical exhaustion among many others. The methodological challenge consists in establishing plausible linkages between particular changes in the conflict situation, general factors and particular third-party interventions. Then, it is necessary to ascertain how far these interventions were decisive in the light of other conditions that may have facilitated the change. A critical problem here is the lack of counterfactual: We do not know what would have happened without the intervention.

How to monitor unintended, positive and negative, effects? Lastly, there is the issue of unintended impacts. Conventional monitoring methods

are geared towards tracking an intervention's impact according to its original objectives. For this purpose, they compare the intended objectives such as laid out in the logical framework with a set of indicators designed to measure their achievement. Yet in conflict situations, it is equally important to be aware of and monitor the unintended and sometimes negative consequences of one's work. These consequences are often more the result of the details of the project organisation and its way of operation than its actual activities. To monitor unintended impact, it is important to clarify what types of impact should be looked for, where they may be found and how far should be the scope of the analysis. The Logframe is of little help in this regard. A comprehensive stakeholder analysis, openness and sensitivity to the unexpected seem to be more promising approaches.

Approaches to evaluating peacebuilding

Drawing on the work of Michael Lund (2000, 2001) and others, there are a number of ways for dealing with these challenges. None of them will provide a final answer, but applying them in combination certainly improves results.

Sequential analysis is a way of addressing the problem of attribution. It consists in analysing the temporal relationship between an intervention x (e.g. a high-level seminar on a particular conflict issue organised by a foreign think tank) and an event y with importance for the course of the conflict (e.g. adoption of progressive legislation concerning this issue). The aim is to find out whether the intervention had any effect on this, and if yes, how it happened. For this purpose, sequential analysis further looks for alternative explanations and examines the particular circumstances, which allowed x to have certain effects (e.g. high donor pressure for political reform). It refrains, however, from stating that y happened because of x.

The *matching method* involves "comparing the types and scope of the intervention responses that are applied to a conflict to the various kinds of causes and peace capabilities that have been identified in the diagnosis of the conflict" (Lund 2000, p. 81). As such, it tries to establish a relationship between individual initiatives at the micro-level and the broad conflict issues at the macro-level. Matching "needs" and "responses" with each other allows conclusions to be drawn on the relevance and potential of single projects, probe for possible synergies and identify areas, which have so far been neglected by the international response.

Meanings and *perceptions*: sometimes, it is more important to know how people explain an event than what actually caused it. This often happens in conflict situations where information sources are unreliable and even insiders tend to act on partial information only. Therefore, if ordinary people, rebel leaders or politicians believe that something occurred because of a certain intervention, this intervention may have already been effective, even if the real causes of the event can possibly never be established. Local people's perceptions are also important to double-check one's own assumptions about certain conflict dynamics.

Logical plausibility: applying the principles of logical plausibility and comparing with previous experience allows the formulation of hypotheses about the impact of certain initiatives. This method is widely used among development practitioners under the headings of the problem-tree or flow-diagram. It is indispensable, however, to double-check these hypotheses with more empirical methods.

I now wish to address Bush's issue of whether a methodology itself can be empowering. Bush (in this volume, p. 43) eloquently demonstrates that politics is rarely made on the basis of the best available information only and is even less orientated towards some rational (peacebuilding) logic. "Methodology is perforated by politics" says Bush (in this volume, p. 45). Yet he maintains that there is an emancipatory potential in the PCIA approach that needs to be defended.

These words strongly remind me of the discussion on the PRA (participatory rural appraisal) methodologies. In the 1980s, still called RRA (rapid rural appraisal), they were marketed to development agencies as a more accurate and cost-effective way of data collection than the then prevailing large-scale surveys. More and more, however, the emphasis shifted from this traditional top-down data collection logic towards empowering communities to take their own decisions on important development issues. PRA methodologies were meant to rationalise this decision-making process, to make it more open, inclusive, transparent and based on objective evidence collected by the participants themselves. The assumption was that this would lead to pro-poor community decisions, who under PRA conditions were expected to set aside their usual family, clan, political and other allegiances.

There is no doubt that PRA has revolutionised development practice in many areas and led to major improvements. However, there are also clear shortcomings. We know very little about the community processes, which really determine the outcome of a PRA planning session, particularly how far the traditional elites find ways of protecting their own interests. Development agencies regret that the result of a five-day exercise occupying various staff and 20-40 villagers is often a rather unspecified 'shopping list' of improvements to village life. To avoid this, some agencies have begun to offer villagers a menu of the options or services they are able to provide. Yet this leaves the whole exercise as a ritual to choose between goat and chicken projects. Are the results of this really the empowerment of communities and further providing them with real choices? The most important argument, however, is that the best PRA cannot replace real democracy in a country where it does not exist. Only institutionalized and living structures of political participation and democratic control give people a chance to influence decisions affecting their lives.

What does this mean for PCIA? I do not wish to deny the empowering potential of a methodology, but rather to sharpen our view to the circumstances under which it is applied. To remain with the example above, PRA could be empowering in the hands of a democratically elected local government as a way to prepare a decision on the location of communal infrastructure. Equally, PCIA could be empowering if it offers people living in conflict with the chance to voice their concerns on the conflict impact of certain development plans and jointly develop alternatives. In this sense, it can even become an exercise in local conflict resolution. However, the conditions under which PCIA is usually applied are all the more trying than the usual PRA experience. Conflicts break apart communities and impose silences as people will rarely dare to openly oppose those carrying the weapons. Consequently, I regard the empowering potential of PCIA under the conditions of conflict as rather low.

Having said this, we nevertheless need to safeguard the *critical* potential of PCIA. Section two showed that PCIA tools are mostly used for those types of top-down planning, management and control processes that are still common within most international assistance efforts. In such a context, we cannot expect revolutionising insights. Yet PCIA does provide an opportunity to promote reflection as well as strategic thinking regarding the conflict issues that agencies face in their daily work in war-torn countries. In the long-run, this may lead to changes in institutional practice and structures. Beyond this, many possibilities still remain unexplored. More could be done, for example, to hand over PCIA to civil society organisations, particularly those from the South, as a part of capacity building in management and advocacy.

We do need more independent voices, who critically accompany the policies and practices of their own governments as well as those of donors in terms of their impact on conflict. We also need more channels for communicating these messages and ways of making them reverberate in policy-making circles.

Bush expresses strong misgivings about what he calls the "commodification" of PCIA and its mainstreaming into conventional development assistance. He worries that in the hand of development administrations PCIA could be reduced to another technocratic exercise in box-checking. This will not only have little impact on the way aid is delivered, but also dangerously depoliticise conflict prevention. Although I sympathise with Bush's concerns, I suggest putting PCIA into the wider picture of introducing a conflict perspective into development assistance. If we see it as only one of several instruments available for mainstreaming conflict prevention, Bush's doubts about possible distortions lose some of their relevance. To my mind, it is more pertinent to ask questions of how agencies define their role in conflict situations and how far they are able and willing to implement a coherent and effective set of measures to establish conflict-sensitive policies within the organisation.

Jonathan Goodhand and Nick Lewer (forthcoming) have shown a number of reasons why agencies should be cautious of unquestioningly adopting the peacebuilding agenda. They range from the risk of compromising the humanitarian space through openly political agendas to avoiding instrumentalisation and becoming a fig-leaf for political inaction. Yet while it is critical for development organisations to maintain their own political analysis, the current emphasis on conflict prevention and peacebuilding also offers an opportunity to introduce real improvements in the way aid is provided in conflict situations. How far agencies will decide to work *in* or *on* conflict then depends on the values, mandate and political judgement of the individual organisation.

What are the skills and capacities required for mainstreaming peacebuilding? They include policies, institutional structures, training and capacity building, tools, analysis and learning, and actual programmes or projects (see CPN 2001). A comprehensive approach to mainstreaming would involve: formulating a peacebuilding policy; creating institutional structures such as conflict advisors, task forces or exchange programmes to sustain the policy; providing training in conflict analysis and conflict management to staff and partners; developing and using analytical and learning tools such as PCIA; and, last but not least, actually implementing programmes and projects with

an explicit peacebuilding focus as well as demonstrating the consideration of conflict issues in a large number of 'conventional' initiatives. In addition, such activities should not only include the different levels within the agency (especially headquarters and field staff), but also its donors, partners and beneficiaries. PCIA is only one step in this direction.

PCIA Methodology: A Development Practitioner's Perspective

Hans Gsänger & Christoph Feyen

This dialogue paper was written in reaction to Mark Hoffman's article and Kenneth Bush's response paper for the Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation. It aims to contribute to the ongoing methodological discourse from a development practitioner's perspective. A perspective that can be characterized by result orientation, creation of measurable benefits, cost-effectiveness considerations, and persistent issues of legitimisation towards partners in the host country vis-à-vis tax payers at home. In short, it is a perspective which is very much concerned with monitoring and evaluation of inputs, activities, outputs, the use of outputs and the assessment of outcomes and impacts.

The paper takes up some of the methodological issues that have been raised in the academic argument between Hoffman and Bush and discusses them on the basis of the PIMU (Poverty Impact Monitoring Unit)/ CEPA (Centre for Poverty Analysis) experience.

Hoffman provides a well-structured overview and discussion of different approaches to PCIA that have been evolved over the last five years. He distinguishes approaches based on standard evaluation criteria, those that develop methodologies for assessing peace and conflict impact of development, and finally those that focus on specific interventions by conflict resolution and peacebuilding NGOs. It concludes that PCIA "should be an important and useful tool for any practitioner that must respond effectively to conflict situations."

However, to date, PCIA is far from being a useful tool as the gap between the conceptual design and the practice has not yet been closed. Hoffman himself identifies a number of issues with the current methodological developments that need to be addressed:

- the articulation of usable criteria and indicators,
- the linkages and interconnections between different types and levels of evaluations,

- the need for understanding the contexts, conditions, and circumstances, and
- the account of different sectors and their dynamic interactions.

Kenneth Bush, in his response to Hoffman's article criticises that it is not appropriate at all to discuss PCIA by summarising "some methodological details" and coming up with "four relatively technocratic points to bear in mind in the subsequent development of PCIA". For him PCIA is fundamentally political and needs to be treated in a political and not in a technical manner. Bush argues that "...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)." (Bush, in this volume, p. 39)

From a development practitioner's perspective one tends to conclude cautiously that any serious evaluation or impact assessment is both a highly political as well as a technical task. This is even more so if the impact of development projects on peacebuilding and conflict transformation in conflict zones is at stake. Nevertheless, in order to cope with these challenges, we need an appropriate analytical framework that is sensitive to political, social, economic, and institutional changes caused and/or stimulated by external interventions.

II. Need for a Practical Framework

Existing PCIA frameworks are often neither specific nor do they propose convincing practical approaches. They often remain vague with respect to the relationship between development cooperation and violent conflicts. In addition, the objectives of the various PCIA approaches that are proposed differ significantly. While some view peacebuilding as a development goal (Reychler 1998 and Warner 1999), others like Bush stress peacebuilding as an impact. Bush proposes five areas of potential peace and conflict impact which can help us to ask the right questions when assessing a specific situation:

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- institutional capacity to manage/ resolve violent conflict and to promote tolerance and build peace,
- military and human security,
- political structures and processes,
- economic structures and processes, and
- social reconstruction and empowerment.

As development cooperation should "do no harm", not even unintentional, a systematic and continuous monitoring and assessment of impacts is indispensable. But do we really need single-issue methodologies or rather a common impact assessment framework that would help to streamline data collection and stakeholder consultations (Leonhardt, 1999)?

From a pragmatic and rather general point of view there is a need for a common framework for impact assessment with specific additions and routines that deal adequately with crucial crosscutting themes such as poverty, gender, environment *and* conflict. Furthermore, impact assessment needs to be integrated into the Project Management Cycle with the aim to monitor (positive and negative, intended and unintended) impacts of the project/programme/policy on the beneficiaries as well as the socio-economic and political context of interventions with respect to the immediate project goal and predefined crosscutting dimensions.

In our view, and this is nourished by experience, we need a common analytical framework for impact assessment that enables donors and partners to

- assess intended as well as unintended impacts,
- help to understand the processes leading to the observed impacts,
- stimulate learning processes among the beneficiaries, local communities and institutions, and the donor community ,
- identify impacts at project, intermediate institutions, and policy level,
- shed light on the nature and dynamics of sectoral inter-linkages,
- strengthen local ownership and participation,
- involve stakeholders,
- guide actions in a transparent manner, and
- remain affordable.

This requires a methodological pluralism that builds upon the strengths of various approaches. Therefore, we should stop getting lost in a battle centred around simple dichotomies such as quantitative versus qualitative approaches, indicator-based systems versus case studies, expert-based versus participatory assessments, outcome-orientation versus process-orientation. We must consider trade-offs and not miss the sound opportunities that various toolkits offer which have been prepared by scores of economists, sociologists and political scientists.

The desired common framework should not be confused with standard operating evaluation procedures established by individual donors that are universally applied without proper contextualization. It should rather be developed locally but applied by all donors operating in the country.

Such a common analytical framework needs to be supplemented by specific routines and modules that address the specific issues to be studied. A *tension and conflict impact assessment (TCIA)* may be an appropriate tool to understand conflict situations and to avoid unintended negative effects of aid.

Klingebiel et al. (GDI 1999) successfully tested an in-depth study approach in Tanzania. It comprised six main steps:

- description of the project region and the project,
- tension and conflict analysis with the aim to identify tensions and conflicts in the project region, their mechanisms and dynamics as well as the actors involved,
- tension-related identification of project stakeholders,
- sensitivity of the project to tensions and conflicts which is analysed by the interrelationship between the project and the local tensions,
- identification of impacts; this results from the first four steps, and
- conclusions and recommendations is the final step aiming at recognizing major impacts, describing their influence on the conflict of interest, and recommending ways and means how to deal with it.

This open approach applied by Klingebiel/GDI also allows for the stronger emphasis that Bush proposes to be crucial for future approaches. It favours local control, an organic process orientation, open-endedness, responsivity and calls for the sustained presence of those facilitating the refection process.

In linking up with the TCIA approach tested by Klingebiel/GDI in Tanzania, a first attempt of adapting the approach to the Sri Lankan context has been made by the Poverty Impact Monitoring Unit (PIMU) in cooperation with its partner organisation, the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA). PIMU, a GTZ supported project operating in Sri Lanka since about three years, aims at:

- *developing a* **conceptual approach and practical toolkit** towards impact monitoring in general and poverty related impact monitoring in particular,
- *translating its approach and toolkit into a* **service package** (applied research, consultancies, training as well as facilitation of dialogue and exchange) provided against fees to clients such as donor supported projects, NGO's or international organisations,
- **institutionalising** *the service package* of impact monitoring in a suitable manner within the Sri Lankan organisational landscape.

Since May 2001, PIMU operates as a support unit to its partner organisation CEPA, a newly established non-profit company that builds upon the PIMU experiences and carries forward its mandate as a service provider.

III.1   Basic principles

The practical experiences gained so far have led PIMU/CEPA to the formulation of the following basic principles:

- impact monitoring irrespective of its focus on poverty, gender, environment or conflict is a project function and shall be regarded as part of the management information system;
- it calls for a methodological pluralism built upon the specific strengths of various approaches;
- impact monitoring should involve all actors who cause or perceive impacts; it should respect the different views of stakeholders, promote the dialogue between them and stimulate learning processes;
- systematic internal impact monitoring shall be supplemented by external evaluations.

In aiming at the development of a coherent conceptual approach towards impact monitoring, PIMU/CEPA have identified three strategic perspectives:

The 'classical' **purpose related perspective** adapted in log-frame dominated projects is based on preconceived impact hypothesis starting from the project purpose and leading to overall goals. Typically, a selection of impacts to be monitored is made and indicators are formulated. Cause and effect relations are crucial and the project purpose is placed centre stage becoming the focal point of attention.

In contrast to that, a **context related perspective** examines the project environment in a more systemic manner. While stakeholders will have to identify fields of observation, a precise formulation of indicators is not of high importance. It is rather a context sensitivity and openness to look into the many unexpected impacts occurring parallel to implementation of a development intervention that characterize this perspective as valuable for planners and implementers.

Third, the **project transcending perspective** requires a critical dialogue of independent researchers, practitioners and policy makers. Based on the analysis of development trends in a particular geographical area, it invites practitioners to relate their interventions to the broader picture. Although the advantage of this perspective lies in a reduced bias in project impact assessment, there can be no guarantee that the attribution gap will be bridged.

From the stance of PIMU/CEPA, the challenge lies in respecting the different perspectives as equally relevant and valuable for the learning process of stakeholders as well as steering of interventions. It is therefore proposed to work with them in a complementary manner.

III.2   CEPA support to the Jaffna Rehabilitation Project

On the request of the GTZ-supported Jaffna Rehabilitation Project (JRP), CEPA had been invited to pay a one-week visit to Jaffna in May 2001 in order to first become familiar with the project concept, institutional set-up and practical implementation. Subsequently, the main objective of the assignment was to identify entry points for a systematic impact monitoring that would allow the project team to not only assess the potential sustainability of physical achievements (such as rehabilitated schools, drinking water supply systems and the construction of houses for internally displaced people) but also to understand the socio-political implications of project interventions.

After a review of major projects documents, a number of bilateral discussions with team members and field visits to some of the supported school development societies (SDS), water users associations (WUA) and housing clusters, a sensitisation workshop was conducted with the project team comprising of management and field workers, engineers and social organisers. The major results of the one-day workshop can be summarised as follows:

- In a brainstorming facilitated by CEPA, the JRP project team identifies a number of observed impacts that have never been incorporated neither in the basic concept paper nor in the log-frame of the JRP. Even more crucial, the questions of "Who benefits from most of the project interventions?" and "Does that lead to less or more tensions?" were felt by the team to be insufficiently addressed.

- The capacity of beneficiary groups (SDS, WUA, housing clusters) to be functional in accordance with the expectations of the group members can be regarded as the major condition for long lasting impact. Main criteria for functionality of beneficiary groups – as seen by the project team - are unity/strong leadership, clear awareness, regular meetings, active participation of all members, joint planning, proper implementation, transparency, joint monitoring and evaluation as well as good cooperation with external agencies.

- The development of a tool for the self-assessment of beneficiary group functionality requires joint development of criteria with the groups. This can be supported by competent facilitation of social organisers. However, while comparability of self-assessment results is in the interest of the project, a manipulation of beneficiary groups is to be avoided if the tool is meant to lead to maximum learning and ownership of the group.

- The JRP project team is of the opinion that – given the specific situation in the Jaffna peninsula with its twenty-year experience of civil war – the analysis of general project impacts must be complemented by a more particular conflict related impact assessment which is at least as important as any poverty related impact monitoring.

- While the Tension and Conflict Impact Matrix (TCIM) proposed by Klingebiel/GDI is a helpful starting point for reflecting observed or potential impacts of project interventions, the major challenge lies in defining the local dimensions of the main factors causing, triggering or aggravating tensions /conflicts.

- Finally, the proposal to not only differentiate intended and unintended as well as positive and negative impacts but also consider three different perspectives, namely the project team, the beneficiaries and the research team, subsequently leads to an undertaking that might stress capacities of ordinary development projects to the limit if not overburden them.

The preliminary experiences described above have meanwhile led to an In-Process-Consultancy (IPC) provided by CEPA to JRP. The IPC has a time-frame of one year and will comprise of several visits of CEPA professionals to Jaffna, conduct of self-assessments, preparation of case studies in selected beneficiary groups, development of a tailor-made tool for conflict impact assessment, regular backstopping to the project team and a final documentation of experiences made.

Acknowledging the limitations of the client (JRP) both in terms of time as well as budget, CEPA accepts the fact that the scope of work for the IPC will neither be able to look into all aspects that CEPA would regard as important nor guarantee a sufficient learning process that would lead to radical adjustments of the overall project concept.

III.3 Explanatory interpretation versus measurements

The preliminary CEPA experiences made in supporting the JRP seem to give a tentative response to the question of what type of information we might need in order to avoid doing harm with our development cooperation projects. Rather than quantitative measurements, we need explanatory information on impacts. We must understand the processes that have led to positive and negative, intended and unintended impacts. Moreover, we are well advised to respect the different perspectives expressed by different stakeholders.

Measurement based upon 'inductive' indicators that have been predefined by donor-driven planning workshops without clear reference to an impact model may be misleading. Linear impact models such as the standard type of "log-frame" with its vertical logic will not be sufficient as they do are not sensitive to the observation of negative as well as positive unintentional impacts. The log-frame approach sidelines them and puts them into the dustbin of 'assumptions'.

On the way towards flexible and open initiatives for impact monitoring, crosscutting issues such as poverty, gender, environment *and* conflict require further development and testing of methodologies. While impact monitoring can be seen as a task that needs a strong bottom-up perspective leading to participatory indicator development, some of the basic questions regarding PCIA can be answered as follows:

Why do we need impact assessment that is sensitive to tensions/conflicts?
To lead to a better understanding of the conflict situation and its dynamics; to stimulate learning; to steer the project; to orient work towards impact;

What needs to be studied?
Development and peacebuilding impacts and their dynamic interactions, in particular unintentional impacts;

Who should be involved?
Project staff, beneficiaries; target population; important stakeholders outside the project;

Where should it be applied?
At all levels that are deemed important to the stakeholders;

When should it be performed?
PCIA: during programming of aid (ex ante macro-level); project planning (ex ante micro level); impact monitoring (observing a set of indicators assessing conflict risks and tensions), and evaluation (ex-post micro- and macro-level)

How should it be tooled?
Aiming at local ownership and participatory; avoiding linear cause-effect thinking such as the log-frame mindset;

PCIA as a Peacebuilding Tool

Marc Howard Ross

Kenneth Bush's goal of assessing the peace and conflict impact of development interventions is an important one. He puts front and center the issue of governance and in so doing also problematizes the relationship among multiple goals in development interventions. My reactions to the dialogue on PICA focuses on three issues: the need for more explicit concern with theory in the planning, organization and evaluation of interventions; the difficulties that many projects will have in making sense of the long lists and "shoulds" that characterize PICA; and the question of goals, goal revision and indicators of success in any project. Our discussion provides an opportunity to ponder ways in which working towards one set of goals can, at the same time, promote other highly valued ones. However, it also forces us to consider how, at times, the pursuit of development and social justice goals can be at odds with the goals one might articulate from a peace and conflict perspective. Lastly, I emphasize the importance of integrating evaluation into development and peacebuilding projects as practitioners take responsibility for altering, refining, and redesigning programs to make them more effective.

While both Bush and Hoffman talk about the role of theory, neither gives it a sufficiently central role in their discussion of PICA. Theory, as I am using the term, refers to both local (what some anthropologists call *folk theories*) and academic knowledge about the world. While outsiders can use theory as secret knowledge to control projects, there is no reason why this has to be the case. In fact, most of our theories of social action are remarkably simple and can readily articulated in local terms and can be compared with local theories to clarify similarities and differences to bridge gaps between them.

Theory is crucial to practice in at least two ways. First we should recognize that all people have theories about how the world works. It is often critical that interventions understand the theories people in a community have concerning their social, political, and economic worlds since successful project implementation can depend upon interveners' awareness of how local beliefs intersect with a project's activities and goals. Second, theory matters because it makes explicit how a project's specific activities are expected to affect behaviors and attitudes of those people directly involved in a project,

and their expected wider impact on others living in the community and region (Ross and Rothman 1999). Both effects matter because most NGO interventions (and many governmental ones as well) are relatively small scale. If interventions are to make a difference, there needs to be transfer of knowledge, attitude change and resources to people beyond those directly participating in a project (Kelman 1995). Yet, despite the fact that how transfer is to be achieved, it is often left unarticulated and frequently rests on naïve assumptions such as good intentions.

Theory can play a crucial role in priority setting and resource allocation when it identifies sequences, points of maximum impact, and connections among domains (Ross 2000b). Each of the areas of potential peace and conflict impacts Bush identifies contains an implicit theory of practice and these should be made explicit to better understand how it is hypothesized that specific goals might be achieved. Theories, of course, are often partial and produce disagreements. However, their articulation forces practitioners to specify indicators to decide if, and how, an activity is successful. When used in this way, theories can be empowering because they help stakeholders better understand why something is being done and they can assist in deciding which actions taken are effective. Theories at odds with one another can help practitioners run natural field experiments that can help interveners and communities decide what produces the best results. In short, by integrating theory into practice, projects can empower stakeholders on the frontlines, building commitment that translates into more effective action.

II. PCIA's Potential Relevance to Individual Projects

Ross

Let me offer a hypothesis for which I have no evidence. It is that the PICA approach is not yet sufficiently user friendly. When I look at Bush's framework from the point of view of projects in the field, my sense is that the large list of goals and their generality is overwhelming and will induce a profound sense of inadequacy among people who might, in fact, be able to apply it if they better understood its particular relevance to their project. One reaction to feeling intimidated can be bureaucratic efforts to comply without internalization any of PICA's deeper goals. The scheme, and Bush's discussion in his response to Hoffman, is comprehensive in that it lists political, social, cultural and economic goals and emphasizes the importance of the political context in which a project is working. But a practitioner wants to know where does one begin? How does one prioritize? How does one know what parts of the PICA scheme are not relevant to their work? How can projects decide what not to do at any point in time? These questions aren't addressed sufficiently and yet they are central to any project's use of PICA. By

suggesting to projects that everything matters and that all domains are interconnected, PICA, as Bush presents it, can be disempowering and produce frustration.

Some of these difficulties would be lessened if Bush distinguished more clearly among evaluations at different levels as Hoffman encourages; and if we recognize that the comprehensive coordination of many projects (even in a relatively small region) is not likely to be terribly successful. In fact, this realization is fully consistent with many of Bush's own goals, which emphasize local autonomy, invention, and control.

If stakeholders would spell out their specific goals and indicators of success at various stages of their work, many projects would be significantly improved through the goal redefinition and in-course corrections this would generate. Contextually defined goals will, however, sometimes be at odds with those of other projects in the same region. One reason is because different projects will develop divergent ideas and priorities. Another is because of politics. Local actors often strive to maintain their own autonomy and control and have trouble giving these up. A common solution to this problem is to limit local autonomy and control putting it in the hands of higher level experts, often outsiders, who supposedly don't have self-serving motives. Yet comprehensive planning underplans and a few very smart (even well-intentioned) project planners will consistently oversimplify and lose the complexity and richness of local needs and understandings (Scott 1998). But that is, of course, what Bush wants to avoid.

As Mary Anderson (1999) argues so effectively, outside funded projects introduce new actors and resources into a region whose actions affect the fortunes of local players. Bush acknowledges her injunction to "do no harm," but fails to draw additional relevant conclusions from her analysis. One is that projects shouldn't be expected to get everything right the way Bush implies they would if they just apply PICA properly. Instead we should be emphasizing that there are a number of things projects might do which are "good-enough," not a single standard of perfection against which they are to be evaluated (Ross 2000a). Good-enough projects make significant differences in peoples' lives although they may fail to address many of the items on Bush's lists. If Bush is serious about harnessing local knowledge and local standards of success, he must loosen up some of the injunctions he offers (often implicitly) about what goals effective projects will achieve. There is a real paradox here and the solution isn't simply better and more indicators and more contextualization. Tradeoffs among goals are a real part of development and peace work and good outcomes are often far from ideal ones.

Bush resists imposing a set of contest-free indicators on projects. For the most part this is appropriate, although not trouble-free. Doing this does not avoid the issue of accountability and deciding when, and to what degree, a project is successful. Funders, project administrators and those living in a community in which a project operates may have different priorities, if a not outright disagreement, about what constitutes success. These differences often are simply seen as a problem. However, they also offer an opportunity to bring various stakeholders together to consider their differences and set new joint project goals (and not just those which represent a least common denominator).

Goals are not the same as specific indicators and it is important to recognize that while Bush has no desire to impose specific indicators on particular projects, he has little problem in offering a large number of general goals projects should be working towards. There is however some inconsistency here. If people working in specific contexts should develop appropriate local indicators of success, why shouldn't they also be involved in goal setting? Why are the goals he lists under the five areas of potential peace and conflict impact the right ones for all communities and why are these five areas those of highest priority? Is the functional distinction among these areas particularly useful in all settings? Perhaps not. Bush clearly has an implicit theory of change linking each of these elements. As noted above, making it explicit would be helping in deciding how useful this general approach to goal setting is.

In contrast, Rothman's approach to goal and indicator setting directly involves stakeholders in the process and explicitly recognizes that in many projects goals shift over time (Ross 2001; Rothman 1998). Rather than starting with a list such as Bush provides and asking a project to it adapt it to their situation, Rothman draws on Lederach's (1995) elicitive approach and has stakeholders generate goals which he then seeks to group into more general categories. This approach permits participants to make connections among elements they see as important and set their own priorities at the same time.

A source of tension underlying this dialogue is between a desire to articulate a general set of evaluation standards for the field that is relevant across a wide range of interventions and the recognition of the need for locally grounded and articulated indicators of success. Of course this sounds like Lederach's distinction between directive and elicitive approaches but there is a something additional going on in Bush's proposal and Rothman's (1998) ARIA project. Implicit in both, I

believe, is the idea that diverse, contextually defined, local indicators can somehow be successfully linked to more general peace and conflict impact goals. In Bush's case, he begins with five areas of potential impact to guide the development of local indicators, while Rothman begins with locally articulated indications but has expressed the clear expectation that replicating his process across projects can yield general goals for the field. As Hoffman suggests, in neither case is it clear how the cross-level connections are to be made. How they might be linked is not clear to me either. In fact, I think that any connection between the specific and general is conceptual and not organic.

Finally, while Bush and Hoffman raise the issue of potential conflict among the diverse goals in any project (and the likelihood of this increasing when there are multiple projects working in a region) more needs to be said about this question. For example, Bush talks about tensions between the goals of raising educational achievement and lowering intergroup tension in education projects. There are often tensions between the development of local capacity building and meeting immediate human needs and service delivery. On a more general level, tensions between peacebuilding and human rights priorities occur when projects have very different priorities. Projects not only need to be able to mediate among these differences, but they also should be able to articulate as clearly as possible the potential consequences of pursuing one course rather than another.

IV. Integration of Evaluation into Practice

I am delighted to have had an opportunity to participate in this discussion. Let me end with the thought that the more explicit integration of evaluation into practice is crucial to the successes of peacebuilding efforts. It is fully consistent with Campbell's (1988) idea that we consider policy as hypothesis and evaluate practices as quasi-experiments (Campbell 1969). When practice doesn't work, there is an all-too-common tendency to variously blame people in local communities, implementers, or governments. But sometimes, practices fail because of incorrect assumptions about the effects that their actions would have. These learnings should not be explained away or excused; rather, they ought to be the basis of change and innovation. Only when people feel sufficiently secure with the knowledge that failure is not an end but a new beginning will practitioners embrace evaluation as a tool rather than a seeing it as a problem to be overcome.

Action Evaluation:
A Response to Mark Hoffman's Comments

Jay Rothman

Mark Hoffman's discussion of the Action Evaluation process is, on the whole, accurate and insightful. However, there are a few corrections I would like to point out as well as respond to his provocative questions about the possible limitations of the still-evolving methodology.

I. Action Evaluation as a Tool

Action Evaluation (AE) has evolved over the last 8 years in parallel with my conflict resolution process called ARIA (Antagonism, Resonance, Invention and Action). AE builds on ARIA (i.e. the last phase of ARIA is the first of AE), yet for clarity they should be distinguished (for a full discussion of the ARIA framework, see Rothman, 1997, or www.ariagroup.com; for a full discussion of AE, please go to www.aepro.org).

AE was developed in part to address what I found to be a serious limitation in my own conflict resolution work (it is useful to note that in trying to improve my own work, I have also aimed at contributing to the field itself, and yet it is perhaps most accurate and less over-reaching to speak purely in first person here). In my decade-and-a-half of conflict intervention, I am satisfied that by using the ARIA process I have effectively assisted many disputants to reframe their differences constructively – from *antagonism to resonance* (see Rothman 1997). Moreover, I have contributed to their ability to *invent* creative options for deepening their *resonance* of shared goals and needs between them. However, I am less satisfied that I have been successful in helping disputants sustain *action* that promotes lasting and structural changes. This led me to ask two questions: What could I do in my work as an intervener to help disputants move from good ideas to good implementation for social and structural change?; and, How could I know?

This led me to develop Action Evaluation, a methodology designed to assist key stakeholders in a conflict intervention initiative (e.g. third-parties, participants, funders) to collaboratively define

success (baseline stage) as a vehicle for helping to promote and enact it. Moreover, having systematically articulated a shared and operational set of definitions of success, the ability for systematic monitoring and self-evaluation would also be fostered (formative stage). Then, participants' interest in systematic self-reflection and self-evaluation, as part of their overall experience in a conflict resolution initiative, should grow as they help to define and then monitor "success". As Ross concludes in his comments on *PCIA as Peacebuilding Tool* "[o]nly when people feel sufficiently secure with the knowledge that failure is not an end but a new beginning will practitioners embrace evaluation as a tool rather than a seeing it as a problem to be overcome."

Box 1 Action Evaluation	
Stage	**Action**
Establishing a Baseline	- articulation of definitions of success - negotiation of definitions between individual stakeholders - individual definitions are woven into shared goal of success.
Formative Monitoring	- enactment of the definitions of success - monitoring and adjustment of definitions based on insights gained during real-life activity
Summative Assessment	questions are asked and measures are taken to see how well an intervention has "stacked up" against its own internally derived and dynamically evolved well an intervention has "stacked up" against its own internally derived and dynamically evolved goals

As outlined in Box 1, the three stages in Action Evaluation are: *establishing baseline, formative monitoring* and *summative assessment*. The first, *establishing a baseline*, begins by having key stakeholders individually articulate their prospective definitions of success prior to the launch of a given project or intervention; Hoffman accurately describes this first part. The next step is rather different from Hoffman's description. What he described as the "second layer" of negotiating shared definitions between individual stakeholders, is the second step in establishing a baseline. Here the individual definitions are interwoven into a single platform through a collaborative negotiation process (for an example of this go to http://www.aepro.org/inprint/papers/aedayton.html)

The second phase of action evaluation, "formative assessment" is similar to what Hoffman describes as the "third layer". In this process, baseline definitions of success are enacted and then self-consciously adjusted to give a systematic monitoring of how well those definitions are or are not matching up with the reality of real-life activity (as distinct from theory-driven hypotheses that are made during baseline stage). Finally, there is a *summative assessment* stage, or more traditional "evaluation-as-judgment" in which, based on evolved criteria of success, questions are asked and measures are taken to see how well an intervention has "stacked up" against its own internally derived and consciously evolved goals.

II. Some Critical Remarks

In seeking to summarize some general criteria of success, Hoffman has expanded on definitions that were derived from one specific project between Greek and Turkish Cypriots and, after us, has suggested these could be used more broadly (see his discussion of "illustrative standards", and chapter 13 in Ross and Rothman 2000). This is indeed a goal of action evaluation, but as it evolves, it can begin to probe for more data-driven generalizations, and not by extrapolating from just one intervention as was the case here. Rather, our goal now is to draw conclusions and generalizations by employing the now extensive data base of stakeholders goals we have developed of over 75 projects, and begin to develop something of a contingency based analysis of success. We concur with Hoffman's first challenge, or goal, that AE must move from specific project focus to generalizations across projects if it is to be usefully applied in the field (Hoffman , in this volume, p. 28). We believe that by focusing on specific cases, and comparing them with many other cases, we may be able to generalize useful hypotheses about patterns where we can begin to match types of conflict intervention, such as training, needs-based, interest based, and the goals that are developed for each with different types of conflicts.

For example, Ghais in her AE of CDR's intervention in Bulgaria (Ghais 1999 available at www.aepro.org/inprint/conference/ghais.html), surmised that the further away a given set of stakeholders are from the intervention, the more wide-ranging are their goals (e.g. CDR's goals were to build local capacity, enhance democratic processes and pilot test a model that could be applied in other settings); while those closer to the situation itself would have more immediate and concrete goals (e.g. the Bulgarian participants sought to improve education and social welfare of Roma youth). Ghais concludes "[a]t the end of the baseline section of this paper, we noted that the four stakeholder groups, participants, conveners, supervisors and sponsors,

articulated goals that differed along a spectrum from practical, direct charity work for the underprivileged (expressed by participants) to such lofty goals as building a culture of democracy and dialogue (expressed by sponsors)."

With such a detailed analysis of a single case study, we can now begin to see if we might hypothesize goals of various stakeholders based on their proximity to an intervention and see if the kinds of goals they articulate line up with Ghais' experience. More generally, Ross, in his above-mentioned essay, comments on this inside/outside difference in goals: "There are often tensions between the development of local capacity building and meeting immediate human needs and service delivery." As we articulate broad goals by the end of the baseline phase in one project, we can begin to analyse the types of goals that are generated across types of conflicts and interventions. Thus, the systematic collection and documentation of multiple cases across type and level could contribute to systematic and comparative research on this and other applied hypotheses, which in turn could help expand the field.

While both Ross and Hoffman inquire about how to generalize from specific interventions, to the "field" itself, my proposition (still awaiting a sustained effort to test the voluminous data we've collected over the past half dozen years from 1,000's of stakeholders in almost 75 projects) is that by supporting contextualized efforts to define success in specific, small scale, often NGO-directed efforts, we can begin to find all sorts of rich and theory-driven hypotheses to test (e.g. such as Ghais' hypothesis about distance from intervention influencing types of goals) across a range of projects.

Hoffman's second question about AE (Hoffman , in this volume, p. 29), about the danger of goals falling to the level of the lowest common denominator, misses the important emphasis in AE about evolving goals; indeed, this is perhaps the most important aspect of the entire iterative process that constitutes AE. Thus, in addition to giving participants a "place at the table" in the project design from the start, and indeed it is true that the goals first articulated are usually broad and overarching, as they are consensual and inclusive, it also facilitates a process of successive approximation of "success" as the initial and general goals are translated into practice and revisions of those goals are required to ensure project vitality and relevance. Thus, goals become more nuanced, operational and practical.

Concerning Hoffman's third point that AE is rooted in the Western (and more specifically Burtonian) problem-solving approach, and therefore may be guilty of imposing a framework even as it asserts

its desire to elicit "local models," is well-taken. I would be the first, in fact, to agree that AE is linear (although also iterative) and clearly rational in orientation. However, what systematic social science is not? This, it seems to me, is a challenge for the conflict resolution field generally as it seeks to extend itself beyond its Western roots and orientation. However, clearly the beginning of wisdom here is clarity about the origins of this work, not apology for them, and where such origins may run counter to, or nicely dovetail with, local contexts and culture.

I join Marc Ross in applauding this initiative to dialogue about the challenges and opportunities of rigorous evaluation of conflict resolution initiatives. This is still the next frontier in our developing field and is well-served by serious efforts of scholar-practitioners such as Hoffman and Bush to frame the agenda and respectfully, if frankly, debate the issues they raise. Thank you for inviting me to lend my voice as well.

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