ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO EVALUATING PEACEBUILDING INITIATIVES

Authors

Isabella Jean, Director Evaluation and Learning, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects

Anita Ernstorfer, Co-Director Reflecting on Peace Practice Program, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects

ABSTRACT

This paper reflects on the use of evaluative approaches to peacebuilding and why they are important as alternatives to formal evaluations. The authors provide a brief overview of the state of the art in peacebuilding evaluation and share lessons derived from CDA's recent experiences implementing Program Quality Assessments (PQA) and Evaluability Assessments (EA). Both assessment frameworks were adapted for peacebuilding programs and integrate tools from CDA's Reflecting on Peace Practice Program (RPP). In addition, the authors also reflect on methods for monitoring and evaluating conflict-sensitivity as well as on the use of feedback mechanisms as additional approaches to improve program quality and to support accountability. The paper identifies several areas for further research and inquiry.

Keywords

Evaluation, evaluative thinking, peacebuilding, conflict sensitivity, feedback mechanisms, feedback loops.

Glossary of abbreviations used in this paper

AfP	Alliance for Peacebuilding
CDA	CDA Collaborative Learning Projects
DNH	Do No Harm
EA	Evaluability Assessment
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict Affected States
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PQA	Program Quality Assessment
pwl	peace writ little
PWL	Peace Writ Large
RPP	Reflecting on Peace Practice Program (CDA)
UN	United Nations
USIP	United States Institute of Peace

1. ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO EVALUATING PEACEBUILDING INITIATIVES

1.1. Peacebuilding and Evaluation

If we were to summarize in one sentence the state of affairs in peacebuilding evaluation it would probably be something like, "*Progress has been made, but a lot remains to be done*." Over the past ten years, the field of peacebuilding evaluation has significantly matured. A range of guidelines, frameworks and toolkits have been developed by peacebuilding and evaluation organizations and practitioners. The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD guidelines on the evaluation of conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities (OECD DAC 2008 and 2012[1]) are now standard in the field. However, many organizations struggle with their implementation. Increasingly, development and peacebuilding organizations make a conscious effort to institutionalize peacebuilding program design and related monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approaches into their work. This includes prominent international non-Governmental organizations such as Search for Common Ground[2], CARE, Saferworld, Catholic Relief Services, Interpeace, as well as multi-lateral organizations such as the UN through the establishment of the Peacebuilding Fund in 2006 and related efforts since to be more rigorous about strategy design and M&E.

> "*In 2003 and 2004, two major studies were published that had significant reverberations on the conversation around evaluation of peacebuilding. First, the publication in 2003 of Mary Anderson and Lara Olson's Confronting War, the culmination of many years of collaborative learning within the peacebuilding field through the Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) project, challenged the field to assess their contribution to "peace writ large" (PWL).* […]*The following year saw the publication of the high-profile Joint Utstein Study of Peacebuilding, led by Dan Smith. One of the primary findings from this broad review was that peacebuilding had a strategic deficit. Of the many recommendations given in response to this deficit, the most significant to evaluation was that: "the […] evaluation community needs to recognize that impact assessment at the project level is not proving to be viable and to shift it to the strategic level […]."*[3]

Peace Writ Large (PWL), referenced above, is concerned with the "bigger picture" of a conflict. This "bigger picture" refers to the overall socio-political conditions in a given context. It can involve national level conflict dynamics (or in some contexts, sub-national or regional dynamics). Being accountable to Peace Writ Large means ensuring that initiatives address key drivers of conflict and make a contribution to the 'bigger picture'. This requires an explicit strategy for influencing those drivers, and a way to monitor and evaluate effects beyond the life of the project. This does not mean that all programs should be expected to produce concrete changes at the larger societal level. In fact, many programs are successful at smaller scale interventions, such as operating at the community level, or with small groups of people, thus contributing to 'peace writ little'. The impact of these interventions will not be directly observable at a societal level. However, CDA/RPP has found that many

[1] In addition to the OECD/DAC evaluation criteria for all fields (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, sustainability, and coherence), the 2008 OECD/DAC guidance recommends three optional criteria to be used for peacebuilding specifically: linkages, coverage and consistency with values/conflict sensitivity.

[2] See SFCG's new DM&E (Design, Monitoring and Evaluation) for Peace portal: http://www.dmeforpeace.org/

[3] Scharbatke-Church, Cheyanne. 2011a, p. 461

practitioners assume that their programs, because they have solid goals, will somehow lead to or support Peace Writ Large. This is not always the case.

In the peacebuilding field, it is critical to distinguish between ***Program Effectiveness*** and ***Peace Effectiveness***. Program Effectiveness focuses on assessing whether a specific program is achieving its intended goals in an effective manner. This kind of evaluation asks whether the program is fulfilling its goals and is successful on its own terms. The question about peace effectiveness asks whether, in meeting specific goals, the program is making a contribution to Peace Writ Large and having a positive effect by reducing key driving factors of conflict. This requires assessing changes in the overall environment that may or may not result directly from the program. In most instances this requires identifying the contribution of the specific program to PWL, rather than seeking clear attribution of impacts from discrete peace initiatives. Impacts at the level of PWL typically cannot be achieved by single activities and projects, but rather are cumulative, resulting from many different efforts happening simultaneously, especially when these efforts are deliberately designed to complement one another. Strategic linkages among efforts in a single context are therefore critical.[4]

Despite all the positive developments mentioned above, **the peacebuilding field has also been struggling significantly to apply evaluations as a systematic professional practice**. In 2011, a report by the Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) noted that "[...] *the peacebuilding field seems to have reached a frustratingly long plateau in the use, understanding, and application of evaluation. As a result, most peacebuilding funders and implementers express dissatisfaction at the current state of evaluation*."[5] Progress and practical learning has been slow. There is still no widely accepted methodological agreement about how best to conduct evaluations in complex and conflict-affected contexts (Paffenholz 2011).[6]

Three particular challenges are worth highlighting in this regard:

The ***first challenge*** is how to measure the impact of micro-level interventions on the macro-level conflict dynamics. This refers not only to the challenges of attribution, but also to the highly complex non-linear processes of social change which cannot be captured by linear cause-effect logic (e.g., as manifested in some of the standard logical frameworks used in M&E systems). Systems approaches to peacebuilding and peacebuilding evaluation are gaining increased attention in light of the recognition that peace practitioners and evaluators need to examine both program and peace effectiveness as highlighted above. [7]

The ***second challenge*** is that there is not yet a well-established 'culture of evaluation' within the peacebuilding field. On the one hand, peacebuilding itself has struggled for some time to become recognized as a legitimate and clearly defined field within international relations

[4] See CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. 2013. Reflecting on Peace Practice Participant Training Manual, p. 28
[5] Kawano-Chiu, Melanie, 2011, p. 8
[6] One of the most recent contributions in this regard is Andersen, Ole Winckler; Bull, Beate; Kennedy-Chouane, Megan (eds.): *Evaluation Methodologies for Aid in Conflict. Explorations in Development Studies*. 2014. See also Corlazzoli, Vanessa; White, Jonathan: "Back to Basics. A compilation of best practices in design, monitoring and evaluation in fragile and conflict-affected environments." SFCG/CCVRI. 2013
[7] See Woodrow, Peter and Chigas, Diana: *Connecting the Dots: Evaluating Whether and How Programs Address Conflict Systems*, in: *The Non-Linearity of Peace Processes: Theory and Practice of Systemic Conflict Transformation*, Ropers, N. et al. (eds.), Berghof Foundation. 2011.

and international development. On the other, many peacebuilders have resisted a systematic application of rigorous and professional results measurement tools and frameworks to their work. Many peacebuilding practitioners claim that that it is too difficult to measure impact, given the complexity of the conflict factors at stake and the long-term nature of conflict transformation and peace efforts.[8] At the same time, the combined pressures of scarce funding, the requirement to demonstrate results and the need to establish peacebuilding as a legitimate field have led to a tendency among peacebuilding programs to 'over-claim' results.[9]

Accountability to act upon evaluation results is a ***third challenge***. This is clearly not unique to the peacebuilding field. Often, local staff are left to their own devices with little continuing external support to implement the recommendations of evaluation reports[10]. Most literature on (peacebuilding) evaluation is clear about the fact that evaluation should never be "[...] *an end in itself. It should be a mechanism that contributes to accountability and learning at a variety of levels: project team, office, organization or peacebuilding field*."[11] In practice, however, the donor accountability aspect of evaluations has received much more attention than the learning and program quality improvement aspects. Frequently, evaluation processes are not designed in a way to support a conscious process of learning and adaptation.

1.2 Why do we need alternatives to formal evaluation in peacebuilding?

Many evaluations are commissioned to 'tick the box', in response to donor requirements, because there is an underlying sentiment that 'something is not going quite right' with a particular program, or to justify prevailing funding and strategy decisions. However, many evaluations show weak results and "[...] *do not reach any strong conclusions, positive or negative*."[12] This obviously makes them of limited value to program staff, donors, and local partners. Evaluation teams often struggle fulfil the different needs of everyone who has a stake in the evaluation process: donors, in most cases, care most about broader strategy and impact questions, and implementing partners might need further assessment of particular implementation challenges and operational performance. In most cases, program teams also have significant **capacity development needs** in the M&E areas, which are usually not met by evaluations.

Rigorous evaluation processes that meet professional standards (for example, standards of the American Evaluation Association[13]) have **cost implications**, especially in contexts where data collection is constrained and requires additional time. Due to funding constraints, many peacebuilding organizations cannot afford full-blown evaluations. Yet, they still want to

[8] This is one of five 'myths and misconceptions' identified by the AfP report (Kawano-Chiu, Melanie, 2011), p. 9 and following. [Could cut these.] The other four are: "Staff in country offices must be trained social scientist"; "The primary purpose of evaluations is to highlight flaws and faults and assess when a program is a 'success' or 'failure'"; "The expectation is that nearly all projects will be 'successful"; and "Countervailing forces against good evaluation practices are too entrenched to change".
[9] Scharbatke-Church, Cheyanne. 2011a, p. 476
[10] Action Asia, 2011, p. 16
[11] Scharbatke-Church, Cheyanne. 2011a, p. 471
[12] Blum, Andrew, 2011, p. 4
[13] http://www.eval.org/

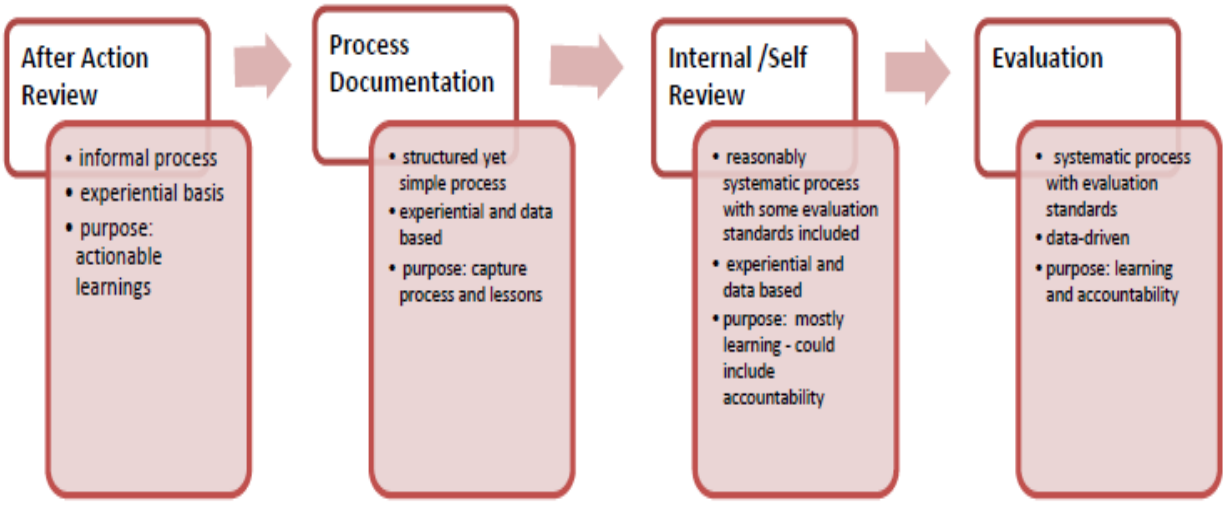
benefit from an evaluative process that supports real-time assessment, reflection, learning and program improvement during the implementation phase, not merely in retrospect after program completion.

CDA has also frequently heard from evaluators that many programs are simply not ready for a full evaluation. They find that they are confronted by programs with poorly articulated goals or objectives, and very few have any form of baseline data or even a thorough "before" analysis. In addition, the quality of conflict analyses informing program design are quite varied.

Because a classic evaluation might not always deliver the right responses to the specific challenge programs might face, the peacebuilding and evaluation community have been exploring a range of **new and alternative approaches to peacebuilding evaluation**, such as the "most significant change" technique (Davies and Dart, 2005), developmental evaluation (Quinn Paton, 2010), and outcome mapping[14] CDA has been experimenting with evaluability assessments (EA) and program quality assessments (PQA), which are further explored below, based on recent experiences facilitated by CDA.

Cheyanne Church's illustrative **spectrum of evaluative processes** below locates formal evaluation with a systematic, rigorous application of the norms and standards of the evaluation discipline at one end of the spectrum, and more informal, experiential based (rather than data based) exercises at the other end such as an After Action Review. This spectrum does not provide a complete picture of the range of possible evaluative processes, but rather give an impression of the multiple options available.

Figure 1: Illustrative Spectrum of Evaluative Processes[15]



[14] Outcome mapping: Description and resources at http://betterevaluation.org/plan/approach/outcome_mapping

[15] Scharbatke-Church, Cheyanne, 2011b., p. 7

2. LESSONS FROM CDA's RECENT APPLICATION OF ALTERNATIVE AND COMPLEMENTARY METHODS

2.1 What are Program Quality Assessments and Evaluability Assessments?

CDA's Reflecting on Peace Practice Program (RPP) has been exploring for several years how its findings concerning peacebuilding effectiveness and impacts can be integrated into good program design and evaluation practice[16]. As RPP tools for peacebuilding design have been applied more widely within the peacebuilding field in general, practitioners and evaluators have also begun to draw on the tools in evaluation processes. A review of the uses of RPP in peacebuilding evaluations conducted by Cheyanne Scharbatke-Church (2011)[17] suggested that RPP could be particularly effective for strengthening peacebuilding design and preparing programs for evaluations through RPP-infused **Evaluability Assessments (EA)** and **Program Quality Assessments (PQA).** CDA produced two working papers on evaluability assessments (Reimann, 2012) and program quality assessments (Reimann, Chigas, Woodrow, 2012) for peacebuilding interventions. Evaluability Assessments and Program Quality Assessments are quite familiar in the evaluation field and have been applied in other social science areas, particularly education. In these working papers and subsequent EA and PQA implementation processes, CDA adapted these evaluation approaches to the peacebuilding context incorporating RPP tools and concepts.

EAs and PQAs are not evaluations. They are evaluative processes that aim to improve program strategies and ongoing learning. They do not meet formal requirements of many evaluations regarding e.g. regarding accountability and data collection, but are more in line with the overall approach behind developmental evaluations. Both EA and PQA are done when there is a recognized need to review and strengthen program strategy and M&E systems.

However, there are clear differences between the two:

An **EA** is ideally conducted prior to a formal evaluation and assesses whether a program is ready for a formal evaluation and recommend changes in order to prepare it if it is not yet ready. Ideally, EAs are accompanied by check lists, describing the level of evaluability (low evaluability to high evaluability) across three assessment areas. From a CDA/RPP perspective the checklist should include questions regarding:

- **Program Design**: Conflict analysis; program goals; linkages between activities, goals, and the overall objective; theories of change.
- **Data availability**: baselines, M&E systems, indicators, access to stakeholders.
- **Conduciveness of the context**: overall conditions (security, climate etc.); financial resources; ownership of processes, and the integration of Do No Harm principles.[18]

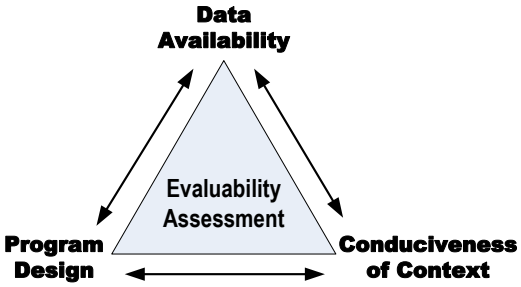
[16] CDA/RPP contributed to the OECD/DAC guidance (2008 and 2012), is an active contributor to the steering committee of the Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium (along with AfP, USIP, SFCG, Mercy Corps), CCVRI – the Conflict, Crime, and Violence Results Initiative in support of DFID, and publishes regularly on questions of program design, theories of change, evaluation of conflict sensitivity and peace efforts, including systems approaches (www.cdacollaborative.org).

[17] The full report can be found at: http://www.cdacollaborative.org/media/45049/The-Use-of-Reflecting-on-Peace-Practice-RPP-in-Peacebuilding-Evaluation.pdf

[18] For an actual check-list, see Reimann, Cordula, Chigas, Diana, Woodrow, Peter: 2012. pp. 16-18

EAs could be considered as preparatory steps for actual evaluations. It is helpful to know the type of evaluation that will be commissioned in order to define the priorities for the EA. At the same time the outcome of an EA will also further define the focus and scope of an upcoming evaluation.

Figure 2:[19]



Two types of outputs might be expected from an EA:

- An assessment of evaluability of a program, based on strength of its design and the information that will be available, and what measures are needed to make the program more evaluable; and
- The practicality and utility of an evaluation, given the nature of the program and the context in which an evaluation would take place.[20]

A **PQA**, by contrast, can be conducted at various stages of the program, and involves a review of key program dimensions, assessing them against RPP-based program quality standards. This includes assessing **program relevance** (with reference to a conflict analysis process), program **goals**, **theory(ies) of change**, **program strategy and logic**, and the inclusion of an **M&E system** in the program design. The ultimate goal of a PQA is to **strengthen program strategy**, increase its **relevance,** and its possible **impacts on Peace Writ Large**, as well as strengthening program staff **capacity** in these areas. Compared to an EA, a PQA focuses more on program design (and implementation) with M&E as an element of it, whereas the availability of data and the M&E of a program are examined in more detail as part of an EA.

An RPP-infused PQA assesses the following standards[21]:

- **Conflict Analysis**: does the analysis identify key driving factors of conflict? Is the scope of the analysis appropriate? Is the analysis updated on a regular basis? Does the program strategy build on the analysis? Has the analysis process been conflict-sensitive?
- **Program goals**: Does the goal address key drivers of conflict? Is the goal articulated as a desired change, with clear indications of how socio-political change will be achieved (i.e., a clear theory of change)? Is the goal realistic and

[19] See Reimann, Cordula, Chigas, Diana, Woodrow, Peter: 2012, p. 4
[20] Davis, Rick. 2013. p. 29
[21] Reimann, Cordula, Chigas, Diana, Woodrow, Peter: An Alternative to Formal Evaluation of Peacebuilding: Program Quality Assessment. Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. October 2012.

robust? Does the goal contribute at least to one of RPP's building blocks for peace[22]?

- **Program Strategy and Logic**: What is the theory of change—and is it plausible? Do the activities 'add up' to the goal? Does the program make linkages between activities/changes at the individual/personal level and the socio-political level? Does the program make linkages between 'more' people and 'key' people[23]? Has the program accounted for factors that could impede success? Does the program relate to other initiatives in related areas? Is the program strategy conflict-sensitive? Is there an M&E plan and feed-back mechanisms?

Outputs from Program Quality Assessments usually include a detailed report assessing the different program dimensions as per RPP standards above.

2.2 EA and PQA Pilot Testing by CDA

In 2013, CDA conducted two RPP infused EAs and PQAs in order to test the validity and practicality of the approach in the field. One EA was done in cooperation with Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) Afghanistan regarding their 'Building Resilient Communities for Sustainable Development and Peace Program,' a program implemented since September 2013, tasked with integrating water sanitation, electricity and peacebuilding in three provinces. The EA focused on the peacebuilding component of the program.[24] The second EA was conducted with World Vision Sri Lanka regarding their RIWASH-II (2010-2015) program, with a focus on water, sanitation, and hygiene as a possible vehicle for peacebuilding in the Hill County.[25]

One PQA was undertaken with International Alert in the South Caucasus, the Economy and Conflict Program, a sub-regional program in implementation since 2002, focusing on research and advocacy related to the role of trade, economic cooperation and private-sector relationships in support of peace in the region.[26] The second PQA was conducted in Mali with Interpeace's 'Agenda for Peace, Reconciliation, and Social Cohesion' program, implemented with Interpeace's local partner IMRAP (Institut Malien de Recherche Action pour la Paix) since 2013. The program operates in the eight regions of Mali, as well as at the national level, and in refugee camps in neighboring countries.[27]

CDA conducted a consultation in February 2014 to consider the experiences from these PQAs and EAs. The consultation included the participating agencies, other partners and a

[22] CDA, 2013, p. 28

[23] More People approaches aim to engage increasing numbers of people to promote peace. Key People approaches focus on involving people or groups of people who are critical to the continuation or resolution of violent conflict, due to their power and influence. See CDA, 2013, p.9

[24] This EA was facilitated by Mark Rogers, independent consultant, supported by Abdul Khaliq Stanikzai, local consultant

[25] This EA was facilitated by Cordula Reimann, independent consultant, supported by Sushanthy Gobalakrishnan, local consultant.

[26] This PQA was facilitated by Isabella Jean, CDA.

[27] This PQA was facilitated by Anita Ernstorfer, CDA.

range of peacebuilding and evaluation experts from international NGOs, donors, and multi-lateral organizations.[28]

While additional application and refinements of the tools are needed, CDA has been able to identify preliminary conclusions regarding EAs and PQAs.

2.3 Key Insights from the EA and PQA processes

From the four field pilots and the discussions during the consultation, CDA identified several preliminary insights regarding the application of EA and PQA processes.

Critical Insight Number One: ***Be clear about the purpose, timing, and how the RPP infused EA/PQA process fits into a larger process of program strategy enhancement.***

Before any engagement is planned, the right evaluative process needs to be determined. Evaluative tools and thinking need to be integrated into program design from the beginning. Once the program is being implemented, an **RPP program reflection exercise[29]** could also be appropriate, or a **PQA**. Program reflection exercises review the conflict analysis, the program goal, the program activities, theories of change, and use the RPP Matrix (see CDA 2013) to assess program strategy using the RPP matrix.[30] The reflection exercises also examine the overall program logic, and provide recommendations regarding changes in program design and/or implementation. Compared to PQAs, program reflection exercises are more likely to be internal team deliberations and are less likely to incorporate elements of an external assessment. Program reflection exercises are often facilitated internally, whereas PQAs often have external facilitation, including at least some data gathering.

Based on CDA's experiences, the **PQA** was found to be effective at various stages of a program, but especially at junctures when program staff, partners, and donors are particularly open to reviewing their program critically and willing to make changes to program design and implementation. Furthermore, a PQA could potentially support the team in articulating *what* to evaluate as the program develops. It is more challenging to review long-running programs which were not planned according to RPP standards.

The **EA** was found to be most effective if conducted during the implementation stage when there is already enough data regarding program implementation, and where the expectation of an upcoming evaluation serves as a helpful incentive.

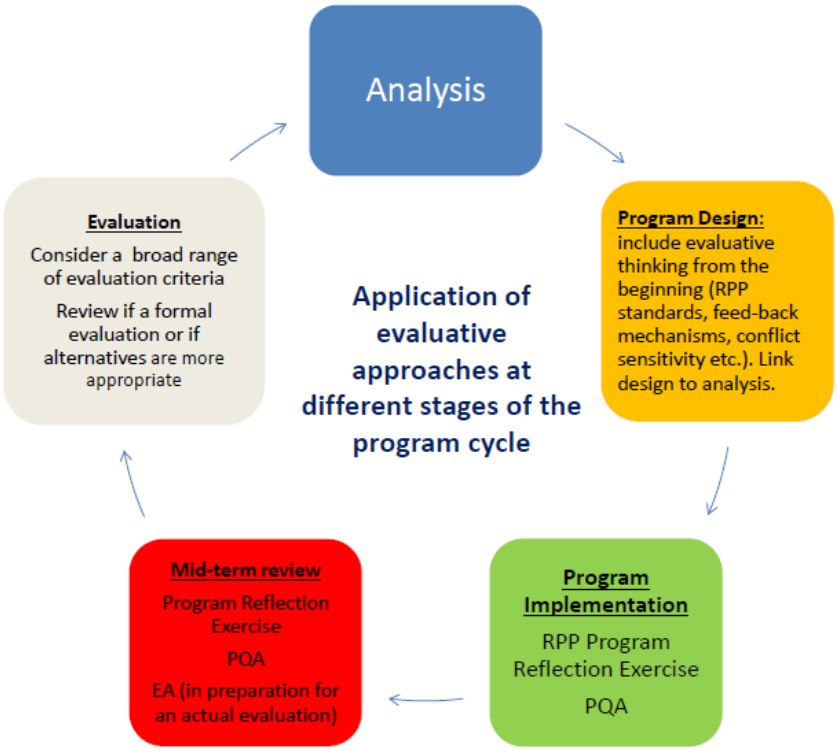
Figure 3 below offers a visual representation of sequencing for alternative evaluative steps that a program could integrate into its program reflection, learning and improvement cycle.

[28] To access the full workshop report, please visit: http://www.cdacollaborative.org/media/161220/Strengthening-the-Design-Monitoring-Evaluation-of-Peacebuilding-Programs-Reflecting-on-Experiences-from-Piloting-New-Tools-and-Concepts.pdf

[29] See CDA 2011.

[30] The RPP matrix is a four cell tool to review program strategies. It reflects on different program strategies, including changes at the levels of more people, key people, individual level change and socio-political change.

Figure 3: CDA (September 2014):



If EA and/or PQAs are implemented with very new programs that are still in the design stage or following the immediate design phase**,** the focus is more on reviewing the program design and offering suggestions for possible re-design and adjustment of certain elements, and not on reviewing program implementation.

The timing, duration, and intended outcomes and products of the EA or PQA processes need to be clarified with program teams, donors, and senior management. This includes expectations for follow-up processes, in terms of possible program re-design, organizational planning and/or capacity building. This could help the organizations to plan a longer-term strategy of program review, organizational learning, and capacity-building and integrate the EA or PQA as one important element.

Critical Insight Number Two: ***Be clear about the nature of the exercise – assessment based on clear standards, facilitated strategy & program review, or capacity development of teams?***

There are no universally recognized standards in the peacebuilding field[31] and definitions of what constitutes relevant and effective peacebuilding varies greatly across organizations. However, the findings and tools of CDA's Reflecting on Peace Practice Program have been recognized by many organizations and practitioners in the peacebuilding field over the past

[31] Such as e.g. the SPHERE standards in the humanitarian field or the INEE minimum standards for education in emergencies.

decade. As highlighted above, RPP tools and approaches have historically been used for a variety of strategy and program design processes. CDA has worked with hundreds of practitioners and organizations providing training, program and strategy review processes as well as in evaluations[32]. **The EA and PQA processes constitute an attempt to use RPP findings as standards or "benchmarks" for peacebuilding programs. This is 'bolder' than past applications of RPP, for example as applied in program reflection exercises, while maintaining a focus on learning.**

CDA's EA and PQA pilot processes revealed the need for clarity about the nature of the process. Some partner organizations appreciated that their programs were assessed against **clear criteria** and check-lists, also for their own internal follow-up purposes. Other organizations were concerned about the introduction of a certain level of **judgment as part of a facilitated strategy and program review**, with program teams and local partners. All four PQA/EA partners requested various elements of **capacity building** in RPP, DNH[33] and evaluative approaches. In some cases, taking the preliminary step of providing RPP and/or DNH training before the actual PQA and/or EA process might have enhanced the learning experience. This, again, raises the question of how feasible RPP-infused EAs and PQAs are, if the program was not designed according to these principles, unless the program is at a very early stage and can be influenced in this regard.

Critical Insight Number Three: **The right amount of data collection and analysis for both EA and PQA needs to be determined for each case individually.**

A key question in both EA and PQA processes is how much data (in addition to program reports and information, baselines and other data collected by the program itself) needs to be collected for the EA/PQA assessments. In developing the EA and PQA working papers, CDA consulted a number of evaluators, who expressed a variety of opinions on this question. Only two of the pilots engaged in data collection (one EA and one PQA), included interviews and focus groups with program participants and stakeholders outside the program as well as focus groups and participant observation. In the other two cases, the program teams specified that more time was needed for a facilitated, workshop style reflection processes with local teams and partners. All four cases also included, to varying degrees, elements of training and capacity-development on key RPP and DNH tools/concepts.

For newer programs, data collection is less applicable; instead, the focus is on reviewing program design and M&E systems. For programs that undertake an EA or PQA later in the program cycle, the question arises regarding what data the facilitator/evaluator should collect. Data collection should be targeted and limited, as these processes are not evaluations and, especially in the case of the EA, should not become one.

Data collection could be useful in several areas:

- **Conflict analysis:** This becomes tricky, especially in cases in which a conflict analysis had not been done or updated. It might be necessary to conduct at least a validation exercise with local partners on the key conflict drivers in order to determine the peacebuilding relevance of the program.

[32] See Schabatke-Church, Cheyanne, 2011b. The use of RPP in Peacebuilding Evaluation.

[33] All EA and PQA processes revealed major capacity development needs in both RPP and Do No Harm.

- Understanding **theory of change:** In many cases, theories of change are not explicitly articulated. Some additional data collection might be needed to articulate the theory of change during the EA and/or PQA.
- **Conflicting reports or beliefs about facts related to the program:** Where there are conflicting accounts of facts related to the program (e.g., program activities, outputs, outcomes, theories, etc.), data collection may be needed for validation and clarification.

Chapter 3 of this paper provides an overview of how **feed-back mechanisms** can be used as alternative ways of data collection.

Critical Insight Number Four: ***Senior management buy-in and donor engagement are critical.***

Participants noted that it is critical to get **donor buy-in** in order to support the integration of evaluative tools into peacebuilding programs. Some donors are already leading on the promotion of evaluative approaches, but there is a need for more work with others. This could include a close engagement of donors in relevant evaluative approaches (as was done in three out of the four CDA PQA/EA processes), as well as closer engagement with donors regarding the integration of OECD/DAC criteria into policies and program guidance.

In addition, **senior management buy-in** proved to be critical. In line with broader findings on the challenges in peacebuilding evaluation, any evaluative process is of limited value if perceived only as a technical exercise driven by the implementation team. Follow-up to any of the evaluative processes needs to be ensured and must be supported by senior management, including difficult decisions around course correction and strategy review.

Critical Insight Number Five: ***Facilitators need to be highly competent in both peacebuilding practice and evaluative methods. It is important to choose the right facilitator / facilitation team.***

The facilitators of such evaluative processes wear many “hats." The CDA EA/PQA engagements required a great amount of **adaptability** on the part of the facilitators, who needed to respond flexibly to arising needs throughout the respective processes, while at the same time staying true to the PQA/EA principles.

The peacebuilding and evaluation experts who participated in CDA’s February 2014 consultation emphasized that the **professional qualities of the facilitators** of the pilot EAs and PQAs was critical to their success. Facilitators of these processes need multiple skills in order to be effective: skills in facilitation, coaching, training, peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity expertise, and a strong M&E background. In addition, for the specific CDA processes, knowledge and fluency in the application of RPP tools was critical. Given the sensitive contexts in which peacebuilding happens, facilitators also need to be well-informed of the context and self-aware.

Does the facilitator need to be an external facilitator? Some of the CDA partners appreciated the fact that the facilitator was an “outsider” with a fresh and unbiased perspective, but also noted that engaging external facilitators has budget implications. Consequently, building

regular self-evaluative components into programs is potentially a good alternative – facilitated by outsiders only when needed.

3. Feedback Loops in Peacebuilding Programming and Fragile and Conflict Affected States

Feedback mechanisms can serve as a powerful means to support evaluative processes such as Evaluability and Program Quality Assessments. For peaceabuilding programs, feed-back loops broadly serve two main purposes: **program quality improvement** and **participatory context monitoring**.

Program quality and program effectiveness. Solicited and unsolicited feedback can be gathered to inform real-time program improvements and adaptation. To this end, feedback is sought on the quality and appropriateness of program interventions, staff performance and program results. Feedback is gathered as part of routine monitoring processes or by establishing additional, accessible and confidential feedback channels. Such practices have become commonplace in many humanitarian operations, particularly the use of complaints-response and grievances mechanisms.[34] Challenges remain in active conflict areas where restricted access and security concerns prohibit regular communication channels.

In addition to feedback on program quality, local views can be sought on broader, strategic areas to inform strategy review for programs, sectors or country specific policies. Both program-level and strategy-level feedback loops require an intentional and purposeful approach to feedback collection, acknowledgement and analysis and making sense of data, opinions and perceptions. Program Quality Assessments can benefit from this additional data collection method. PQA facilitators can examine accumulated feedback gathered on program quality and use formal and informal feedback channels to gather additional perceptions from a wider range of stakeholders, to include informed observers.

Participatory context monitoring. Organizations seeking to identify unintended and unanticipated effects of their programs need to establish feedback channels and practices that reach beyond their target program participants. This is particularly true when over-reliance on indicator based methodologies can result in oversight of dynamic changes in the context and program's effects on local context. Well-functioning feedback mechanisms can capture and respond to real-time information about unintended impacts of programs on inter-group and intra-group relations and avoid doing harm.

A functioning feedback loop goes beyond feedback collection and analysis. It requires a response and/or corrective action, in other words -- the closing of the loop.[35] Ultimately, for feedback loops to be effective, the feedback needs to be utilized in decision-making and evaluative processes. Our recent research into effectiveness of feedback mechanisms highlighted a few factors relevant to programs operating in and on conflict affected environments:

[34] See CDA 2011b.
[35] See Bonino, F. with Jean, I. and Knox-Clarke, P. 2014 and 2014b.

- **Factors related to design and set-up**. Organizations seeking to improve their feedback practices need to clearly define the purpose of the feedback mechanism and expected users, their needs and expectations. They need to identify which communication tools and channels are most appropriate in the local context. They also need to consider how sensitive information will be obtained and used. In conflict affected settings, organizations may choose to institute an informal approach to gathering feedback as opposed to formal mechanisms which could be perceived as unsafe. In some cases, informal feedback channels may be the only trusted source of information as formal monitoring and evaluation visits can be compromised by the presence of dominant and divisive figures in the local communities and neighborhoods. This is important to keep in mind also for conflict analysis purposes.

- **Data Analysis and Use**. Capacity to analyze both qualitative and quantitative data is critical and often requires investment in training and coaching staff. Program teams and decision-makers expect feedback mechanism to provide reliable information that they can use in decision making. Analysis needs to be able to disaggregate and aggregate, and produce concise, compelling and actionable summaries of feedback that show patterns and trends. This is particularly critical for feedback related to program's effects on conflict factors.

- **Organization culture**. Effective feedback loops function in organizations that have a feedback culture and a commitment to learning and acting on what is heard through a variety of channels. Feedback should be actively sought, collectively reflected on and shared within and between program teams and partners to support organizational learning and accountability.

4. Conclusions

Independent of the particular choice or combination of evaluative and evaluation tools, it needs to be noted that any such process will only lead to better practice if approached from a strategic and not from a technical perspective only. The key findings from the Peacebuilding Evaluation Project, implemented by AfP and the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) between 2010 and 2011 revealed two major conclusions: "*Improving evaluation must be addressed as a problem of structural and institutional change within the peacebuilding field, not simply as a technical research or methodological problem; and second, for this reason, whole-of-field approaches are necessary to make progress in peacebuilding evaluation*."[36]

The following three pre-conditions for success shall be highlighted:

- **Evaluative processes need to be integrated into organizational policies and processes**, such as the planning and programming cycles: They need to become part of regular organizational routine. For this to happen, organizations need senior management decisions and adequate priority setting. They need to identify existing institutional capacities for the facilitation of evaluative processes and reach out for

[36] Blum, Andrew, 2011, p.2

external support when necessary. Documenting the lessons and iterative program adaptation steps are useful from an institutional learning and memory perspective and can be a rich source of data for external evaluations when these take place.

- **Sharing of information and data:** A big shortfall for peacebuilding evaluation and gathering data for feedback mechanisms in fragile and conflict affected states is that **data and evaluation findings are not shared within and across different organizations** working towards similar goals. Sharing information and data, particularly regarding conflict analysis, has the potential to decrease costs for all organizations involved, increase quality of analyses due to the wide range of data included, as well as provide the foundation for joint planning and implementation.

- **The field of peacebuilding evaluation and evaluative processes needs to be professionalized:** While it is widely accepted that monitoring and evaluation practices in conflict contexts require specific technical and inter-personal skills, the field requires more professionalization and standards regarding the types of skills required. Technical skills required include e.g. peacebuilding, conflict sensitivity, conflict analysis, an understanding of M&E systems in conflict affected areas and of peacebuilding interventions, data analysis, disaggregation, aggregation, presenting data in actionable ways. Soft skills include the ability to nimbly adapt different tools, facilitation and training techniques, as well as a high degree of personal conflict sensitivity, listening skills, and dealing with contradicting opinions and data.

5. Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Diana Chigas and Peter Woodrow at CDA for their critical review of this paper. We also thank our colleagues at Norwegian Church Aid, International Alert, World Vision, and Interpeace with whom we partnered in the application of RPP infused Evaluability and Program Quality Assessments. Finally, we would like to thank the innovative work of our partners in peacebuilding evaluation, many of whom are cited in this paper.

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Annex 1:

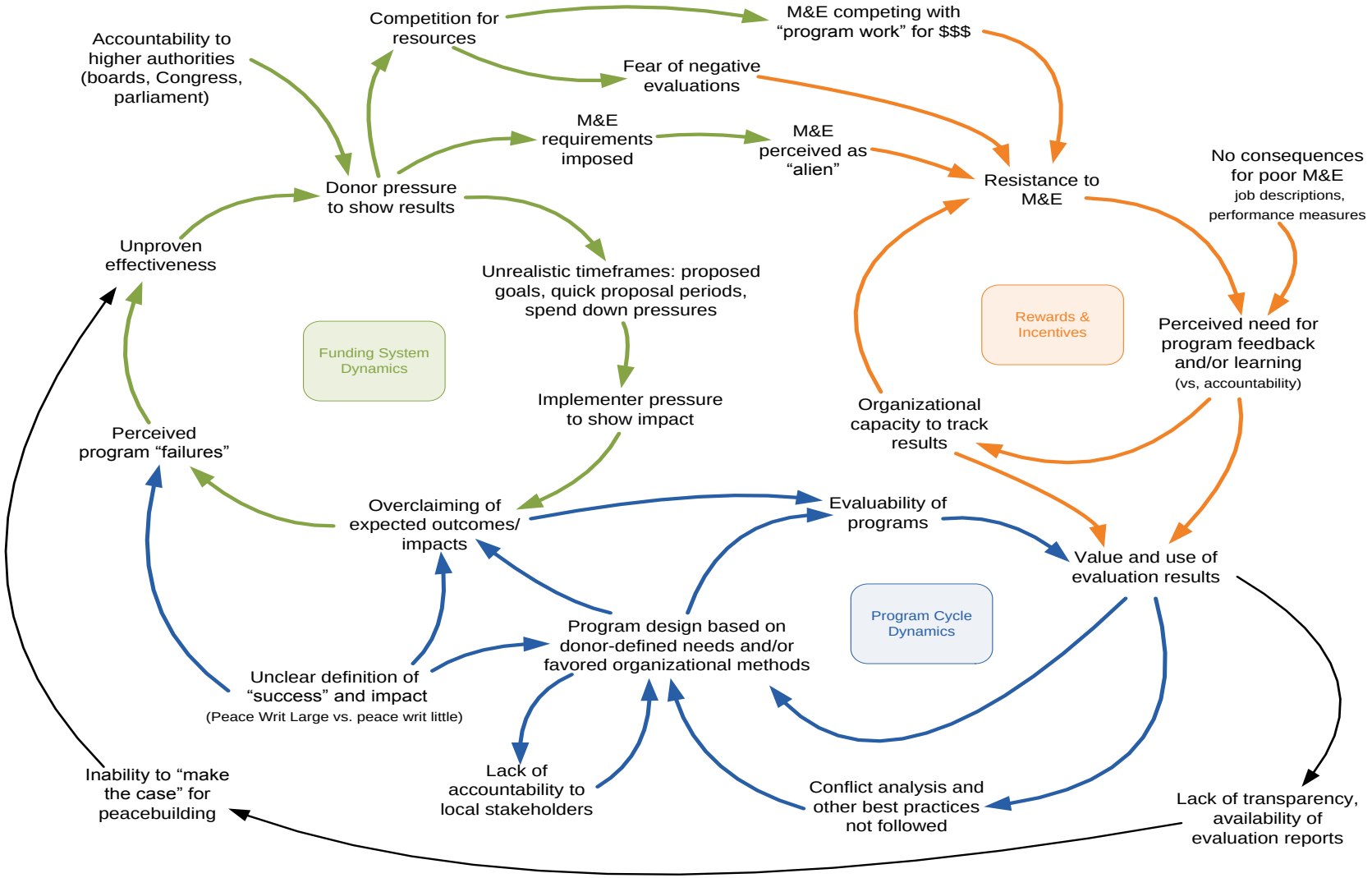
Peacebuilding Evaluation Systems Map

The below systems "map" is from the 2011 of the Alliance for Peacebuilding.[37]

It is one representation of the ongoing dynamics that work to impede the effective evaluation of peacebuilding work, broadly defined. Many of the factors included in the mapping are drawn from issues identified in the first meeting of the Peacebuilding Evaluation Project in the spring of 2010. Additional factors were added by a small working group.[38] The group has also identified a number of countervailing positive factors in the field.

[37] Kawano-Chiu, Melanie, 2011

[38] Susan Allen Nan, Melanie Kawano-Chiu, Tamra Pearson d'Estree, Peter Woodrow



Draft March 2011

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