

How do I know? Strategic planning, learning and evaluation for peacebuilding

FriEnt Study 06/2014



FriEnt

The Working Group on Peace and Development (FriEnt) is an association of governmental organisations, church development agencies, civil society networks, and political foundations. FriEnt aims to pool capacities, support networking and cooperation, and contribute to conflict-sensitive development cooperation.

FriEnt's members are committed to working together to promote a range of approaches and highlight the potential of development-oriented peace work to policy-makers and the public at large. They are united by their great commitment to peace and development. They vary, however, in their size, mandate, international partners, projects and approaches. FriEnt's members aim to utilise their diverse perspectives and experience as an asset for their shared productive work on peacebuilding in the context of development cooperation.

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Bread for the World – Protestant Development Service | Center for International Peace Operations (ZIF) | Civil Peace Service Group | Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH | Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) | Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) | Heinrich-Böll-Foundation (hbs) | Misereor/ Catholic Central Agency for Development Aid | Platform for Peaceful Conflict Management/Institute for Development and Peace (INEF)

Imprint

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Design and Layout: Claudia Oly
Printing: dieUmweltDruckerei GmbH
Carbon neutral printed on 100% recycled paper
Number of copies: 500

Picture Credits:

Cover & p. 30: Artists: Pablo S. Herrero/David de la Mano

<http://lasogaalcielo.blogspot.com/>

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We would like to thank our colleagues from Bread for the World – Protestant Development Service for financing this publication.

Bonn, June 2014

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Introduction



Natascha Zupan and Sylvia Servaes

“Unless Colombian NGOs successfully convey their multi-dimensional understanding of peace to the international development community, the paradoxical situation could quickly arise in which overseas funding for their work is ultimately linked to the perpetuation of the armed conflict, not to the attainment of a lasting peace.”

This conclusion of Vera Grabe in her contribution to this publication captures in a nutshell the complexity of peacebuilding and its relationship to development work and their external supporters. At the same time, it echoes the main conclusions of two international workshops jointly organised by FriEnt and the Center for Peacebuilding (KOFF) at swisspeace, which focused on results orientation in peacebuilding: “Results orientation in its currently practiced form is more of a hindrance than a help for achieving better results” (Bächtold et al 2013: 5).

What is needed is more space for learning, beyond the established structures and procedures, and more systematic use of experience and lessons learnt, combined with more adventurous use of alternative methods that take into consideration the complexity and dynamics of the (post-)conflict and peacebuilding situations. This includes the development of new forms of communication between all stakeholders to facilitate these processes.

Complexity and dynamics make up an important part of the specific conditions of (post-)conflict and peacebuilding

situations. Other characteristics include being highly political and emotionally charged. “You have to proceed in a very sensitive way – and you cannot proceed according to the European rhythm,” said one workshop participant from Central Africa. Change generally does not come about in a linear fashion, even less so in (post-)conflict contexts where a multitude of interdependent factors are at work, making change so much less predictable.

But what are “desired changes”? “In peacebuilding and conflict transformation, these are intimately linked to individual perceptions. The real challenge here is to find out what kind of change is considered a step forward towards peace. For donor organisations, this is not always easy to understand. It means more intense and more specific dialogue between all parties involved: the people on the ground, colleagues in local organisations and institutions, and colleagues in donor organisations. The central question is, how do we engage and organise this dialogue in order to contribute to processes leading to peace.” – These are the reflections of two colleagues from our member organisations.

So it is essential to create synergies between the work of different organisations, to address key factors of relevance to peace and conflict and the linkages between them, and to support stakeholders. However, central to all this is a willingness on the part of all actors involved, including

donors, to take risks and accept failures: “It is important to develop a new culture of risk taking and learning. To go for easy results often means working just on symptoms, not taking complexity into consideration, and neglecting causes,” said another colleague at one of our workshops.

This links us back to the importance of learning processes: considering experience and lessons learnt while designing the next steps of a programme is crucial. It means making learning an important part of the debate about results – with due consideration of the related issue of accountability. Three areas for further exploration and action were identified as important by workshop participants:

- Institutional learning: How do we make good use of experience and lessons learnt? Do we have to develop different approaches? Create new organisational set-ups?
- Methods: Linear thinking does not take sufficient account of the complexity of (post-)conflict and peacebuilding situations. Systemic approaches and methods such as scenario analysis or „most significant change“ will have to be practised by organisations in a much more systematic way.
- Partner relations: Results orientation is also a question of social relationships and a learning community between “donors” and “recipients”. This is particularly important in (post-)conflict settings where conditions are difficult to understand or predict. “Peer reviews” or “South-North dialogue” which create debates on an equal footing about strategies and practices may help to develop truly results oriented peacebuilding, as well as fostering accountability to the local people who have lived through war, violence and mass atrocities.

While the working paper that came out of our workshops summarised the main issues that seemed important to us for the debate, the present publication is a collection of “snapshots” from the practice of our members and organisations affiliated to FriEnt. It identifies steps towards results-based learning and strategic planning in peacebuilding. It contains reports and reflections on all three areas mentioned above and combines issue-specific experience with lessons learnt in particular country contexts. These include the use of more open methods as “most significant change” within the

organisational framework of the Swiss organisation HEKS; the consideration of previous experience (or lack of it) in the design of new programmes in bilateral and multilateral cooperation; and experience with designing multi-stakeholder strategies from the German Civil Peace Service Group. We also provide insight into scenario analysis in a FriEnt-organised round table on Kenya and present selected findings from a multi-year impact evaluation project in North East Afghanistan. And for the relational aspects, diverse experiences with peer review processes are presented for debate and require further application.

Two accounts from the field show how important all three areas are in specific (post-)conflict and peacebuilding situations and – for that matter – in democratic reform. They also show what donors’ requirement for tangible results means in their daily work to make a difference to people’s lives: in Burundi, after five decades of atrocities, the challenge is to overcome the trauma experienced by so many people, to rebuild social relations and communities destroyed by the protracted conflicts, and to (re-)create a value basis on which to build a post-conflict society. For Kenya, one important challenge is to open up closed spaces by building and using a resource of “weavers” – people who can cross borders and have entry points into closed spaces.

The starting point for these reports is a study commissioned by the former Church Development Services (eed) on the experience of peacebuilding in Colombia. It covers much of the history of the protracted conflict with its changing nature over time, its changing constellations of actors and issues, and the various peacebuilding efforts that correspond to different needs but also different understandings of war and peace and their background. It presents a range of theories of change, approaches and methods that are important in peacebuilding – each under particular conditions and in certain points in time.

With this publication, we hope to encourage colleagues in our member organisations and others working in the field to share and develop their experience of these and other related issues. FriEnt is there to facilitate and support this exchange and the development of new approaches.

References and further reading

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Pathways to peace

Theories of change and experiences of Colombian NGOs



Vera Grabe

Under President Juan Manuel Santos, hopes of peace have been reawakened in Colombia. Unlike his predecessor, whom he served as Defence Minister, Santos recognised that there is an armed conflict in this Andean country, and initiated negotiations between the government and the guerrillas in 2012. At the same time, the government launched various policy measures, firstly to address elements of the political agenda traditionally represented by the FARC rebel movement, and secondly, to maintain support in the conservative camp. It adopted legislation to restore expropriated land to displaced persons and provide publicly funded support to victims of the conflict. In parallel, rural development programmes and institutional reforms were announced or initiated. Offers were also made to the traditional elite, whose links with paramilitary structures have become increasingly clear, and to the military in an effort to win at least their partial support for the negotiations and a possible peace process.

Even before these somewhat surprising developments took place, the Church Development Service (now Bread for the World) and the Colombian organisation Podion had the idea of analysing the experiences of various Colombian non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in their engagement for peace. What is their understanding of peace? Which theories of change have been developed, and which strategies are being pursued by civil society organisations? The outcome was the 2012 study by the Colombian peace advocate Vera Grabe, entitled “La acción de las ONG en la construcción de

paz” (Grabe 2012). The following article summarises her core findings.

Civil society responses to a changing conflict

In Colombia, there are many opinions on what promotes peace or how it can be brought about. This diversity of opinion is based, not least, on the changes in the dynamics of the armed conflict, which has been ongoing for decades. Peace negotiations in the late 1990s and the subsequent “democratic security policy” under President Álvaro Uribe – for whom the term “armed conflict” was taboo, who saw the guerrillas’ military defeat as the only possible pathway to peace, and who reached agreement with paramilitary groups on demobilisation and reintegration into civilian life through transitional justice measures – were turning points in civil society strategies and options for action in the past decade.

With the failure of peace negotiations between Andrés Pastrana’s government and FARC in Caguán (1998-2002), the organisations comprising the peace movement at the time were left without an agenda or any further mobilisation potential. They had subordinated their work to the ups and downs of the negotiations to far too great an extent and had waited for peace and radical change in Colombia as an outcome of the talks between the conflict parties. Gradually, however, it was recognised that peace cannot be equated

with the end of armed conflict (“negative peace”) but requires various dimensions of conflict to be addressed.

Whereas previously, the state and the armed group with which it was negotiating were seen as the initiators and main parties responsible for ending the violence and initiating peaceful social change, other political and social forces were now attracting more attention as agents of change. For a long time, the existence of violent political forces had mainly been explained by the fact that the majority of the population lacked democratic channels for the formation of the political will. Now, the focus shifted back towards other explanations for the conflict, such as the social exclusion of large sections of the population, the lack of equal opportunities, and an authoritarian culture which perpetuated social, political and economic injustice. The notion of “positive peace” gained ground: this meant strengthening democracy, efforts to promote social inclusion, and every citizen’s full enjoyment of their rights.

At this point, however, the “democratic security policy” pursued by Álvaro Uribe’s government (2002-2010) was reinforcing the diversity or – from another standpoint – the fragmentation already evident in civil society. In NGOs and social movements, there was a growing assumption that there was very little prospect of achieving a comprehensive nationwide solution to the armed conflict through negotiations. Most civil society organisations decided to wait for better times for peace and, in the meantime, to focus their work on problems of direct relevance to the daily lives of conflict-affected citizens.

Theories of change and strategies for action

In the organisations that I have analysed, various concepts of peacebuilding have become discernible since then, which are discussed more or less explicitly depending on the NGO concerned. It is not uncommon for several of these concepts to be identifiable within a single organisation, and almost every one of them has political implications for practical peace work.

Peace as an end to armed conflict

Although a negotiated peace is no longer viewed at the most promising strategy for peace nowadays, this concept of conflict management never entirely vanished from the organisations’ field of vision after the failure of peace talks in 2002. Many of them are insistent in their demands for a political solution to the armed conflict and link their calls for negotiations with the rejection of violence as a means of politically asserting interests or claims. Previous and failed attempts at peacemaking have been analysed in the NGO environment in order to learn lessons and identify experience that may be useful in preparing fresh initiatives for political negotiations.

For some organisations, the negotiations between the conflict parties at national level play only a secondary role. Their ideas and activities to end the violence centre more on the conflict dynamics, as felt by these organisations at the local or regional level, and this determines their priorities and scope for action.

Peace as a process of structural change

Building on their experience, most of the NGOs studied start from the premise that the greater the progress on democracy, social justice and respect for human rights, the more enduring and deep-rooted peace will be. Their emphasis varies, however.

Some NGOs see the democratisation of society and the safeguarding of the rule of law as prerequisites for peace. For them, promoting peace means initiating fundamental institutional reforms.

Others directly link peace to democracy and social justice. For them, building peace means creating the conditions for a life in dignity based on democratic and sustainable development. Many of these organisations focus on the local or regional potential for development and change, and display a conscious willingness to act in spite of the “macro conflict”. For them, it is important to utilise the opportunities existing at the local level, in order to engage citizens more fully in decision-making processes, and to focus governance on democratic rules and effective action. This understanding of peace also encompasses the dimension of reconciliation, because it promotes encounter through participation in decision-making processes and aims to build trust, which overcomes fear, a lack of a voice, or silence.

Respect for, protection and fulfilment of human rights are closely linked to peacebuilding. However, the way in which organisations whose priority is human rights defence explicitly create this linkage is not easy to discern in Colombia at present. In some cases, human rights are embedded in a discourse that is based on a strategy of highlighting grievances and demanding rights and legal protection, without offering any prospect of establishing a different set of conditions for human rights promotion by the state or raising society’s awareness of their significance for peaceful and democratic coexistence.

Peace as a process of social inclusion

Violence can be more than a random physical act. It can come from a logic of social exclusion and be reflected in discriminatory structures and attitudes. Peace, as a way out of this dimension of violence, opens the eyes to a broad range of options for action. This is most visible in organisations that work with socially stigmatised and marginalised groups and empower them to articulate their interests in the political arena. In terms of promoting peace, this approach is very important to many NGOs because it helps to provide a basis for action at many levels: peace as a process of individual emancipation, as a process of empowerment of social groups, and as an end to violence at micro and macro level.

Peace as a regional perspective

For many NGOs, the term “territory” or “space” means a social, economic, cultural and ecological cosmos where they conduct their activities and which forms the direct frame of reference for the people with whom they work. They emphasise that a violent conflict only becomes concrete and

tangible for people in the local context. Here too, it is most apparent how the armed conflict is linked with other conflicts (e.g. over resources). At the same time, it can be seen at the local level that there are attempts, emanating from local politics, to prevent violence or launch initiatives for peace.

The aim is to (re-)establish a social structure in which issues relating to local reconciliation are addressed in just the same way as the potential and the wishes of local communities for the future development of their home region. At decentralised level, in contrast to the national level, social movements – such as those established by Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities, women's and youth groups – have significance and voice their demands for peace in a variety of ways to the violent actors in their "space".

The broad range of programmes combining development and peace perspectives has now led to the emergence of an approach that "newly constructs" a region through intensive participation by local people and the involvement of a range of stakeholders. It centres on the experience gained with a participatory approach to the drafting of regional development plans in accordance with local communities' wishes, and decentralisation of the state. In relation to these programmes, the NGOs prioritise the provision of leadership training, strengthening of local initiatives, and these citizens' participation in the development of local budget plans.

The "micro-peace" approach, which focuses on a particular "space", can create dynamic and constructive tension between national and regional peace efforts. It can create impetus for a more comprehensive peace process in Colombia and thus become a key factor for the peace negotiations at a higher level. It requires and allows voices from the grassroots level – from the villages and regions – to be heard and for the grassroots experience to be considered. For a number of NGOs, the diversity of themes, ideas and strategies for conflict transformation, reflected in local experience, is the starting point for defining their own contribution to peace.

Peace as a conscious option for the work with victims

One of the greatest successes of NGO work in the recent past resulted from the decision to engage with, and on behalf of, civilian victims of violence and their families. This has helped to ensure that the victims' voices are increasingly heard by the government and society at large, and that the victims are recognised as persons affected by violence and not as part of one of the conflict parties. One outcome achieved is that the rights of these groups in the ongoing conflict now feature on Colombia's political agenda.

The work with people affected by the war was undertaken with the aim of making them visible as "social groups" and encouraging them to see themselves as rights holders, not only as victims. This is reflected in the goals formulated by the NGOs, such as "making the victims visible, ensuring that there is no impunity for the perpetrators, and seeking the legal and historical truth".

This approach to peace work is important because it has replaced the traditional humanitarian approach – which is

based on short-term protection of victims and the provision of emergency aid to persons "affected" by the war – with a long-term vision that requires patience to achieve. The structures that have made people into victims and the perception of the victims as independent social and political stakeholders with capacity to act have moved to the forefront.

The adoption of the Victims and Land Restitution Law (2011) reflects victims' increased significance as legal subjects. This was made possible, at least in part, by an understanding between various self-help organisations set up by victims. This was not an easy step, as the question of which conflict parties had made people into victims had often prompted polarised debates, also among the victims themselves.

Peace as the search for reconciliation

There are tensions, too, among civil society organisations on how to deal with the concept of reconciliation. For some of them, reconciliation is a long-term goal and the outcome of a process after the end of the conflict. Others regard it as a prerequisite for peace, and advocate for reconciliation in the midst of conflict.

For the first group, the reconciliation process includes a phase of truth-seeking, the restoration of justice, and reparation. As long as the conflict remains unresolved at the national level and dealing with the past is not possible, this group gives priority to working with the victims of violence, rather than with groups that belonged to the armed actors. The work with ex-combatants is also questioned as it is seen as enhancing the status of perpetrators vis-à-vis victims, and experience gained with DDR processes to date has shown that they have not prevented impunity or fresh recruitment for armed political or criminal groups.

The second group of NGOs adopts more of a short-term approach to the concept of reconciliation and aims to make peace tangible on a micro scale. Starting from an understanding of peace which, besides addressing structural causes of conflict, is also viewed as a process of change among the conflict parties, advocates of this approach regard reconciliation as, simultaneously, a strategy, a working method and an ethos. They work with victims, but also with those who have laid down their arms. If the victims of violence are willing to engage with demobilised ex-combatants living in their neighbourhood, this can create opportunities to integrate these ex-combatants into the local context and open doors for the assumption of shared civic responsibility.

These organisations continue to attach importance to identifying a specific local agenda that is appropriate to local conditions and the current status quo – without ignoring the fact that the national conflict dynamics also have local impacts. As experience has shown, an accurate analysis of the context is essential. In the ex-combatants' world, there are perpetrators who were previously victims of the conflict. Sensitivity on the part of NGOs is needed, along with local leaders' knowledge, to determine whether the victim-perpetrator relationship can be addressed and whether, at local level, there is scope to initiate a reconciliation process that offers promise for the future.

Peace as an ethical principle and methodology

In Colombia, it is still difficult to draw clear boundaries between peace and conflict. The idea that “the end justifies the means” is deep-rooted in many milieus, and it takes courage to initiate debate about the armed conflict and its role as a major obstacle to democratic development. Not even the peace movement is immune: it too must deal with different visions of peace within its ranks. As in the human rights sector, there are those whose ideas are ambivalent and whose approach to the issue of peace is based more on a logic that combines “all forms of struggle”, rather than on a serious attempt at peaceful conflict transformation. As a consequence, they are more likely to tolerate violence from one conflict party than another. Other factions in the peace movement unequivocally invoke principles of nonviolence and completely reject the use of violence in conflicts. In view of the cruelties which the war has inflicted on the civilian population, the dwindling respect for human dignity, and the decline of other ethical values, this clear distinction makes an important contribution to defending the institutional, social and cultural progress which, with the adoption of the 1991 constitution, has created the preconditions for a democratic nation wishing to live in lasting peace.

For some civil society actors, therefore, peacebuilding is more than a goal; it is the path towards it. The core principles defining the grassroots work of these NGOs are therefore of significance for their contribution to peace as well: the willingness to understand, respect and respond flexibly to the situation and the wishes of the groups with which they are cooperating; the ability to act as a bridge-builder between state and society but also between different positions in the social movements or between the interests of the urban and rural populations; and the capacity to convey the complexity of a situation without resorting to simplifications and narrow-mindedness.

Peace as a culture of nonviolent coexistence

The aim of “peaceful coexistence” often arises in conjunction with social justice and is used by some organisations to link political and institutional notions of peace with the general public’s every-day experience. However, the precise meaning of this term, as with the concept of “a culture of peace and nonviolence”, is unclear. Although certain aims or concepts are often used to describe fundamental convictions, there is often a lack of definitions that would facilitate their translation into practical action.

“Peaceful coexistence” could become a more tangible concept if its advocates linked it more closely to the concept of security. If security is understood as the deepening of democracy and civility, the “classic” understanding of security – defined as control of society by the police or the military – could be overcome, opening the way for endeavours to find a basis for social relations free from arbitrary authority.

For the organisations which see conflict transformation in terms of the democratisation of society or respect for rights, a contribution to the culture of peace is rarely the main starting point. Even with NGOs that originated in “Educación Popular”

in the 1970s and 1980s, which are most likely to recognise that peace processes always have an educational or communicative dimension as well, this approach is weak in practice. In schools or youth groups, little is done in an educational sense to raise awareness of conflicts emerging here or to train young people in managing them nonviolently. There are also rarely any actions that focus on the control or destruction of privately owned weapons or on conscientious objection to military service. Little is being done, too, to raise awareness of the need to foster respect for social diversity and curb the degradation of the natural environment.

“The ‘micro-peace’ approach, which focuses on a particular ‘space’, can create dynamic and constructive tension between national and regional peace efforts. It can create impetus for a more comprehensive peace process in Colombia and thus become a key factor for the peace negotiations at a higher level.”

Nonetheless, there is a growing awareness that a peace process needs not only structural but also cultural change, which must be reflected in daily life, in the use of language, in people’s behaviour, and in political culture. This is especially important in rural regions. In Colombia, there is a wealth of experience that can be utilised, especially among groups which have found ways of resisting the presence of armed groups at the local level.

Peace and gender equality belong together

Women’s groups and the feminist movement have done much to foster a changed understanding of peace. They have drawn attention to various forms of violence – including violence between women and men – and have called for a stronger focus on the “plurality of peace”.

Uncovering gender-specific violence and the search for gender equality are now among the topics and fields of work addressed by civil society organisations. Although NGOs are in the vanguard of Colombian society in this respect, they still have some ground to make up. It is often not apparent to external observers how the NGOs’ internal debates about gender mainstreaming are reflected in their practical work. All too often, the gender debate simply leads to projects for women and ignores the interaction between changing gender roles and the social conditions that make democracy, social integration and non-arbitrary social relations possible.

Successes, impacts and timeframes

Multidimensional conflicts require multidimensional conflict transformation. The debates about the Victims and Land Restitution Law, about the expansion of citizen participation

in political decision-making and about judicial reform show that there are many milieus within civil society that are capable of responding to government programmes or parliamentary initiatives, to develop alternative proposals, and to bring them to the public's attention. There is a clear trend towards more intensive cooperation in the NGO sector. Although each organisation continues to maintain its own profile, there is a growing willingness and ability to cooperate in networks and platforms or to work on a complementary basis in consortia.

Where is civil society engagement achieving successes? If large sections of Colombian society now recognise that peacebuilding can be understood and addressed as a multi-dimensional process, this progress is partly due to the work of NGOs. An approach which focuses on the "plurality of peace" opens up access to various change processes, starting with individuals, with the community, with institutions, or with a cultural reorientation. However, they also require the concept of peace to be filled with content and given a direction if it is not to remain simply a statement of commitment.

If an NGO puts peacebuilding on its agenda, the direct impact of its activities does not necessarily have to be measured in terms of the extent to which it facilitates progress "towards peace". Rather, peace is an overarching goal to which contributions are made, but which is hard to fit into predictable project planning phases and timeframes. Furthermore, overcoming social inequality, consolidating the basic democratic order, and safeguarding the full enjoyment of rights are not impacts which a civil society organisation can achieve on its own, even if it forms a coalition with other similar organisations for this purpose. Peace remains a long-term goal.

It is therefore all the more important to see progress towards this goal as a process in which, step by step, the conditions are created for overcoming structural violence and small successes are achieved. If peacebuilding is expressed in strategies which define the desired short- to medium-term impacts on the actions of specific social actors and also focus on fields of action such as reconciliation, peace education and a culture of peace, they acquire a tangible dimension. Without losing sight of the long-term perspective, we must gear our thinking and actions more strongly towards a "viable peace", so that peace is no longer seen as an ideal that is far out of reach.

The effectiveness of NGOs' action does not only depend on the formulation and implementation of their strategies; it also depends, of course, on their organisational frameworks. This includes having competent staff available, but it also means having sufficient financial resources to achieve ambitious project goals. Colombian NGOs are in a fortunate position at present: many foreign aid agencies are giving precedence to conflict resolution and peacebuilding rather than to the criterion that no projects should be funded in middle-income countries. However, unless Colombian NGOs successfully convey their multidimensional understanding of peace to the international development community, the paradoxical situation could quickly arise in which overseas funding for their work is ultimately linked to the perpetuation of the armed conflict, not to the attainment of a lasting peace.

If peace work is linked to project duration, it is essential to make clear what is understood by "peacebuilding" and on which level action is to be taken and impacts achieved: at the level of structural or institutional change, at the level of stakeholder relations or culturally determined attitudes and social behaviour, or at national, regional or local level.

“ If civil society actors define peace as a ‘political project’ they must analyse more precisely how they should conduct themselves vis-à-vis the existing power blocs, which obstacles to conflict resolution must be dismantled, and which forms of social mobilisation are necessary for peace. ”

And it must also be clear which stakeholders are regarded by the NGOs as key actors in terms of their ability to promote or "spoil" peace. In the current context in particular, it is important to determine whether they are able to influence negotiations between the conflict parties without being unduly affected by the dynamics and timeframes specified by the negotiating parties. Certainly, it is wise not to stake everything on this particular card but to continue to rely on the establishment of a lasting and comprehensive peace process. This includes changes at the local level, which, naturally, will always remain integrated in the dynamics of the overall conflict or its political solution but offer an opportunity to make practical conflict resolution visible: through sensitisation, dialogue and action to support new relationships between social movements or promote institutional reform or the creation of new structures. But equally, it also requires civil society organisations to publicly ensure that the state and the armed groups do not acquire the sole power to determine what is meant by peace.

As long as everyone continues to wait for peace at the macro level, micro-level peacebuilding efforts will receive too little attention. The "micro-peace" that can be observed in many places has produced notable results and the lessons learnt from it can be the starting point for a broader process. It is essential to move away from a focus on the macro level, in order to create space for greater reflection on the plurality of actors and pathways to peace.

Challenges and recommendations

Although Colombia has made a start in thinking in terms of the "plurality of peace", the ongoing conflict and violence mean that some strategic reorientation is required.

Strategies and alliances

Although it is apparent that Colombian NGOs have improved their capacities to analyse the context of their activities and to plan, implement and evaluate their work, there is still a

need for self-critical reflection on whether the current assumptions guiding their peacebuilding activities dovetail with the actual impacts of peace work, or whether these assumptions and/or practical action now require adaptation. This process of reflection should take place in every NGO, but above all between various organisations, with their target groups and also with the local and international agencies which provide funding for their activities.

A key point in this context is, undoubtedly, a willingness not to be satisfied with the fact that the many existing peace-related activities already contribute in some way to leading Colombian society out of violence and ending the conflicts. A definition of what constitutes peace should be stated more explicitly in the long-term goals of NGO work and should then be reflected in the strategies and assumed impact chains of their programmes and projects.

More precise answers should be provided to questions relating to the following:

- The conflict dynamics that can be halted or de-escalated by NGOs, and the peace dynamics that they can help to reinforce.
- The situations in which the diversity of NGOs' peace activities proves to be more beneficial than more intensively coordinated action by various stakeholders.
- Their action in platforms, alliances or other types of coalition: How are the range of expertise and the financial capacities of members utilised, and for what purpose? Can members take on a variety of roles vis-à-vis other actors? To what extent can the activities be organised in a complementary manner in order to achieve the broadest possible impact in terms of achieving peace?
- The advantages of focusing individually or in alliances on fewer topics or limited geographical areas in the interests of obtaining broader impact and additional support by third parties.

Peace negotiations

There are various other political challenges which require intensive consideration. If, in the civil society space, it is currently assumed that in Colombia, there is a genuine prospect of ending the violence through political negotiations, various scenarios must be rehearsed. What role should the public play while the conflict parties are negotiating? Which past mistakes should not be repeated, in order to facilitate a negotiated lasting peace? Is there any prospect of avoiding the renewed polarisation of society and the legitimisation of violence as a solution to conflict if the negotiations fail?

In the current context, civil society must develop positions and clarify the following:

- Which topics are central to peace, and what can be done to encourage the chief negotiators from the government and the guerrilla movement to address issues that feature on the civil society agenda?
- To what extent is civil society willing to support a negotiated outcome if there is no coherence between its peace agenda and the agreement?
- What should happen to the current combatants in a post-negotiation process?

- Which agents and strategies are needed in order to lead "positive peace" away from its marginalised position and make it a subject of social policy debate?

Long-term structural change

If civil society actors define peace as a "political project" whose effect is felt over the long term and which involves a multitude of stakeholders, they must analyse more precisely how they should conduct themselves vis-à-vis the existing power blocs, which obstacles to conflict resolution must be dismantled, and which forms of social mobilisation are necessary for, and conducive to, peace.

Starting with the search for democratic, rights-based development, NGOs which aim to achieve structural change should reflect to a greater extent on the following questions:

- The linkage between peacebuilding and measures to safeguard human rights must be emphasised to a greater extent. What form might human rights activities that are also defined as part of the efforts to promote peaceful coexistence take – and how can they be experienced positively by diverse social groups?
- The statement that peace and democracy go hand in hand and make violent conflicts obsolete must be deepened in conceptual terms and fleshed out in practice. What form should participatory, law-based democracy take, in order to permanently discredit the use of violence as a form of political debate?

Dealing with victims and ex-combatants

The work with victims – and especially implementing the new legislation – poses many challenges while the conflict is still ongoing. Only a minority of victims of violent expulsions or other forms of violence are organised at present. Furthermore, people from rural regions in particular lack essential knowledge of their rights as victims and are highly suspicious of the government. Education is therefore needed in order to enable them to access the mechanisms that have been created. As the state has yet to produce a well-crafted strategy for dealing with victims and demobilised persons, active engagement by NGOs continues to be important.

To prevent any increase in the tensions between NGOs that publicly advocate for clear options for the victims of violence and peacebuilding on the national level, on the one hand, and those that focus on initiating local peace and reconciliation processes, on the other, it would be helpful to discuss the following points in the NGO arena:

- Is the engagement for local reconciliation processes a response to the current conflict dynamics and the lack of prospects for a way out of violence, or are there fundamental differences in the understanding of peace? What can be achieved at the local level, and where do the limits lie? Must peacebuilding start at the national level, or can local actors create perspectives for a new form of social coexistence?
- Victims' claims to truth-seeking, investigation of atrocities and compensation must be taken seriously. NGOs should clarify whether, beyond calling for the state to fulfil its responsibilities in this context, there are entry points in their

own work which can be expanded and assessed.

- Reconciliation work that includes demobilised persons requires great sensitivity. A distinction must be made between those who made the decision to use violence and those who went along with it but are willing to renounce violence. A glance at perpetrators' life stories may reveal whether they joined an armed group in revenge for the murder of one of their own relatives, whether they were forcibly recruited as child soldiers, or whether they were among the young people who simply wanted to leave home. It is not uncommon for perpetrators to have been drawn into the spiral of violence without having made a conscious decision to do so. Breaking this spiral, which constantly reproduces violence, is essential in order to end the ongoing saga of conflict in Colombia. Exploring the reasons why people join armed groups may be just as important as clarifying their motives for leaving.

If NGOs wish to become a reference point in the social policy debate, they must make it clear:

- What they regard as strategically important topics for political action in Colombia.
- Why different localised approaches may well be an appropriate response to the complex and diverse conflict situation in Colombia.
- That peacemaking requires social consensus and alliances involving various social forces.
- That short-term change (such as compliance with humanitarian law) is just as important as steps towards medium- and long-term peace-related goals.
- That peace has many different dimensions and must be reflected equally in individual and community attitudes, structural and institutional reforms, and political culture.

If NGOs are successful in finding answers to these questions and initiating social debate, this may be an important step in offering people in Colombia a different outlook for the future, instead of the current, seemingly all-pervasive violence – an outlook based on the possibility of a visible peace.

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Special thanks to Claudia M. König for translating the Spanish original into German and to Wolfgang Kaiser for giving editorial support.

Peace writ small?

Centre Ubuntu's approaches to community healing in Burundi



Frère Emmanuel Ntakirutimana

Introducing Centre Ubuntu

Centre Ubuntu is an initiative launched by Dominican Friars in the region of Rwanda and Burundi. Its focus is geared towards promoting peace and reconciliation in order to contribute to healing wide spread effects of massive and cyclic violence that has struck the Great Lakes region during the last six decades. Centre Ubuntu is located in Bujumbura. Its activities started in January 2002.

Its vision is a peaceful Burundi healed from trauma, improving its development conditions and taking roots in ubuntu values. Ubuntu is a common word in the Bantu linguistic groups in the eastern and southern parts of Africa. In Burundi, it refers to the synthesis of all values that make a human being different from all other creatures. Some of the attributes of ubuntu include love, respect, trust, reciprocity, peacefulness, justice, reconciliation, forgiveness, neighborliness, humility, truth, caring, and God's vision of a shared purpose for mankind. Ubuntu philosophy has become a fundamental concept in South Africa for national renaissance grounding national solidarity.

The Ubuntu Network is a cluster of organisations engaged in rebuilding Burundi's social fabric and working for self-autonomy of citizens by reinforcing ubuntu values and healing grassroots communities through participatory approaches

such as narrative theatre. This is implemented around the following focuses:

- Alleviating trauma in grassroots communities.
- Training local committee members within their communities in order to be able to better address conflict resolution and peacebuilding needs in their communities.
- Increasing participatory governance in collaboration with local elected leaders and other formal and informal leadership.
- Engaging in lobbying and advocacy for vulnerable and marginalised community members in collaboration with local committee members.
- Capacity building for development by raising awareness for local resource mapping by establishing strong partnerships within communities and by stimulating a creative and partnership-driven spirit.

The socio-political crisis that has shaken Burundi for the last five decades was the origin of many large-scale massacres, forced disappearances and rough executions in many corners of the country. Hundreds of thousands of deaths in the last 50 years of open or dormant conflict have undoubtedly caused a climate of mistrust, hatred, and exclusion between different identities of Burundians among the country's population. The growing socio-political stabilisation of the country requires tremendous work in the field of healing.

Implementation logic and theories of change

<i>Theory of change</i>	<i>Centre Ubuntu methods to achieve change include</i>
By transforming the consciousness, attitudes, behaviors and skills of many individuals, we will create a core mass of people who will advocate peace effectively.	Trauma healing/healing of memories; dialogue and encounter groups; personal transformation and/or awareness-raising workshops.
By breaking down isolation, polarisation, division, prejudice and stereotypes, we will enable progress on key issues to reduce ethnic prejudice and inter-group tensions and forge strong relationships which are essential for peacebuilding.	Processes of inter-group dialogue such as narrative theatre; networking; relationship-building processes; joint efforts and practical programs on substantive issues.
By creating inclusive structures for community problem-solving, we can improve communication, respect, and productive interaction among sub-groups in the community, and increase access to groups disenfranchised to decision-making.	Healing of memories; processes of inter-group dialogue such as narrative theatre; networking; relationship-building processes; joint efforts and practical programs on substantive issues.
By engaging community members in participatory approaches to decision-making and implementation of development activities, we can strengthen community relationships.	Working with community committees at grassroots level; fostering dialogue and social contact; collective problem-solving; housing and goat farming projects.
By fostering cooperation across ethnic lines regarding non-political issues of common interest like drugs and alcohol abuse, domestic violence and infrastructure, we can build stronger inter-ethnic ties and understanding.	Narrative theatre; counselling; housing and goat farming; radio broadcasts; peace education magazines.
By promoting peace using the media (radio and magazines) we can change public attitudes and build tolerance in society.	Radio; documentaries; ubuntu value building magazines.
By enabling displaced people (IDPs, refugees) to return to their homes and live in relative harmony with their neighbours, we will contribute to security and economic recovery.	Psychosocial healing; ubuntu value basis rebuilding; narrative theatre; skills and capacity building; community reconciliation; traditional rites and ceremonies; negotiation and problem-solving; inter-group dialogue.
By encouraging people to talk and play together, we will contribute to building relationships and break down stereotypes.	School-based peace education; narrative theatre; human rights education; tolerance education for children.
If we develop activities that provide economic benefits to all ethnic communities (economic inter-dependence), people will have incentives to resist efforts to incite violence as well as develop habits of cooperation.	Inter-ethnic projects like housing and goat farming; dialogue and non-violent communication training.

Centre Ubuntu's intervention approach

Centre Ubuntu bases its peacebuilding work on six propositions (Maphosa 2009: 59-60):

- Peace emerges from the transformative change of the critical mass of individuals.
- A sense of shared belonging and dialogue can lead groups to cease their engagement in violence.
- Media can serve to create awareness.
- Community self-help projects can assist in uniting different groups.
- Strengthening social capital infused with democratic concepts can foster collaboration and more peaceful communities.
- Mutual dialogue and encounters can help people understand each other.

Challenges

In implementing our programmes, we have been trying to work in the four connected fields of social capital, mental health and psychosocial support, community restoration, and peacebuilding.

Changes observed can be related to social well-being (trusting others, working together and feeling united), as well as skills and knowledge (e.g. conflict resolution skills) and improved collaboration between Ubuntu local committee members and local administration. The pride, commitment and ongoing efforts that the local committees within their local communities have shown is considered a positive indicator for ownership and solidarity, which in itself should be considered a viable prerequisite for restoration and community healing.

It is clear that putting the social capital theory into practice remains a challenge.

The network building approach was conceived as a promising strategy focusing on roles, planning, monitoring and evaluation. However, the goals and anticipated changes of Ubuntu network-building were mitigated by the lack of capacity among network members in strategic planning, project cycle management and other operational skills. Centre Ubuntu's style of leadership, together with the intrinsic motivation of its staff, results in a collective culture of sharing and reflection. However, Centre Ubuntu could further strengthen its leading role in supporting the Ubuntu network. The reported capacity differences within the network and the contextual differences between communities should be factored in more clearly in this respect. A special focus should be put on monitoring the learning chain for Centre Ubuntu's donors, Centre Ubuntu staff, Ubuntu network members, and local committee members within local communities in order to strengthen communities in post-conflict areas.

Besides these general observations, let us stress four elements which require special attention.

Community ownership of processes

If change has to take place, it is crucial to have local people and communities own the processes and work with their stories. They are the best specialists on their lives and community settings. This process may take time as facilitators have to negotiate with gatekeepers and have people negotiate solutions to their problems through an appropriate forum. In wounded communities, the pace may be very slow.

Fragile post-conflict renaissance

We experience the difficulty in setting up activities, bearing in mind outcomes, medium and long-term impact in a fragile political environment that has to deal with new arrangements, especially from transitional justice mechanisms that simultaneously generate hopes and fears.

From activities and programme orientation to generating a culture

It is not easy to win a long-term engagement in promoting a culture of peace, as peacebuilding does not work based on a hit-and-run approach. It is a process that needs to create structures and capacities for long-term work with regular monitoring and evaluation to strengthen staff and all community stakeholders.

Hardship in attributing causality

The link between overall and intermediary results, and between these and peacebuilding dynamics, is still weak. Attributing causality is hard to define. The fruits of social peacebuilding may not be harvested for years. The healing of communities, while developing a renewed leadership and setting up a new socio-political setup able to strengthen social fabric, requires complex undertakings that are difficult to coordinate.

How did we respond to the challenges?

Centre Ubuntu has demonstrated its steadfast and objective nature in helping to heal memories of the violent past and foster reconciliation by developing a culture of peace. Its programmes target a range of people, including Hutu, Tutsi, Twa, returnees, IDPs, prisoners, former prisoners, demobilised combatants, child soldiers, victims and perpetrators of violence, and local populations. Centre Ubuntu requires that the heterogeneous groups it engages with work as a community, which is an important strategy to help people appreciate and understand each other. In promoting psychosocial healing of individuals and communities, the centre communicates messages of peace, reconciliation and ubuntu values, promotes psychosocial community healing, networks with relevant stakeholders (such as other civil society organisations, government and community institutions, international donors, and research institutes), and bridges and links grassroots communities with stakeholders to create opportunities via social capital.

After the community mobilisation phase, collective opinion was that local capacity building of the communities was most important, rather than continuous support from the Ubuntu Network organisations. The issue of the local committees' needs to feel more confident in the work they were doing within communities was therefore raised. More questions were discussed in subsequent Ubuntu Network meetings, such as: what do we expect from local committee members? What are their roles and responsibilities if we want them to perform? In which areas do they need capacity building? It was finally decided that the capacity of local committee members was very important to their communities and therefore needed to be strengthened by providing additional training. In particular, more training in the following five specific areas:

- Rebuilding the value basis and engaging in lobbying and advocacy for vulnerable groups.
- Introduction to trauma and trauma healing.
- Capacity building for conflict resolution.
- Promoting participative leadership and good governance.
- Mapping local resources and developing partnerships for development.

Concluding remarks

Centre Ubuntu's socialisation activities are still sporadic, haphazard and have not yet spawned the necessary country-wide coordination to create a critical mass for tangible change at macro level to peace writ large. However, small scale grassroots interventions such as working with schools, prisons, IDPs, and returnees, are having a micro peacebuilding impact at the individual, personal level, and slowly but surely are moving into the socio-political sphere. Communication, truth, respect, trust, justice, networking and collaboration are pillars upon which enduring peace can be established in post-conflict societies like Burundi.

The main remaining challenge to reach peace writ large is to generate approaches creating a critical mass for tangible change at macro level – but this also requires country-wide

coordination. Measuring and/or evaluating success in building peace is no easy matter. There is a need to set up indicators with community members for sustainable changes in attitudes, behaviour, structures, and cultural conceptions. For the Centre Ubuntu team and our psychosocial facilita-

tors, there is a strong need for capacity building in planning, monitoring and evaluating in contexts of complexity and uncertainty, with the possibility of developing a scenario methodology.

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Supporting peace and democracy in Kenya

Results orientation in practice



Cyprian Nyamwamu

Challenges

For organisations working on constitutional change and multiparty democracy, the lack of learning platforms in the democracy and peacebuilding community in Kenya is a major challenge in terms of results orientation. This has made it difficult to build scenarios that offer clearer perspectives on what the real problem is and what ought to be done.

For a long time in the quest for reform in Kenya, the ruling class used to set the questions. As a result, the reform movement was unable to position itself as a positive force until the mid-1990s when assertive civil society organisations emerged and gave the pro-democracy actors space to explain the need for reforms through the media and other civic education outreach activities. At the moment, the ruling elite have again stolen the agenda of reform. At the same time, pro-democracy forces fail to articulate a clear message on how further reforms will benefit the majority of citizens. If the message in the airwaves is that “these are stooges from the West” aiming to undermine the sovereignty of our country, a real problem exists.

Due to dependence on resources from the North for democracy and development work in the developing world, most actors do not plan clearly to ensure that their work is results oriented. Most of the time, the activities being carried out are not connected to clear outputs (such as collective

charters, resolutions, tools or guidelines) that will lead to clear outcomes (policy and legal reform) and then generate clear impact in terms of change of culture and governance processes.

I would like to point out a few challenges in terms of performance: unfortunately, there is a lack of data to show what change has taken place in society over what period. Many actors are busy trying to implement activities but there are few, if any, initiatives aimed at collecting, collating and analysing the data available to show what changes have occurred that are attributable to the work being undertaken in the area of focus. There is also a duplication of work and attributing credit is always a challenge. At implementation level, there is a massive challenge in terms of resources because some governments still believe that reform and peacebuilding programmes are not an essential part of the government’s mandate but rather that of foreign donors and civil society actors.

Challenges also arise due to donor requirements on results orientation. The demand for tangible results in a political process that takes time to change has always been very frustrating. One funding agency once asserted that constitutional reforms were taking too long and hence they need to get engaged in other development programmes that would bear results. Donor agencies do not usually foster partnership relations with agencies involved in peacebuilding work

but rather treat recipients as clients who they use to implement pre-conceived programmes and projects. It is almost on a "take it or leave it" basis. Although this has improved over the years, and some of the recipients are becoming more assertive and becoming better negotiators, this challenge remains.

Response

The 4 A's approach

The 4 A's approach has always been instrumental in navigating the spaces of reform and peacebuilding. It entails:

- Analysis based on research to promote evidence-based engagement and action.
- Access: promoting a framework where citizens can access information and have the right to act for themselves and make informed choices.
- Advocacy: promoting advocacy that is informed by analysis and research, and also supported by the majority of the people for whom change is being advocated (to reduce the legitimacy deficit).
- Accountability: where accountability is enforced on duty bearers as much as on citizens themselves including the change champions.

The spaces approach

Over the past ten to eleven years, the democracy and human rights movement has come to assess impact in terms of how much we open up the closed spaces in the state system, expand the invited spaces such as various dialogue and reform commissions and forums with the government.

There is also one unique aspect we have nurtured in Kenya which has always held the country together: the building of a pool of "weavers" – men and women who have sufficient clout

to knock at the doors that matter in order to deliver messages and make conversation possible. This approach has helped the Kenyan reform movements deliver results that led to the promulgation of a new constitution on August 27, 2010.

The civic action/movement approach

This approach encourages a situation where every actor's work contributes to the improved performance of the other actors in four vital fields of intervention: "service", "advocacy", "education and dialogue" and "institution/ platform and assets building". Although undeveloped, when it has been applied, mostly at crisis points in the life of the nation, it has succeeded in ensuring that bad situations are turned into opportunities for leveraging reforms under what sometimes is referred to as "the constitutional moments" or the "constitutive moments" of the nation.

Recommendations

In order to improve results orientation in peacebuilding and democratic reform, support from donor organisations in the following areas would be helpful:

1. Scenario-building spaces would be very useful to enhance results orientation in programming.
2. Joint strategic planning with donors that takes the realities on the ground into account.
3. There is a need for capacity building for actors on how to undertake persuasion, negotiation, dialogue and consensus building for change.
4. There is a need to invest in broad and sustainable platforms for the engagement of various actors where several donor agencies have a role. The lack of a national platform for reforms in Kenya explains to a wide extent why there are no strong alternative voices to those of politicians.

Scenario analysis in Kenya

Identifying and addressing short-term challenges in long-term transitions



Angelika Spelten

Strategic planning: what it actually claims

Building peace and democracy in “fragile” countries takes time. Development organisations wishing to support these processes must take a long-term view and plan their programmes accordingly. There is little point in adopting short-term ad hoc measures, as the peace research community has made clear for some time. They are not alone: this is now a well-established principle and a frequent practice among development policy actors as well.

From a systems theory perspective, complex and dynamic social relations react continuously – also over the short term – and in many different ways to reform processes, and thus have a considerable influence on them. The reform efforts initiated by the Arab Spring are a good example; the bargaining processes involved do not progress in a linear fashion in any country.

However, the greatest risk to the long-term success of political transitions, as experience has shown, is that individual reforms can fail and trigger violent unrest. Good strategic planning should anticipate these risks at an early stage and respond to obstacles flexibly with appropriate short-term countermeasures. That’s the theory – but how does it work in practice?

This challenge was addressed by the members of the Working Group on Peace and Development (FriEnt) with reference to the specific example of Kenya. With the Kenya

round table, FriEnt created a space in which German and Kenyan partners engaged in regular dialogue in order to anticipate possible opposition to the reform process and to explore options for action. Taking “risks and opportunities for peaceful elections” as its topic, the round table mainly focused on possible scenarios for the forthcoming election period.

This joint learning process showed that the factors that are influential during phases of political transition can vary considerably over the short term. It also showed that these transitions put a question mark over the impact hypotheses of long-term programmes. An approach which may be the right one in the long term may be counterproductive in the short term, during phases of political tension. What lessons can be learned from this in terms of continuing with programme implementation during critical phases? The approach and key outcomes of FriEnt’s Kenya round table were intended to provide some ideas on how external actors can support their local partners’ efforts to overcome short-term escalations of crises.

Background: Kenya’s new start – a fragile process

At the end of 2007, Kenya held a presidential election, which neither the country itself nor the international community regarded as particularly risky or problematical. But things

turned out very differently: the defeated candidate Raila Odinga contested the result of the election and accused the other side of massive election-rigging, violent unrest broke out, and within a matter of weeks, the country was on the brink of civil war. The rival political camps accepted a mediation process led by Kofi Annan and agreed to the formation of a coalition government and an ambitious reform agenda, with implementation of its key elements to be completed before the next elections in late 2012.

“ Any reform of power structures has potential winners and losers; this applies not only in the Kenyan case but to other regions too. ”

The FriEnt member organisations supported the reform process from the outset through various long-term programmes. These programmes were based on “do-no-harm” and conflict analyses and included regular monitoring and intensive dialogue among partners. In August 2010, a first important milestone was reached when a large majority of the Kenyan people voted in a referendum for the adoption of the new constitution, drafted by the coalition. Kenya celebrated this step with great confidence and relief. International observers also took the view that this established a new and more equitable basis for community relations among Kenya’s ethnic groups and created workable rules for power-sharing and a balance of interests.

Despite all the euphoria, however, observers also pointed out that implementing these constitutional provisions would require a new understanding of political governance at the highest level. One of the greatest challenges was the restructuring of existing governance institutions and the establishment of new ones, as well as the development of new processes for the sharing and exercise of power. Limiting the excessive power wielded by the President and central government through a new decentralised system of governance was regarded as the centrepiece of the new constitution. However, there was little time available for the implementation of these reforms before the next elections, which were to take place at the end of 2012 as stipulated in the constitution.

International cooperation programmes primarily supported technical capacity building and skills development to enable the new governance apparatus to perform its constitutional role. For the political elite, however, there was much more at stake. Any reform of power structures has potential winners and losers; this applies not only in the Kenyan case but to other regions too. To ensure that the future political system can contribute to peace and stability in the long term, all the relevant political stakeholders must be involved in developing new normative principles and procedural rules, accept them in their finalised form, understand the consequences for their own political and economic status, and be prepared to align their own actions to them. Whether and to what extent this is successful generally only becomes apparent

during implementation. Usually, conflict assessments are carried out during the planning of long-term development programmes and focus on structural causes of (violent) conflicts; they can’t identify short-term risks.

Scenario analysis as a strategic planning tool

In spring 2011 the implementation of some of the constitutional provisions noticeably fuelled political tensions. Development organisations began to voice concern about the possible consequences for the forthcoming elections and Kenyan partners also regarded the situation as highly dynamic, complex and extremely fragile at that time. The FriEnt member organisations and their Kenyan partners all felt that there was a need for an up-to-date analysis of the situation, focusing particularly on the opportunities and risks associated with the election process.

The FriEnt round table therefore searched for a methodology that would capture the configuration of political interest groups, the main points of contention, and the key stakeholders’ behavioural strategies in “real time” as far as possible. Commissioning an academic conflict analysis did not seem to be a promising approach, as its findings, in this highly dynamic phase, would probably be out-of-date by the time the report had been written. Furthermore, due to their working contacts with local partners, FriEnt member organisations already had access to a wealth of up-to-date information and assessments, which they could feed into the analysis. Interestingly, however, these assessments were extremely diverse. At one end of the spectrum, there was the concern that the coalition government might fall apart before the end of the electoral term, with the issue of power then being resolved through violence. At the other, there was a confident view that the emerging middle class, out of economic self-interest, would prevent a renewed escalation of violence.

FriEnt therefore opted for a systems thinking approach to scenario analysis (Herweg/Steiner 2002), which would reflect and combine the diverse viewpoints and assessments.

This methodology is based on the hypothesis that developments in complex social systems are the outcome of interaction between a range of individual factors. Whereas classic conflict analysis seeks to encompass as many relevant factors as possible, the systems approach requires narrowing down on a short list of most relevant factors. These factors are identified, prioritised and evaluated in a discursive process, drawing on individual experience and current dynamics. The first scenario planning exercise was jointly convened in November 2011 by FriEnt and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES) under the guiding question: “What are the most important direct drivers and spoilers for peaceful elections in 2012?” In a two-day round table, a small group of eight participants identified a list of key factors and reflected on each factor’s relative impact as well as the estimated relationships between the individual factors.

The Kenyan participants, all of them longstanding partners of the FriEnt member organisations, were chosen so that they represented a range of regional and social perspectives and,

based on their activities to date, could not be assigned to any particular political camp. Assessing the individual factors and the way in which these factors interacted triggered intensive dialogue in the group. Some participants who work fairly close to the government felt that the President's influence on the conduct of the political parties, socioeconomic conditions and the state security forces was relatively high. At the same time, they surmised that the President would wish to end his political career in good standing with the international community, which meant that international influence on the President's behavioural strategy was relatively high. Other Kenyan participants working in the civil society context were initially surprised by this assessment, asked critical questions and enhanced the picture with their own observations. Finally, they broadly agreed with this assessment.

Another issue that featured in the discussions was the impact of the confirmation of charges hearing under way before the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. Six suspects had been accused of orchestrating or inciting many of the atrocities committed in the aftermath of the December 2007 election violence – among them Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, two of the prime candidates to run for the office of president in 2012. The decision on whether or not any of the six suspects would be tried was expected in January 2012.

All the participants agreed that this issue could well have considerable influence on the peaceful conduct of the elections. However, assessments of the systemic relationships initially diverged. Participants close to policy-makers in Nairobi regarded the ICC and its decision as the relevant factor, which naturally would not be affected by other elements in the system. Participants from NGO circles, however, pointed out that the large majority of the population had almost no direct access to information about the arguments presented and the decision adopted by the ICC. They felt that relations among the ethnic groups were influenced to a greater extent by the political elite's and the media's interpretation of the ICC's decision and the way in which this was utilised in the election campaign. These stakeholders (political elite and media) were undoubtedly open to the influence of other systemic factors. All participants in the discussions were ultimately convinced by the NGO position on this issue.

This process of reflection and weighing up was repeated for all the influential factors identified. Although time-consuming, it ultimately produced a scenario that was consensus-based and combined diverse stakeholder experience and perspectives. None of the 11 factors identified was surprising. The added value of this exercise was that it created a better understanding of the connections between the individual factors. The discussion thus became more focused and the assessments were more transparent and comprehensible. There were also lessons to be learned for the work at the local level, mainly in relation to media activities.

Sobering outcomes

In October 2012, FriEnt and FES repeated the scenario planning exercise. By now, the elections had been postponed until spring 2013 and political tensions were rising. Internati-

onal experts, too, were now openly warning about the risk of a violent escalation. Against this background, the FriEnt members again invited representatives from their local partner organisations to Germany to conduct an analysis of the potential risks. Some of the Kenyan participants had taken part in the scenario planning exercise the previous year; others were new to the process, which was based on the same model and explored the same question as before, namely the "most important direct drivers and spoilers of peaceful elections".

The findings of the analysis showed clear differences compared with the previous year. Only four of the 11 factors identified in 2011 were again classed as being especially relevant to the conduct of the elections, and there was further differentiation between them. This time, for example, it was no longer the behaviour of the political parties in general which was viewed as problematical, but quite specifically the way in which political leaders were mobilising their supporters. When asked about the critical aspect of the security forces' role, the October 2012 participants focused on the lack of progress on police reforms.

“The added value of this exercise was that it created a better understanding of the connections between the individual factors. The discussion thus became more focused and the assessments were more transparent and comprehensible.”

Other topics which, in the first analysis, had ranked among the 11 factors that were expected to be most influential were now seen as having much less or, indeed, no influence at all. For example, the role of President Kibaki had changed considerably over the course of the year, as a result of power-political wrangling. His influence on the peaceful or violent conduct of the elections was no longer regarded as particularly significant. The same applied to the ICC. Following the decision by the ICC in The Hague to prosecute all six suspects, the topic seemed less significant for the Kenyan people.

Instead, this round of discussions added new factors to the list. A series of terrorist attacks in Nairobi, attributed to Islamist groups, was adversely affecting the relations between the Kenyan and Somali communities and had already led to outbreaks of violence. There was now a serious concern that this violence could develop its own momentum and further escalate in the run-up to the elections.

This rapid change in the influential factors was surprising. It was impossible to overlook the fact that the social and political mood had changed over the course of the year, that new stress factors had emerged, and that implementing the constitutional provisions was fuelling old and new conflicts of interest. What was also surprising was the loss of significance of stakeholders and topics which, only the previous year, had been regarded as highly relevant to the success or failure of the election process. The participants in the round

table themselves were baffled by this finding and therefore reviewed the assessment for each individual factor/stakeholder which had been regarded as influential the previous year but did not feature on the new list. They finally confirmed the new list of key factors.

In terms of the original goal of the Kenya round table, this outcome was extremely sobering. Initially, there had been an expectation that the scenario analysis produced with local partners would offer starting points for minimising the election's risk potential and creating stabilising impetus through development policy measures.

After the first scenario planning round table, some minor amendments had been made to certain programme components. However, the conclusion drawn at the second round table was that development policy instruments are too cumbersome to react to rapid changes in the influential factors. But even if it were possible to respond more quickly, it is doubtful whether the development policy toolbox, which is largely geared towards capacity building and know-how transfer, would be able to create the necessary momentum. The short-term resistance – as the scenario analysis had made clear – was primarily political in nature. Advice from external actors would have little or no influence on whether the police reform was implemented prior to the elections, or which strategy presidential candidates deployed to mobilise their supporters. Key factors for these processes were political commitment and the individual priorities set by key actors in Kenya.

Short-term peace stabilisation requires diplomatic engagement

Despite these muted prospects, the Kenyan partners in particular refused to be discouraged. As it was clear that little progress could now be achieved with traditional development tools, they were keen to make contact with actors from the diplomatic field, who had other means at their disposal. They therefore presented the scenarios and analyses of influential factors to representatives of the German Federal Foreign Office (AA) and the German Bundestag. An intensive dialogue was already under way with the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), as this Ministry is a member of FriEnt.

During these talks, one idea which was also considered was whether to hold the next FriEnt round table during the period between the two ballots in the presidential elections in March 2013. If there was indeed a critical escalation in the election process, this would be the time when it was most likely to occur. In that scenario, the round table would be in a position to raise political awareness of the Kenyan situation, help shape opinions, and inform decision-making.

The planning and organisation of the round table began in December 2012. At this point, political attention in Europe was fully focused on Turkey's military response to the crisis in Syria and on the violent unrest in Egypt. Attempts to arrange meetings in March with the German Federal Foreign Office (AA) and with the European External Action Service (EEAS) in Brussels made little headway, with no

outright refusals but also no firm commitments by the end of February. The FriEnt members therefore had to decide whether it was reasonable to expect their partners to make the journey, and whether they should continue planning the visit. A further question was how the financial outlay could later be justified if it proved impossible to arrange any meetings. However, FriEnt's church-based member organisations were particularly keen to continue planning. In their view, preparing options for action was not a wasted effort: although these would not be needed if events in Kenya took a positive turn, they could perhaps help to curb the violence in a more negative scenario.

“Preparing options for action was not a wasted effort: although these would not be needed if events in Kenya took a positive turn, they could perhaps help to curb the violence in a more negative scenario.”

On 4 March, Kenya held the first ballot. Within a few hours of the polling stations closing, there were already signs of a surprise victory for Uhuru Kenyatta. However, it was also becoming apparent that technical problems with the count would delay the final result. It took a further five days, until 9 March, for the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) to announce the official result and confirm Kenyatta's victory. However, the defeated candidate Raila Odinga contested the result of the election and filed a petition with the Supreme Court, demanding a fresh vote in some regions or a new election. This turn of events reawakened memories of the failed elections in 2007 and caused tensions both in Kenya and among international observers. These concerns at international level not only related to Kenya's political stability. Diplomats were particularly preoccupied with the issue of how the international community should deal with a President whom the International Criminal Court (ICC) had indicted for crimes against humanity. During those few days, FriEnt's requests for meetings finally bore fruit and various political institutions confirmed the meetings with members of the round table which had been requested weeks earlier.

Real dialogue among partners requires new approaches – also in the West

When the five Kenyan round table participants arrived in Berlin on 18 March, they caused some surprise in that they initially showed little interest in jointly analysing the events in Kenya. They greeted their German colleagues with the question: Why are the Europeans so focused on the ICC issue? Please help us to understand the reason: what do you expect from it?

The round table discussions concentrated on this issue for one day. The Kenyan partners were genuinely interested in gaining an understanding of the European perspective. At

the same time, they wanted to draw Europe's attention to what they regarded as far more important challenges in the present situation, since these challenges would determine the success or failure not only of the election but also of the constitutional reforms as a whole.

In addition to the key factors, which were defined quickly and on a consensus basis, the Kenyan representatives formulated a strong political message for the forthcoming talks with foreign policy actors in Germany and Brussels: "The challenges the people of Kenya are facing right now are neither Kenyatta nor the ICC, but rather the ongoing distrust in governmental and independent institutions that are related to the implementation of the constitution, the devolution process but also the reconciliation process. The dwindling credibility of institutions could seriously affect the social cohesion in Kenya.

We ask you to join in our efforts to protect and support the legitimacy and mandate of Kenya's key constitutional institutions. Let the current situation at the ICC not undermine the constitutional reform processes and the gains already made. The kind of support currently most needed is moral support for our institutions and appreciation for the learning curve new institutions are undergoing when they are newly established, but also corrective support; if institutions really failed, correct them without undermining their reputation and self-confidence." (Memorandum 2013)

With their critical questions about the basis of the European position, the Kenyan partners brought a new dimension to the round table. While the first two meetings had focused primarily on the situation in Kenya, there was now also shared reflection, for the first time, on German and European actors' normative bases and their impact assumptions.

Lessons learnt

At the end of the process, when the elections had passed off peacefully, four of the factors which the round tables in November 2012 and March 2013 had identified as being of central importance had indeed proved to be highly influential. Since then, various academic studies have been published which show that it was primarily, although not exclusively, the high level of public recognition of the Supreme Court and Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC), the two lead candidates' carefully considered statements and gestures aimed at de-escalating the situation, and the strong presence of the security forces which ensured that despite numerous difficulties, the situation remained relatively calm.

What conclusions can now be drawn for the methodology of systemic scenario analysis as a strategic planning tool?

Systemic scenario planning provides prompt, nuanced and realistic analyses

A positive aspect which should be mentioned first of all is that the scenarios developed provided accurate assessments and captured the dynamic changes on the ground very well.

This confirmed our assumptions about the advantages of this approach compared with a full-scale conflict analysis. Through the participatory process, up-to-date and nuanced analyses can be produced very quickly. To ensure the quality of the results, however, it is essential to include different societal perspectives. Peace research refers, in this context, to a multi-track approach which encompasses groups close to government (track 1 1/2), public authorities and associations (track 2) and local or regional civil society organisations (track 3). The Kenya round table therefore benefited greatly from FriEnt members' broad spectrum of partners, which encompasses all three levels. In terms of building an atmosphere of trust for the discussions, the fact that the partnerships had already existed for some years was also very helpful.

Traditional development tools are too cumbersome

The starting point for the repeated scenario analysis was the expectation that together with local partners, it would be possible to identify options for action that help to reduce opposition and minimise potential risks.

Based on the influential factors identified, the local partners were able to modify minor elements of existing programmes where this could be done quickly and with no financial impacts. However, it was felt that there was not enough time to submit new applications for additional programme elements or to adapt current measures before the window of opportunity to create any real impetus closed.

Short-term options for action arise on the partners' side

Nonetheless, the systemic analysis provided an important frame of reference for further action. It helped some local partners to categorise their own actions in this dynamic context more accurately. Furthermore, certain peacebuilding initiatives which were taking place at various tracks were not necessarily known to the other levels. The NGO representatives, for example, had previously been unaware that complaints mechanisms exist in the regions to address problems with the devolution process. The NGOs also lacked information about opportunities to support mediation on ethnic rivalries in the nomination of candidates, which were offered by the National Cohesion and Integration Commission (NCIC) as part of its mandate. The dialogue on current and planned measures helped to facilitate mutual access to, and utilisation of, strategies being pursued at the different levels.

"Creating space" – external actors' key contribution

External actors' opportunities to create a positive dynamic in a tense situation are obviously limited. Nonetheless, they can make an important contribution by offering their partners a safe and confidential framework for dialogue and reflection on partners' own options for action. Another important potential function of external actors is that they may be able to facilitate contacts between the interlocutors from the countries concerned and political/diplomatic actors at European and national level.

Two lessons can be learned from the Kenya round table experience:

1. When a situation in a partner country escalates to a critical level, parliamentary and diplomatic actors are likely to be interested in, and open to, informal dialogue with persons from the region concerned.
2. However, this interest only really emerges once the crisis reaches a certain level of escalation. The preparations for this dialogue, the choice of interlocutors, visa applications, travel arrangements and coordination of the agenda with local partners all take time and financial resources, and should, ideally, be dealt with before any potential escalation occurs, or at least at the earliest possible stage.

At this point, however, there is still no pressure to act at the political level, and experience has shown that there will therefore be little interest in committing to talks. Good strategic planning for stabilising peace and long-term reform processes must therefore include the allocation of human and financial resources in order to create space for dialogue on options for action when there is a risk of a short-term escalation of violence, even if the expectations of the likely effects remain vague

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Developing multi-stakeholder strategies

Experiences of the German Civil Peace Service Group



Ulrich Goedecking

The Civil Peace Service (CPS) was established by the Federal Government in 1999 after German civil society organisations had called for a Civil Peace Service some years earlier. The CPS deploys specifically qualified professionals in conflict and post-conflict countries in accordance with the provisions of the Development Workers Act (Entwicklungshelfergesetz). These CPS workers assist local organisations to resolve conflicts non-violently, to engage in peace processes, and to articulate their interests. They provide training in nonviolent conflict resolution, foster dialogue processes, protect and support advocates of nonviolent conflict resolution, facilitate “dealing with the past” processes aimed at overcoming the legacy of violence, injustice and suffering, and promote reconciliation. The CPS also has project funding available, which can be used, for example, to finance partners’ activities and to train and employ local staff. In 2013, the funding allocated to the CPS as an item within the BMZ budget amounted to around 29 million euros. After the comprehensive reform process which took place from 2011 to 2013 following the worldwide evaluation of the CPS, inter-agency country strategies were introduced. The following article summarises the experiences of the Civil Peace Service Group in developing multi-stakeholder strategies.

Inter-agency CPS country strategies

The somewhat cumbersome term “inter-agency CPS country strategies” refers to an instrument first deployed in 2012 to sharpen the profile of, and provide strategic direction for, Germany’s Civil Peace Service (CPS). For the CPS organisations and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), these inter-agency country strategies are both a steering mechanism and a key reference document for the dialogue about the CPS’s in-country engagement.

The CPS organisations are responsible for developing programmes and projects in conjunction with their partners. Implementation of these measures is contingent on approval by the BMZ. In this respect, the CPS organisations differ significantly from the implementing organisations, which operate on behalf of, and deliver projects and programmes commissioned by, the BMZ.

The adjective “inter-agency” highlights the key characteristic of these strategies. In many countries where the CPS is

¹ The CPS organisations are the Association for Development Cooperation (AGEH), Bread for the World – Protestant Development Service, EIRENE – International Christian Service for Peace, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, the Civil Peace Service Forum (forumZFD), Weltfriedensdienst (WFD), Action Committee Service for Peace (AGDF), Peace Brigades International (pbi) and KURVE Wustrow Centre for Training and Networking in Nonviolent Action.

engaged, several CPS organisations are involved in implementing their own CPS projects. Each of these agencies has its own access to certain partners/partner organisations, its own specific understanding of its role, and its own ideas on how the work carried out by CPS workers is positioned in the relationship with local partners and how other resources available to the CPS should be utilised. This diversity does much to add value. The inter-agency country strategies are therefore not intended to merge the various agencies' CPS projects into one single "CPS country project" and thus establish uniformity, but aim to add even more value to the diversity existing within the CPS.

First of all, as part of the CPS reform process, the CPS organisations and the BMZ drafted joint Terms of Reference for the design of country strategies. With so many agencies involved, this was a challenge in itself. Joint strategic planning was initially piloted in 2012 in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Palestinian territories and Israel as well as the Philippines. Further processes followed in 2013 and 2014. The Terms of Reference were amended several times in light of the experience gained.

Strategy development involves partners/partner organisations, including representatives of their head offices if appropriate, and CPS workers and coordinators. Additional expertise can be accessed from Germany and in the country concerned.

The process initially focuses on a joint systemic analysis of context and relevance. Peace needs are then defined on this basis, acting as a bridge between the analysis and the formulation of the strategy for CPS engagement. Strategic planning has two main elements. Firstly, the CPS organisations agree on joint outcomes, i.e. the goals that they are seeking to achieve. This applies both to the impact level, with long-term goals, and to the formulation of outcomes to be achieved over a three-year period. In addition, the CPS organisations identify working methods, based on shared priorities. This answers the question how the resources available within the CPS should be deployed by stakeholders to tap the identified peacebuilding potential and thus achieve the desired outcomes.

Ownership and a focus on partners

Ownership of the strategies lies with the CPS organisations in-country. However, it is also essential to fully involve the various partners in the countries with CPS engagement and, if appropriate, channel additional local expertise into the development of the strategy.

On the issue of ownership, experience gained with the strategy development processes in 2012 and 2013 shows that a high level of communication with local stakeholders is essential before strategic planning begins. A brief description in the Terms of Reference will not suffice. For example, it is not always immediately apparent to local partners' representatives why they have been invited to participate in joint strategy development when it is ultimately the German CPS organisations that decide which of the partners' ideas and contributions should be included in the strategy. One of the

lessons learnt from previous strategy development processes is that a strategic planning workshop must start with a detailed clarification of roles in order to avoid misunderstandings and unrealistic expectations.

An in-country workshop enables the expertise of selected local CPS partners or other available expertise to feed into the development of the CPS strategy. Here, the focus is on conflict analysis and strategy formulation. Experience has shown that partners' representatives have diverse expectations of these workshops. Although the main focus is on participation in the country analysis, not every partner views the development of a country strategy as their own priority. From their perspective, a workshop is also an opportunity to address significant problems affecting their day-to-day work.

An important and positive effect of joint strategic planning is that it provides opportunities for networking. A workshop is a chance for CPS partners to get to know each other or deepen existing contacts and utilise the potential for cooperation. This applies, for example, to large countries where CPS partner organisations are dispersed across a wide area and rarely have the chance to meet in person. Partner organisations operating in different conflict scenarios can come together to discuss priorities. However, if partner organisations participating in the workshop do not occupy the same position in the conflict scenarios or have different political affiliations, this can pose a particular challenge.

Learning more about each other

The regional divisions in the BMZ and the German Federal Foreign Office are indirectly involved in strategy development processes long before the first draft of the strategy is produced. The German embassies, especially the economic cooperation officers (ECOs), are informed about CPS strategy processes at an early stage and are invited to attend at least part of the in-country workshop. They also provide feedback on the drafts.

This adds value beyond the development of the inter-agency strategy paper itself. Through this joint process, stakeholders find out more about each other, and new and rapid communication channels can develop between the agencies implementing the CPS projects in-country, the ECOs and the German embassies.

The strategies are also discussed with the BMZ, which in turn obtains confirmation from the German Federal Foreign Office (AA) that the proposed strategy is foreign policy-compliant. This step is extremely important in ensuring that the strategy is universally accepted and provides a frame of reference for all stakeholders.

Desired outcomes at strategic level

What is to be achieved? This question is at the heart of every CPS project. The desired outcomes are agreed by the BMZ and the CPS organisations on a binding basis, but the pathway towards their attainment is flexible and context-specific.

Drawing on initial experience with the pilot processes, the Civil Peace Service Group (CPS Group) has focused intensively on how desired outcomes should be formulated at country strategy level. The relevant executing agency is responsible for the direct outcomes of the individual CPS projects, whereas the country strategy must define jointly agreed overarching objectives.

The Terms of Reference therefore address two questions. Firstly, they must define the long-term goals/outcomes that the stakeholders jointly aim to achieve (= impact).

Secondly, they must focus on the goals/outcomes that the relevant CPS organisations wish to achieve jointly over a three-year period. Four criteria are applied to define these outcomes. Firstly, they should clearly relate to the foregoing analyses. Secondly, they should be attainable within a three-year period; at the least, progress towards their attainment should be observed. Thirdly, they should be transparent and specific. And fourthly, they should, realistically, be achievable within the parameters established for the CPS.

A brief glance at the experience gained with the strategic planning processes already concluded underlines the relevance of these criteria.

In every case, the impact level should be addressed by the country strategy: consensus on this point has existed from the outset. The question was whether the inter-agency agreement on goals and desired outcomes should be limited to the impact level. In this case, there would have been a risk that the joint goals would remain so generalised and long-term that inter-agency joint monitoring of progress would have been almost impossible to perform in a meaningful way.

It was therefore decided that the joint goals of CPS engagement defined in the country strategies should be based on the above criteria: in other words, they should be more specific than the impact level and have a three-year time-frame. For these desired outcomes, which should be the subject of joint monitoring, no indicators are now required, in contrast to earlier versions of the ToRs. Experience has shown that the question of “direct desired outcomes”, combined with a requirement for indicators, often caused confusion, making it almost impossible to make a clear distinction, in this respect, between the CPS project level, on the one hand, and the inter-agency strategy paper, on the other.

Monitoring as a joint learning process

Monitoring at the inter-agency country strategy level is understood as a process of shared reflection on the CPS’s in-country engagement. The CPS organisations working in-country agree on a format for joint monitoring at the country strategy level, to take place, as a rule, at least once a year. Every three years, the BMZ and the CPS organisations determine whether and to what extent a review of the country strategy is required. No experience of this process has been gained yet: monitoring will take place for the first time in 2014. Practical experience will reveal which monitoring formats are appropriate. One challenge which will

undoubtedly arise is how to involve in-country stakeholders without requiring them to make a disproportionate effort – e.g. via workshops such as those conducted during strategic planning – at each stage in the monitoring process.

Joint monitoring will mainly focus on practical progress towards the outcomes defined in the inter-agency country strategy. It will also identify any unintended consequences. Each executing agency can share the practical experience gained with its own CPS projects, where progress is measured against specific indicators in accordance with the agency’s own internal procedures. Joint monitoring at inter-agency level will examine which contributions the individual CPS projects make to achieving the shared goals agreed in the country strategy and which overall picture emerges from the sum of the agency-specific contributions. As mentioned above, the monitoring process at inter-agency level dispenses with indicators to measure progress towards the outcomes defined in the country strategy. It is therefore especially important for the CPS organisations to utilise the monitoring process as a means of gaining an accurate and nuanced picture of how the stakeholders, context-specific factors, project activities and project outcomes relate to each other and interact within the framework of CPS engagement, and which intended – and, more specifically, which unintended – consequences emerge as a result.

Summary

The CPS reform process initiated in 2011 has now ended. The ToRs for inter-agency country strategy development were part of this reform, as were the agreements on the monitoring and updating of the country strategies themselves. In all, 11 country strategies have been produced, with a further seven in preparation at the time of writing (June 2014). In October 2013, the CPS organisations submitted applications for the first time in a new format, which makes explicit reference to the inter-agency country strategies. Strategy development has thus been integrated into the CPS’s routine, although some steps have yet to be taken, including gaining initial experience of inter-agency monitoring at country strategy level.

The inter-agency country strategies are already producing significant and tangible benefits. The CPS organisations are engaged in a more intensive and systematic dialogue about their own and their partners’ work in-country, not only among themselves but also with the BMZ. New impetus for networking is being created in the countries concerned. The question of what the CPS stands for in a given country can be answered without undermining the diversity of country-specific approaches, which is one of the CPS’s strengths.

The completion of the 2011-2013 reform process is not the end of the matter. All the procedures and structures are, as a matter of principle, the subject of further joint reflection by the CPS organisations and the BMZ. The additional experience gained with each strategy development process and with monitoring will support the further refinement of this instrument by the CPS.

“I’ve just got to quickly save the world....”

International and national lessons learnt in conflict prevention and peacebuilding



Elke Stumpf

This song by Tim Bendzko (German title: “Nur noch kurz die Welt retten”) was – until recently – the hold music on the phone system at the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). In a rather tongue-in-cheek way it highlights the hugely ambitious aims that many actors in the field of fragile and conflict-affected contexts have set themselves. What has been achieved so far? What lessons have we learnt? Several donors and implementing organisations have commissioned evaluations of their work in fragile and conflict-affected environments. These include the World Bank (IEG Evaluation 2013), the European Commission (2011), OECD and BMZ, with the latter commissioning several evaluations of its conflict-related instruments in 2010/11. Together these studies paint a clear picture of the current status of conflict prevention and peacebuilding and point to a large number of “works in progress”.

Taking stock of the first decade of conflict prevention and peacebuilding

In 1992 the United Nations Agenda for Peace marked the beginning of peacebuilding as a recognised area of activity for civilian actors. This meant that alongside diplomacy, development activities for peacebuilding would become much more important. In the wake of the attacks on 11 September 2001 people were already speaking of the “securitisation” of development policy, as there were fears

that development cooperation might be used purely for security policy reasons. It is a fact that the international community has invested significant funding in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in recent years. As the evaluation for the European Commission points out, between 2001 and 2010 the European Commission alone invested a total of EUR 7.7 billion in these tasks – more than 10% of its total budget for development cooperation.

New capacities for peacebuilding

The last decade of conflict prevention and peacebuilding has also witnessed a significant development of capacities among donors, their implementing organisations and civil society. New strategies, instruments and institutional units have emerged in response to the new demands of peacebuilding. At the international level pioneering papers and guidelines have been published such as the UN Report In Larger Freedom, the OECD Fragile States Principles (2007) and the World Development Report 2011. New institutional units have been created such as the UN Peacebuilding Commission. And within donor and implementing organisations, new units and competence centres dedicated exclusively to peacebuilding, have emerged. Moreover new, flexible instruments for use in fragile and conflict-affected contexts have been developed such as the Multi-Donor Trust Funds. Germany has played a key role in influencing these international developments.

Both nationally and internationally, German development cooperation was swift to prepare to step up its engagement in conflict prevention and peacebuilding. An initial conceptual framework was provided by the German Government's Action Plan for Civilian Crisis Prevention, Conflict Resolution and Post-Conflict Peace-Building (2004). Shortly afterwards BMZ published its cross-sectoral strategy (2005), which contained binding directives for the strategic mainstreaming of crisis prevention and peacebuilding in German development cooperation. Within BMZ and its implementing organisations dedicated units have been created to address the relevant issues. Moreover, in the Civil Peace Service and Development oriented Emergency and Transitional Aid/ Transitional Development Assistance, BMZ has created new instruments and funding mechanisms that are designed specifically for conflict-affected situations. Implementing organisations such as KfW and GIZ have extended the scope of their expertise to encompass new themes such as demobilisation, mediation, transitional justice, and small arms and light weapons control.

Results at the micro and macro level

Ultimately, however, conflict prevention and peacebuilding must be measured by its results. In this respect the evaluations paint a sobering picture. At the macro level there are only a few countries where the international donor community has actually succeeded in generating a demonstrable positive effect that has helped overcome and put an end to violent conflicts. One positive example is Nepal, where by adopting a unified stance the donor community succeeded in persuading the government to negotiate with the Maoists. In Liberia the international community played a significant role in the demobilisation and reintegration of the numerous armed groups, thus helping stabilise the country. In Timor-Leste, during the first years of independence the international community guaranteed the country's internal security on several occasions, thus enabling it to maintain political stability and hold elections. In all these countries, however, the peace processes remain fragile, particularly since the countries concerned have only rarely succeeded in overcoming the structural causes of conflict.

Success stories are achieved largely at the local level. Thanks to their direct links to various actors, development cooperation projects frequently succeed in nudging conflict transformation processes in constructive directions, facilitating dialogue or creating fresh prospects for young people involved in acts of violence. However, the evaluations published also make clear that such local success stories can rarely influence the national context of the conflict. To achieve this they would need to be integrated into overarching strategies and frameworks for action.

Work in progress

What can we learn from these findings? How can conflict prevention and peacebuilding be made more effective? Despite their differences, the evaluations conducted over the last few years point to several common areas of activity:

Strategy

Mindful of the fact that conflict prevention and peacebuilding have so far struggled to meet the high expectations placed on it, the World Development Report 2011 reminds us of the long periods that were needed historically for democratic governance structures based on the rule of law to take shape. It also calls on the donor community to show greater realism and adopt a long-term perspective. This is the spirit in which the World Development Report 2011 estimates that the twenty best performers among the fragile states will require 36 years to achieve a governance level equivalent to that of Bangladesh.

A sober assessment of the opportunities and challenges for conflict prevention and peacebuilding is needed at the country and portfolio level, where the numerous conflict analyses and analytical tools that are now available are not being used adequately for strategic planning and programming. This often leads to a situation in which standardised programme approaches, i.e. best practices, are applied rather than seeking the best fit for the specific country context. Evaluations demonstrate, however, that programmes which engage closely with the local context are more successful in fragile and conflict-affected situations. No doubt more could be achieved if donors were to harmonise their activities more effectively. In particular, foreign, defence, economic and development policy need to pursue coherent goals that promote peace. Although the desirability of this whole-of-government approach is widely acknowledged, it has proved difficult to implement in many countries. To achieve this, the development community must bring together divergent interests, enable various institutions to move beyond their systemic boundaries, and reconcile different cultures of communication. With a view to pursuing a comprehensive strategy it is also important to involve non-governmental actors, who often have an extensive portfolio in fragile and conflict-affected countries.

“Evaluations demonstrate, however, that programmes which engage closely with the local context are more successful in fragile and conflict-affected situations.”

One of the most important new developments in recent years is the impact that the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States had for countries that have started to implement it. The New Deal has been developed in 2011 as a new set of principles for a partnership between 18 fragile states (g7+ group) and donors as well as international organisations. It also allows fragile and conflict-affected states focusing their own efforts to reduce fragility on priorities circumscribed by the Peacebuilding and Statebuilding Goals (PSGs): Legitimacy, Security, Justice, Economic Foundation and Basic Service Delivery. They formulate their priorities in their own New Deal transition compact that also binds donors to focus their development cooperation on the deficits of fragility.

In 2015, there will be a reform of the Millennium Development Goals. Currently, there are several proposals such as the reports of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons (2013) and the UN Task Team that have advocated for the inclusion of a goal on peaceful and stable societies. Germany and its constituency group members in the Open Working Group on the Sustainable Development Goals, France and Switzerland, are supporting this position.

Instruments

In fragile and conflict-affected situations there are two aims: deliver a rapid peace dividend, and build sustainable state structures at an early stage. The traditional instruments and procedures of development cooperation have often proved too cumbersome and complex for this task. Moreover, the demands they place on state structures are often too high. One example of this is the poverty reduction strategies – and their precursor and follow-up documents – which the donor community require from post-conflict countries at various stages of their “recovery” process. Often neither an appropriate database nor national expertise is available to prepare such sophisticated documents. The donor community is then tempted to steer such “national” strategies externally and implement them through parallel structures (project implementation units – PIUs). National ownership of such documents is correspondingly low. This is why over the last few years the donor community has developed new procedures and funding instruments for use in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. In German development cooperation these are the rapid response procedure, flexible funds, Development oriented Emergency and Transitional Aid/Transitional Development Assistance and participation in Multi-Donor Trust Funds.

“ There is a need to simplify complicated planning and monitoring systems by focusing on minimum standards for fragile contexts, while maintaining transparency and appropriate partner involvement. ”

Yet even these new instruments are often not appropriate to local circumstances. Due to their complex structure, peace and multi-donor funds for instance require a long establishment phase before the first amounts can be delivered. Moreover, their complicated management structure frequently means that they are unable to respond adequately to dynamic developments in the country concerned and do not attach sufficient priority to politically important measures. For these reasons the international community must continue its efforts to develop simple, flexible and contextually appropriate instruments and procedures that do not overstretch weak partner structures. There is a need to simplify complicated planning and monitoring systems by focusing on minimum standards for fragile contexts, while maintaining transparency and appropriate partner involvement. A further decentralisation of donor organisations

involving a delegation of decision-making authority to the respective country level could also bring progress.

Dealing with risks

The evaluations show that in the past, inappropriate risk management made it more difficult for projects to achieve their objectives. For example, concerns regarding the political and fiduciary risks of development investments in fragile contexts led to considerable delays and obstacles, as well as high volatility, which in turn made development cooperation with fragile states unpredictable. When such criticisms are raised in the media or parliaments, development cooperation is often suspended (sometimes prematurely). Such volatility jeopardises the stability of fragile and conflict-affected countries. The donor community should therefore always analyse political risks before rushing to discontinue financial support.

Many studies are calling for a new culture of risk. This would require political expectations of conflict prevention and peacebuilding to be discussed openly and reduced to a realistic level. The risks associated with fragile contexts must also be communicated appropriately to the bodies that oversee and monitor development cooperation, such as parliament and the media, so that they can form realistic expectations. At the same time, fragile and conflict-affected contexts require long-term visions that extend beyond specific programme indicators, as well as a will to engage in a country for the long-term, despite setbacks. A new culture of risk would also facilitate more confident communication between donors and implementing organisations, who would be less concerned about possible reputational damage, while learning to accept failure and seeking joint solutions to problems.

Accepting risks does not mean turning a blind eye to them; it means actively dealing with them. To date, development cooperation has sought to eliminate any risks using numerous ex-ante instruments. It has focused less on facilitating processes, and has been interested merely in the end results of relevant programmes in fragile contexts. For fragile contexts we now have a significant new approach that involves accepting risks, while at the same time ensuring that rigorous process management creates scope for projects to respond appropriately to risks as soon as they arise.

Focus on implementation

IEG’s evaluation of the World Bank (2013) shows that, contrary to previous assumptions, development measures in fragile and conflict-affected situations can also be highly effective if they are of appropriately “simple” design and receive intensive support. The World Bank calculates that the administrative costs for World Bank projects in fragile contexts are three times the level of costs in other countries to achieve a satisfactory result. Development personnel posted to such locations must deal not only with weak partner structures and difficult living conditions, but also with numerous (cross-cutting) themes and the bureaucratic requirements of their head offices. Here there is an urgent need to lighten workloads in order to free up time and capacities for the key tasks and

needs. A first step might be to simplify relevant administrative processes. A stronger local presence of donors in conjunction with a decentralisation of decision-making powers might also help simplify routine planning and reporting procedures and make them more appropriate to local circumstances.

Many evaluations report on the difficulty of recruiting qualified personnel for challenging assignments in fragile and conflict-affected situations. Furthermore, building relationships of trust, and managing knowledge, are made more difficult by the high rotation of staff both within development organisations and on the partner side. Here we need to find innovative ways of stabilising the personnel situation in fragile contexts.

Reforms

German development cooperation has already begun responding to many of the challenges identified in the recent international debate. The German Government has recognised the opportunities for a coherent peace policy and taken important steps toward improving exchange and cooperation between the federal ministries. As well as the adoption of a whole-of-government strategy for fragile states in September 2012, we

should also mention in particular the increased exchange of personnel and the implementation of planning and coordination activities across the federal ministries. With its new concept “Development for Peace and Security” (2013), the BMZ has placed its conceptual and strategic guidelines on a new footing by merging its cross-sectoral strategy for peacebuilding (2005) with parts of its strategy for transformation under conditions of state fragility (2007). Another positive development is the further decentralisation of BMZ, which the ministry is achieving by assigning more economic cooperation officers.

On the international level, Germany has worked successfully through the International Development Association (IDA) 17 and the African Development Funds (AfDF) 13 replenishment process and by co-chairing the IDA Fragile States Working Group to advocate for a more flexible resource allocation system that will respond to opportunities and turn-around situations in fragile states.

Important steps have thus been taken to improve the effectiveness of conflict prevention and peacebuilding. Nevertheless there are still many challenges to be overcome in this demanding setting.

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Peer review: Making the link between learning and accountability productive



Undine Whande and Nokukhanya Mncwabe

“The peer learning process promises a self-initiated, symmetrical, constructive, mutually beneficial and consultative evaluation. It implies a conscious commitment to recognising the mutual value of all evaluation participants: with the organisation under review contributing as much to the endeavour as the organisation undertaking the review (Mncwabe 2010: 3).”

Introduction

From 2009-2011 the African Transitional Justice Research Network (ATJRN) pioneered a peer learning process in partnership with the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation's Transitional Justice Governance and Accountability in Africa (TJGAA) project. The peer learning or review process was identified by these transitional justice practitioners as a means by which African organisations could share lessons and conduct constructive and critical reviews of each other's work. The motivation was to employ an open-minded and emergent approach to evaluation that created deep learning value as opposed to “measuring success” or finding definite answers. Surfacing relevant questions for the future was the responsibility of both partners: the reviewing and the reviewed. The ATJRN steering committee proposed

piloting a series of rotational review processes among its members, in order to evolve the framework and methodology for peer reviewing further. (Mncwabe: 2010).

However, while significant thought went into the exposition of the rationale, process, framework and methodology of a peer learning process, there was less attention paid to what exactly it is about being “peers” in a learning-with-a-review dimension that we have experienced as particularly fruitful. This paper seeks to address this theme in more depth by explaining what we mean by “peer”; by examining what it is about the particular nature of this relationship that makes it conducive to “learning”; and finally, by seeking to understand what contribution is made by peer learning to the broader accountability that monitoring and evaluation purports to provide.

Rationale for peer reviewing

The peer review intends to provide a holistic evaluation of an organisation from the perspective of a caring but critical collegial eye – a peer. Unlike other impact assessment tools, its main focus is not limited to gauging only the “effectiveness” and “efficiency” of an organisation's work. Neither does it need to be only an accountability measure that is donor-driven. While not without its own dynamics of power, the peer review seeks to take review beyond the classical power relations

between donor and implementation partner – a relationship encapsulated in the proverb “he who pays the piper plays the tune”. In other words, the person who sponsors an activity expects to determine how it should be spent.

The peer review seeks to provide a safe space for critical reflection on the reviewed organisation’s work. It is envisaged that this can occur in a non-threatening manner, to allow for the honest identification of issues brought forth by programme and project processes, followed by conscious deliberation on what can be learned from the observations made. In this way, the peer review lowers the emphasis on performance often present in evaluations that focus on pre-conceived results. However, a peer review does not preclude other approaches: peer reviewing is acknowledged as one of a multitude of monitoring and evaluation tools that can be applied in mutually inclusive ways.

Ideally, the review process is initiated by those wishing to be reviewed. In 2009, two pilot peer reviews were conducted between Uganda and Sierra Leone and between South Africa and Kenya. A Zimbabwe-Kenya Peer Review was the third review in the pilot series, undertaken in 2011. The following reflections capture some of the learning that emerged from these processes, and set out what to be mindful of when undertaking a peer review.

General aims of peer reviewing

- Provide a platform for partner organisations to become familiar with each other’s work, in this case on transitional justice (TJ) or human rights/conflict transformation.
 - Facilitate horizontal learning, strengthening relationships and strategic alliances among partner organisations working in these areas.
 - Make recommendations, based on in-country experiences, on how to improve and deal with identified challenges/gaps of the partner’s initiatives.
 - Adapting the broad objectives to the needs of specific organisations and designing a tailor-made peer review process for each.
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Methodology

Fundamental to the methodology of the peer review, as conceived by the ATJRN and CSVN, is the idea that the review framework is developed with input from all partners involved. Due to its organic nature, evolving in conversation between peers, it is difficult to prescribe how a peer review ought to be conducted. The following, therefore, are key components of the process to consider when designing a peer review process, based on our experience:

1. Partners identify each other and participate in the planning process. There needs to be a decision as to whether the review will be reciprocal (ideal) or one-directional, and the implications need to be discussed. When choosing partners, our experience has been that several factors are critical: there needs to be sufficient knowledge of each other, trust

and respect to inculcate a desire to jointly implement a peer review. While an equal power balance was advanced as ideal, experience has shown that organisations wanting to be reviewed generally chose a reviewing organisation they perceived as more powerful, knowledgeable or established (particularly in the area they want reviewed). Thus, where a power imbalance exists that needs to be acknowledged, and the positive potential it presents needs to be fully embraced for the review to be deemed valuable and meaningful.

2. The reviewed partner defines the Terms of Reference in consultation with the reviewers. Ideally, such preparation takes place in a face-to-face conversation through which the aims and intentions of the review are surfaced and the key questions guiding the review emerge. Terms of Reference are then devised jointly and decisions made about modalities of the review, the people involved and especially who will hold the process from within the reviewed organisation. This custodian maintains the lines of communication with the review team and internally, within their own organisation, and guides the review team during their visit. The reviewed organisation then ideally conducts a process of self-assessment and reflection among staff internally in preparation for the review. This is done with the support of the reviewers (i.e. helping with questions, reading the results together with the custodian, making sense of them together). In the often hierarchical settings of CSOs, this ensures that the questions driving the review really come from those at the heart of implementing the work rather than representing only what leadership wants. The conversation with leaders and managers is equally pertinent for the review to be aligned with other organisational strategy and internal organisational development processes.
3. After the sharing and reading of key documents, there is at least one in-country visit. Sufficient time should be allocated to allow for a discussion with the reviewed partner on how best to fulfil the terms of reference, who to meet (including one-on-one meetings with organisational staff as well as targeted external informants), at which stages joint reflective processes should be convened (and with whom): a minimum is at commencement, mid-review and at the conclusion of the country visit.
4. Reporting needs to be carefully discussed and crafted. In most reviews, there were two reports – a public report with insights and reflections that can be shared widely, often pertaining to the impact in the field and context; and a confidential report that often focused on an organisation’s internal processes and difficulties, which cast “the eye of a caring peer” on related dynamics. Internal dynamics are often central to the success or demise of programmes, yet in many evaluation process they either constitute a part that “cannot be mentioned” in the light of keeping good relations, or – if published – lead to conflict and controversy because implementers may feel exposed, misunderstood and judged by external eyes unfamiliar with their circumstances. It is the quality of trust in the relationship and the sensitivity with which the external peer “lens” is brought to the work that determines the value found in also engaging with delicate or even taboo issues in the reviewed organisation.

5. Finally, there needs to be time to discuss and revise the reports and a final forum where all participants in the peer review exercise can reflect on and share experiences some time after completion.

Feedback and results of reviewed organisations

Reviewed organisations were asked to articulate what they found to be valuable about the peer learning process and to motivate why this was the case:

- The value of having an impartial, trusted, valued and respected peer’s opinion was iterated time and again. This “voice” was allowed to raise difficult questions that an external or unfamiliar external would not have the legitimacy to. Due to established trust, the process of assessment was allowed to run in an unusually open way for many, exposing and engaging vulnerabilities and doubts the organisation was grappling with behind closed doors.
- Participants appreciated the opportunity to “re-connect” to their organisation’s/implementing team’s/individual practitioner’s core purpose and motivation for engaging in their particular field and work.
- The satisfaction of jointly exploring how to enhance the power and strength of interventions that do work, how to adapt those that do not work well at present and understanding why the latter is the case was another common refrain.
- The ability to view the challenges faced and to reflect how the current resource base can be used/expanded/transformed in innovative and creative ways.
- Experiencing a sense of ownership of the review process among staff and leadership that (different to other evaluations experienced as more invasive) allowed for joint guidance of the review process as it emerged.

The fact that the relationship between the reviewer and reviewed predates the process (and the assumption that it would likely persist beyond the review) means that insights unearthed and questions raised have time to “germinate” in conversation. Sometimes a few years down the line, a concrete recommendation has been picked up and brought to fruition, as was the case when the Zimbabwean partners took on some points raised by their Kenyan peers and designed a whole project with a focus on peacebuilding.

What do we mean by “peer”?

An inquiry, with a fellow practitioner, on what it means to be a peer, yielded the following:

Being a peer raises the expectation of a fruitful relationship between persons who are in touch with each other’s purpose and quest. The quests, or ventures, are likely to converge at this moment if we are to recognise each other as peers. Being a peer is more than simply being curious about what the other does; or working in the same field at the same time. Implicit is the notion of a shared sense of commitment to a purpose, which provides peers with the vocabulary to contemplate, discuss and debate the enterprise in question. A longstanding – not necessarily uninterrupted – engagement seems to be an integral component of the peer relationship, characterised by development situated

along a similar point on a continuum (else we have a mentor-mentee relationship). Similarly, and for the same reason, we assume that peers meet one another as equals. Over time, if trust is deepened and the relationship grows with care, peers may evolve into fellows who, having cultivated a bond that has the quality of “going through thick and thin and weathering many storms together”, consciously and more frequently seek each other’s professional counsel.

Being a peer means being able to relate some of my experiences, knowing that I will be understood beyond my words, at a level of comprehension that resides at the base of experience. “I want to speak to my peers”, one of our coachees in this work told us recently, “because they will understand me”. At the core of the longing for peers is the longing to be understood, to be seen fully in what I am trying to achieve with my work in the world. There is an assumption here that such deep understanding may arise from similarity in experience. Being a peer also implies a quality of loyalty to that experience, to its unspoken and perhaps unspeakable dimensions. Being peers is a kind of invisible brother- and sisterhood that reaches beyond the realm of the obvious qualities of friendship. I may not feel friendly towards my peer even, yet I respect their opinion and know that he or she shares something with me that leaves us both less isolated in the intangible dimensions of our experience. It may lead to joining hands and hearts in shared inquiry (which is the benefit of the peer review at a deeper level), a commitment to attend to each other no matter what challenges arise.

“ Being a peer is more than simply being curious about what the other does; or working in the same field at the same time. Implicit is the notion of a shared sense of commitment to a purpose. ”

We have experienced this very acutely in the African Transitional Justice Network. There have been deep struggles in the relationships between the partners on the continent. Sometimes we had the feeling the network was crumbling, never to live again. And yet, from that domain of peer-hood we have witnessed new cycles of productive relating emerging after periods of dormancy. We have managed to live through strong conflict and serious breakdown in relations. Yet, as a continental partnership around human rights and transitional justice, we have continued to find each other again and again through that combination of shared purpose and experience and the commitment to engagement. Despite all irritation, we were compelled to acknowledge that nobody understood us quite like our African peers; nobody could relate so well to why our activism took a particular shape and form. So, in due time, we always found a way to come back together and discovered that the work continued with deepened maturity after a cycle of breakdown and dormancy.

There are some deep learnings here in observing networks and partnerships over time. We may do well to trace the cycles, birth, growth, maturation and decay they go through with a more longitudinal eye. Observing closely may help us step beyond the linear and limiting understanding of “results” delivered in the short-term that dominates our field. It may assist in understanding phenomena of fragmentation and withering not as “failures” but as part of broader developmental cycles, in fact needed for maturation and growth. This may allow us to evolve a finer, more nuanced reading of developmental processes involving human relationships. And it may urge us to step beyond wanting to “engineer life processes” in social situations, which leads to excess control and often stops the unfolding of relationships over time.

What do we mean by “learning”?

In 2012, we undertook an inquiry in our organisation, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, which asked of staff: where and when am I happiest to learn? This is what we discovered: “We are happiest to learn when in an environment free of judgement” – “When I am liberated from another person thinking: it must be so, this way no other” – “I feel happiest when I am safe and held in goodwill by my elders and my peers” – “I am happy when someone shares with me, and listens to me in a spirit of inquiry, with no pre-conceived answers, coming from a place of curiosity” – “curiosity of another gives me the courage to speak out about what I really feel, and only then can I learn, it gives me wings” – “I need a still space to learn, where the learning already lodged in me through my experience can rise to the surface”.

We learned that part of learning happens when the focus on a particular set of outcomes is abandoned, while broader intentions and purpose are firmly retained. This allows for a balance between the creativity of imagination and the discipline inherent in the pursuit of a goal. We also discovered that there is an organic process to the gestation of ideas. Peers are able to discern from experience what maturity level an idea has reached and what needs to be done to support its coming into being – whether it is a dreaming space that is needed (pure encouragement) or some sternly discerning advice on what is missing or faulty (push into being) or the enthusiasm of making concrete (realisation, manifestation). We learned that such learning is not linear or predictable, even at the level of experience – today I love my peer, tomorrow I hate my peer, the next day I appreciate my peer again. Such learning always has an edge moment, and peers can be a critical support in mining the experience of that edge, in having both feet on the ground when looking over the edge and daring to test the space beyond my own inner edge. The edge or “hinge moment” of learning often requires casting aside of something old, familiar, perhaps comfortable. This can be a deeply unsettling process because it calls one to step into an unknown realm and role unsupported by the lofty mantle of “expertise”.

We know how much organisations also resist change from externals deemed too distant from the real-lived experience of members. But organisations also resist change from within. Wisdom often resides at the lower levels of the

hierarchy but cannot be heard or received due to inflexible structures of power. From my external peers I may be better able to accept when painful truths are spoken, for I know that they are not above that very same pain. I can deal with the sting among fellows, learn from it even when it hurts and I am unhappy in the moment. The release of what no longer serves me is facilitated by peers, allows the coming home of new insights, even painful ones.

With peers in a learning moment, there is often some inventing of a new language that takes place. I can find words for experiences previously “un-languaged” and through that something new arises – a new impulse takes form, an idea is shaped and intentions are set. This requires a particular relationship with time as well as permission to work in iterative ways. One colleague framed it thus: “I learn best in an environment where the words “a waste of time” cease to exist. I need to be able to go with you into the land of wonderment and dwell there for a bit. Our current world and way of working allows very little of this kind of imaginative time and way of being.”

Another quality that enhances the learning process centres on a sense of “enough-ness”, on being in an environment where, with all my flaws and imperfections, I am “good enough”. Peers working in the field of human rights, where judging right from wrong is a key paradigm, understand this well. In such a learning space, peers can gift each other with a profound sense of worth, of being worthy in this work and worthy to do this work. It is little known, for instance, how much guilt, shame and doubt rests with human rights workers who are exposed to intense human suffering day after day about “what entitles me to do this work and to earn a living from it when others are suffering (even if I am in a job that seeks to alleviate that same suffering)”? There is no measure of success to be set against the immensity of suffering and pain.

“ We have learned that places of stillness and quietude are necessary. Sadly, facilitating the establishment of such still places and spaces is often deemed unnecessary or an extravagance by both implementers and funders. ”

In the world of moral quests, it is very liberating to momentarily free oneself from the enormous pressures of expectation of achievement and allow for imperfection, emotion and messy realities – to admit to working with real people and real feelings. For this, we have learned that places of stillness and quietude are necessary. Sadly, facilitating the establishment of such still places and spaces is often deemed unnecessary or an extravagance by both implementers and funders. It looks like “doing nothing” in a world that values “doing” over “being”. Yet stillness is needed to recognise achievements and to discern how one arrived at them.

Stillness is needed to face challenges, and to distinguish fears from facts. We observe this combination of peer space and stillness as particularly fruitful as we meet a world stuck in frightful acceleration where all is about “effectiveness” and “efficiency”. Which takes us straight to the heart of the debate on monitoring and evaluation: when we adhere only to those two paradigms, effect and efficiency, we limit ourselves to the realm of the tangible, measurable. This poses no challenge with respect to simple, linear and predictable phenomena (x bags of maize delivered). However, social phenomena are complex, unpredictable and non-linear (how many people “healed”?). Therefore, to expect that they can be reduced to concrete measures is to persist in attempting to fit square pegs in round holes. Furthermore, it serves only to edit out the world of dreaming, imagination and intangibles of experience that shapes so much of our lived reality. In the peer review process we have attempted to work with story and narrative in ways that allow for both tangible results and less obvious evolutions to be discerned.

Conclusion

It is our contention that learning occurs more readily in an environment free from negative judgement. It happens when

there is no prescription about how learning ought to happen, when preconceived notions are absent, when one is free to commit mistakes and to rectify them without penalty. Learning evolves where silent spaces, solitude and reflection are encouraged, not frowned upon. It seems to us self-evident that people and organisations are more inclined to honestly confront their realities and the challenges thereof in the company of those most capable of empathising with them and their circumstance. Peers are well equipped to articulate the hard truths we need to hear in order to acquire, adjust or discard the attitudes, behaviours and beliefs which might be hindering progress and to seek the learning modes and skills that could further advance our organisations.

The peer learning system pioneered by the African Transitional Justice Research Network and Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation seeks to complement the dominant development monitoring and evaluation paradigm, which places a premium on upward financial accountability and seeks to discern the value derived from each unit of aid. The peer review system also seeks to strengthen the productivity and efficiency of practitioners and organisations that address transitional justice, post-conflict issues but it puts first the dimensions of human relating and sharing real-lived experiences.

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The authors would like to thank Dominique Dix-Peek, M&E Coordinator and Researcher, Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation who has been supporting their work.

Grasping changes in complex systems

HEKS's experiences in working with complexity



Una Hombrecher

The evolution of the HEKS change assessment system

In the year 2010 HEKS embarked on a process towards exploring the complexity of its work environments. Aside from the repeatedly discussed growing pressures to prove results and accountability, this journey of exploration was triggered by the recurrent experiences of unpredictability, as well as the need for reorganisation experienced in everyday project life. All too often, project staff found themselves in unexpected situations, as dynamics developed differently from initial expectations due to both external influences and/or unintended side effects. In such cases flexibility was required. Traditional approaches do not seem to cater to the fragile contexts in which HEKS predominantly works and may cause unintended side effects.

Furthermore, the process of mainstreaming the human rights-based approach into development projects demonstrated the growing necessity for continuous context analysis and thorough monitoring systems, in order to recognise windows of opportunity and cope with fast-changing environments.

The initial phase of the process was driven by the aim to visualise in a single chart the environment in which HEKS as an international organisation operates with its inputs, outputs, outcomes and impacts. While the first diagrams

resembled triangles which were found to be too static, not even cycles seemed to be adequate for representing the complexity of reality.

Finally, it was the study of living systems which inspired the basis for the new Change Assessment System.

Complex living systems

Observing nature, science has witnessed that complex living systems are continuously adapting to their environment in a way that remains largely unpredictable. When confronted with new information, complex adaptive systems may go through chaotic stages before reorganising themselves in a different way. During this process of reorganisation, however, they maintain a high level of order through a strong sense of purpose, identity and self-organisation governed by a few simple rules. It is for example assumed that flocking birds are driven by three basic rules: separation - avoid crowding neighbours, alignment - steer towards the average heading of neighbours, and cohesion - steer towards the average position of neighbours. With these three simple rules, the flock moves in an extremely coordinated fashion, creating complex motion and interaction that would be extremely hard to achieve otherwise. This can only be observed when focusing on the relationship between the parts of the system and not merely on the parts themselves. The challenge, therefore, is to acquire an understanding of the whole rather

than of single elements. Existing as they do in a continuous flow with their environment, adaptive systems may not be grasped through isolated incidental or exhaustive data. Instead they reveal themselves in shapes and patterns, rather than in facts and figures.

Conditions for change assessments

The challenging perspectives outlined above imply a different understanding of cause and effect. Connected to their environment, living systems do not react to a single chain of command, but to a web of influences. Information or disturbances may be amplified and fed back into the system, creating a reaction exceeding the scope of the initial input. Activities in one part of the whole create effects that appear at distant places. Life does not follow a linear path; we are instead living in a spiralling world. Explorations into complexity among country offices and international division staff have led to a new view of HEKS endeavours and acknowledge the following:

- By working with communities and partner organisations, HEKS is intervening in complex living systems.
- Through its involvement, HEKS becomes part of each living system in which its projects are implemented. Projects, as individual influence factors among many others, instigate processes which are intended to influence systems and make them move in a direction which fosters the establishment of just structures and sustainable livelihoods. HEKS and its partner organisations influence the system and are in return shaped by this system and its environment.
- HEKS's projects do not trigger mechanical consequences in the living systems with which it interacts. In such systems everything is connected and interrelated. The projects cause the living systems to move and react – in most cases in unpredictable ways. Projects might have to go through chaotic phases before order appears. As a consequence, HEKS cannot objectively trace the effects of its actions, but can make its intentions, its inputs and observations transparent.
- Log frames and impact chains are not best suited to capture the evolution of living systems. Log frames are useful for conceptualising programmes or projects in a structured manner; they provide a summary of important elements; they keep track of outputs and simple outcomes, but the simplification and the assumption of a linear progression do not reflect the reality of development interventions aiming at societal transformation (Hummelbrunner 2010).
- “Systems create pathways, communication flows, causal loops – but these defy all attempts to understand them with any precision. No matter how well we name, count, or note individuals and events, we don't get much useful information. Our skills in drawing, separating, and defining are more diversionary than explanatory when dealing with living systems” (Weathley/Kellner Rogers 1996: 79).
- External factors are at play in addition to interventions by HEKS programmes (changing external environment, economic factors, social trends, etc.). The influence of HEKS projects has its limitations. Although HEKS aims to address systems in a holistic manner, the scope of influence in a

globalised world is limited. Thus, the desired changes are beyond the direct influence of HEKS. HEKS can only demonstrate its progress towards change and its endeavours to improve results orientation.

In the process of elaborating a context-adapted change assessment system, HEKS also aims to link impact assessment from a project to a programme level to the impacts of the organisation as a whole. The idea is to improve our learning from the practical experience of HEKS endeavours, which allows us to identify patterns which again support a process of identifying promising practises and facilitate a more context oriented organisational strategy development.

Most significant change theory as a tool to enhance learning in complex systems

Another question accompanying the discussion on how to best monitor project output, outcomes and impact as well as learn from experiences was: Who defines what success means? Thus, an open assessment of the judgement of changes from the perspective of the people of our concern appears to be the best starting point. Inspired by the Most Significant Change Technique (MSC), an assessment strategy linking the individual to the project and programme level as well as to the international department level has been developed.

The collection of significant changes through storytelling and systematic analysis of this at different organisational levels and by different stakeholders can be identified as the core of the approach.

Individual interviews and panel discussions are to reveal the influence of HEKS's efforts at project level. The collection of stories for elaborating annual reports at HEKS country level offices is guided by the same questions. Finally, the third level – where MSC are analysed and patterns identified – is the annual synthesis workshop at the international department level.

The processes described frame the learning process which identifies patterns within complex dynamics as well as markers of successes. “MSC does not use pre-defined indicators, especially those that have to be counted or measured” (Davies/Dart 2005: 8). The MSC tool rather investigates the changes experienced beyond the narrow frame of planned projects and programmes in individuals' lives, which are all too often not reflected in the usual implementation reports. The MSC is therefore a useful addition to the regular monitoring frameworks and helps to better capture unforeseen consequences, external influence factors or relevant contextual information. MSC is thus a participatory monitoring and evaluation tool, as it occurs throughout the programme cycle and provides information to help people to manage the programme. It contributes to evaluation as it provides data on impact and outcomes that can be used to help assess the performance of the programme as a whole (Davies/Dart 2005).

Here HEKS consciously adopts a self-evaluation approach to assess changes instigated by its partners and projects.

Primarily the aim is to improve the awareness and intelligence of HEKS as an organisation in order to optimise its working methods and approaches, rather than to rigorously demonstrate its results. It enables the organisation to assess to what extent its endeavours have allowed HEKS to advance on the way to reaching its objectives.

Social sustainability

Examples of key observations

Social inclusion of vulnerable and discriminated groups	Participation in meetings, knowledge about rights, access to mainstream education, access to paid employment, access to governmental programmes, representation on management and legislative levels.
Degree of fulfilment of rights	Access to land, access to water, access to education, right to property for all, dignity for all, freedom of expression, gender equality, absence of violence and fear, human security, protection against HR violations.
Strengthening of civil society	Establishment of institutions and linkages, interaction with next higher political / administrative level, involvement in decision making, strengthening institutions (CBOs, women groups) public discourse and policy development, good governance in CBOs, less corruption.

Applying the MSC technique, HEKS is focusing on the changes observed and experienced by the different stakeholders involved. The focus lies more on the meaning (or quality) than on the quantification of changes for the people experiencing them. Here HEKS takes a complementary path to strict measurement and hard data collection. Its aim is to capture and understand the evolution of purpose, identity and dynamics that hold and drive the systems - projects supported by HEKS in the frame of country programmes - rather than to measure their ever changing dimensions. According to HEKS, two focal themes – development of rural communities and conflict transformation – have been defined as specific fields of observation. After an open question which aims to grasp the unforeseen and unintended with beyond-the-project logic, the story-telling process and future analysis focus on defining fields of observation. The domains of change can be subdivided into economic, social and environmental sustainability. See the examples in the upper box for the field of social sustainability which captures processes relevant for conflict transformation.

Assessment procedure

1. Ask for the biggest (negative or positive) change a person or group has experienced in recent life.

2. Explore the meaning and the consequences of that change for the people concerned.
3. Investigate what things did not change but should have, i.e. what is missing in order to experience more positive changes.
4. Finally, work out how project management and implementers have reacted to the changes mentioned:
 - a. At the project level differences of perspectives are revealed as staff’s observations are compared with those of people of our concern.
 - b. At the international department level, findings of different countries and continents are compared and similarities and finally patterns are identified.

First experiences, changes, achievements and challenges

HEKS introduced the MSC techniques three years ago. It is still too early to come forward with reliable conclusions. However, the following reflections might give some hints on how the process has inspired and supported a learning process towards result orientation.

MSC interviews and discussions enhanced insights into different points of views and perspectives. The methodology, which provides space for an open reflection beyond figures and narrow project logics, seems to reveal things which would never have been mentioned otherwise. The importance of such insights might vary. In any case, the method supports a better understanding of different perspectives of values which drive the spirit and actions of the different actors involved. A very positive development observed is the sentiment of right holders who have been part of the group discussions and storytelling endeavours. The process has contributed to increased downward accountability and at the same time has empowered people of our concern, as they feel that “their opinion matters”. Thus, the MSC technique can be seen as an excellent supplement to rights-based programming.

In general, the reflections on complexity as well as the MSC process itself have resulted in an increased awareness of the role of societal change. The awareness of project staff that they are an actor with own values and thus part of the system has increased considerably during recent years. Furthermore, the systematic reflection of similar questions throughout the whole international division on different levels has greatly supported mutual learning as well as strategic development. The complexity of the systems is no longer ignored. Project progress is no longer expected to be a linear process. Thus, it seems easier to cope with chaos as it can be seen as a current stage and natural process towards development into the right direction. Such thinking increases adaptability to the unexpected, as it allows solutions to emerge better.

However, the list of challenges and pitfalls is still long:

- The MSC is usually seen as a simple technique which can be used in all contexts. Still, some country offices found the approach too theoretical and people said they found it difficult to reflect on changes. Guidelines have not always been understood easily. As a consequence a number of interviews did not focus on change.

- The definition of the fields of observation is difficult for some practitioners. After an open introduction, discussions are to be guided towards distinct domains of change. These are to be related to project aims, but must be open enough to stay out of the project box. More training of staff seems necessary to exhaust the full potential of the MSC interviews.
- The project logic, which still follows a log frame approach, is not in line with the change assessment system. It appears to be tricky to harmonise or isolate these different bases of thinking.
- The pressure for facts, visible and quantifiable data required by different back donors remains strong and hampers greater investment in reflecting on qualitative

data – although the initial response from back donors has been rather positive.

The analysis and interpretation of data still require some considerable work. The process of identifying patterns could be improved by an additional loop which better integrates country staff and maybe even people of our concern. So far the return flow of lessons learned is still difficult to identify and probably needs some more attention. At the current stage the main challenge is to exploit and interpret the material gathered in order to capture new patterns as well as milestones and indicators.

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The impacts of aid in a conflict zone

Some lessons from a multi-year project



Translation of the mural: „Water will be back to some dry river, but what about the dead fish?“

Christoph Zürcher

Learning – why and how?

Learning what works and what does not in zones of conflict and fragility is important. In order to facilitate meaningful change, aid organisations need to understand which interventions are effective, efficient and relevant. Furthermore, aid organisations are increasingly under pressure to demonstrate their impacts to donors, to domestic constituencies, and to the beneficiaries. Learning what works is, however, a daunting task. In this paper, we describe some lessons from a multi-year evaluation in North East Afghanistan. The evaluation was conducted as a cooperative project between the evaluation unit of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Freie Universität Berlin and the University of Ottawa (lead researchers were Christoph Zürcher, University of Ottawa, Jan Böhnke, University of York, and Jan Koehler, Freie Universität Berlin).

The project was initiated in 2006 and was very much intended to be a pilot project. Its main objective was to develop and to test a method that would allow overcoming some of the many challenges involved in measuring the impacts of aid in zones of conflict and fragility. The challenges were considerable, and the learning curve was steep. In this paper, we briefly present selected findings from this multi-year research project (BMZ 2014 forthcoming).

We will briefly report on three issues: First, we summarise some of the emerging findings with regard to the causal impact of aid. Secondly, we describe some trends that we observed during the research in North East Afghanistan. For policy makers, such trend reports are often as valuable as the final results of an impact evaluation, because trends shed light on what is happening on the ground, and allow policy makers to adjust programs when needed. Thirdly, we present some lessons regarding the organisational setup and implementation of such complex research processes. Interested readers will find more details on all of these aspects in previous publications (References and further reading).

Data

The by far biggest challenge for any impact evaluation is the lack of data. Impact evaluations are incredibly “data hungry”: Researchers need a lot of fine grained data in order to construct independent variables (what causes the impact – in this case: aid), dependent variables (the hypothesised impacts of aid – in this case, security, sub-regional governance, attitudes towards international actors and attitudes towards Afghan governmental actors) and control variables (all other factors which may influence the impacts we are interested in). The following table gives an overview of the main variables for which data was needed.

Important variables

<i>Independent variable</i>	<i>Important control variables</i>	<i>Dependent variables</i>
Aid: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of projects • Perceived aid for the household (food aid, training or advice, salary, rents) • Perceived aid for the community (food aid, training/advice/capacity building, schooling projects, roads and bridges, projects aimed at creating jobs, agricultural extension services, drinking water, irrigation, electrification/power) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnicity • Material well-being (household level) • Location of village • Vulnerability of village 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitudes towards development actors • Attitudes towards military actors • Perceived threats from violent actors • Perceived responsiveness of sub-national government

Since this data was scarce or non-existent in Afghanistan, we had to collect it ourselves. Our data was collected by four surveys in spring 2007, 2009, 2011 and 2013. The surveys were implemented by the Organisation for Sustainable Development and Research (OSDR), formerly COAR (Coordination of Afghan Relief). Since the team conducted interviews with official permission from village elders, response rates were very high in all four waves (90% or higher). Interviews were conducted in 77 villages in 2007 (2043 respondents), 79 in 2009 (2132 respondents), 120 in 2011 (3041 respondents) and 113 in 2013 (2986 respondents). The communities involved are located in six districts in North East Afghanistan: Imam Sahib, Aliabad, Warsaj, Taloqan, Yaftal and Jurm within the provinces of Kunduz, Takhar, and Badakhshan. (Badakhshan – districts of Yaftal and Jurm – was added only in 2011 at the request of BMZ).

The surveys were designed to generate data on objective indicators of development cooperation and local capacities. We also asked subjective questions on, for example, the perceptions of the respondents on topics such as the coverage and usefulness of development projects and the perception of everyday security.

Furthermore, 311 guideline interviews were conducted in all communities between September 2012 and March 2013.

The data from the surveys was then analysed, using statistical methods (mainly regression analysis). Emerging findings from the quantitative analysis were cross-checked using qualitative data from the interviews. Qualitative data also helped to interpret and “to make sense” of the findings.

Measuring Aid

We measured the independent variable “Aid” in three ways:

- 1) *Number of Projects* is based on the number of projects that a community received. Information on aid projects was collected from various aid organisations and through open interviews in the communities.
- 2) *Household Aid*, captures whether individual households (in contrast to the overall community), indicated a direct benefit from household-level development projects.
- 3) *Perceived Community Aid*, seeks to capture the type and the utility of aid to the community according to the respondents’ perceptions. This is a dichotomous variable taking the value “0” when respondents thought that their community had benefitted from few aid projects across few sectors, and “1” otherwise.

(Böhnke et al 2013)

The causal impacts of aid

We now briefly summarise four of our results regarding the causal impacts of aid:

- Firstly, development aid has a positive impact on how respondents perceive the responsiveness of subnational governance. We find that aid correlates positively with a higher perceived responsiveness of the sub-national administration. Working with and through sub-national governance structures is therefore a rewarding strategy.
- Secondly, only under certain benign conditions - most importantly when security levels are relatively high - does development aid have a positive impact on attitudes towards development actors.
- Thirdly, development aid appears to have no impact on attitudes towards military forces. We could find no support for “hearts and minds” mechanisms. Also, aid per se does not seem to contribute to better (perceived) security. Allocating aid to insecure regions may therefore not be a rewarding investment, since it appears unlikely that aid alone can “turn around” a negative security situation.
- Finally, we find that attitudes towards Western actors and towards the subnational administration are to a large extent dependent on the local political economy. Both our

qualitative observations and our statistical models clearly point to the importance of politics at district level.

Trends

As mentioned earlier, our data can also be used to describe some interesting trends in North East Afghanistan. In the following we will present four of these trends:

- Firstly, perceived security in 2013 is much lower than it was in 2007. Security perceptions deteriorated most between 2009 and 2011 in reaction to the cycles of insurgent-counterinsurgent violence that took place in many parts of North East Afghanistan. Between 2011 and 2013, we observe a modest improvement in overall security perceptions. Indeed, respondents in 2013 are a somewhat less pessimistic about the overall security situation in Afghanistan. Respondents also believe their communities are more secure than in 2011. Nevertheless, in 2013 more responders than ever felt threatened by the Taliban. 76.1% of those surveyed were “very afraid” or “somewhat afraid” (up from 48.6% in 2011).
- Secondly, development aid continues to reach beneficiaries. Even in 2009 and 2011 (when the security situation was at its worst), aid continued to flow. By 2013, aid flows had again recovered and were at levels similar to those in 2009. Respondents consistently credit development actors with increased access to basic services. This indicates that the local population appreciates the efforts of development organisations. Until 2009, Afghans said that it was mainly development actors who helped to improve access to basic services and infrastructures. In 2011 and 2013, Afghans also frequently credit their government with improved access to basic services.
- Thirdly, the economic situation of households has overall improved between 2007 and 2013. However, there was a sharp deterioration between 2007 and 2009, very possibly related to bad weather and global food prices. Households have since recovered from this dip, and their economic situation is now moderately better than in 2007.
- Finally, we find that the sub-national administration is increasingly perceived by Afghans to look after local needs and to become more responsive. But progress is slow and started from a low base. Despite the overall positive trend, we find that assessments are different across districts and very volatile. Even though all districts are better off in 2013 than in 2007, we note that Taloqan, Warsaj and Jurm are seen as less responsive in 2013 than they were in 2011. One explanation for this is that in all three districts, responsive and capable heads of administration were replaced. This indicates that “responsiveness” is still very much a function of what kind of immediate benefits (services, goods or privileges) the sub-national administration is able to provide, and not so much related to long-term gains in mutual trust and legitimacy.

Organising and implementing complex impact evaluations

A final set of lessons refers to the organisational set-up of such complex evaluations.

Logistics

First of all, the various logistical difficulties of such a project cannot be stressed enough. Difficulties with regard to transportation, communication and security were to be expected. Other challenges arose unexpectedly. For example, we were surprised to learn that large parts of rural Afghanistan are literally uncharted territory: Many villages had no univocal official name, or various names were used for the same village. Maps were rare and not up-to-date; administrative borders were not yet in place, or constantly being redrawn. We also found that demographic and other basic statistical data is hardly available in Afghanistan. All of this makes conducting surveys difficult. In logistically less challenging countries, researchers typically develop a questionnaire and experienced local enumerators then conduct the survey, making sure that the sample is representative for the chosen unit. In a country like Afghanistan (and we assume that this is the case for many poor developing countries in or after war), researchers have to establish the basic data on their own (for example, village lists and population figures) before they can devise their own sampling strategy. We ended up preparing own maps (based on Soviet maps) and widely using GPS to locate our communities. While this is certainly possible, it is also time consuming. Researchers preparing an impact assessment in such regions are well advised to plan for a substantial preparation period, and to anticipate that most of the needed data must be collected on the ground.

Aid data

Establishing the impacts of aid requires reliable and disaggregated data on aid flows. Such data is very rarely available. We continue to dream about accurate, geo-referenced aid data that can be used to track aid flows to province, district and community level. Such data was not available when we started to work on the project in 2007. However, over the last few years, aid organisations have made major investments in collecting more accurate data and making these data available. Fine examples of these efforts are DFIDs Development Tracker, Sida’s Openaid, or the Aid Management Platforms in Malawai and Nepal. Much of this truly breathtaking progress comes from initiatives that combine political pressure with technological innovation and the campaigning for standards. Important examples are the International Aid Transparency Initiative IATI, Aiddata, or Publish What You Fund. Currently, the BMZ is working on a relaunch of his Tracking System in Afghanistan. The new system will be able to provide geocoded, disaggregated aid data in IATI standard. This major innovation is one result of the here-described evolution. With better aid data soon becoming a reality, the prospects for impact evaluations are better than ever.

Skills and methods

In our experience, it is vital that the evaluation team is comfortable using both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to combine advanced statistical methods and fieldwork on the ground. One of the most challenging but also rewarding tasks in the framework of a multi-method evaluation is the organisation of on ongoing dialogue and

Aid data

Aid Management Platform Malawi

<http://malawiaid.finance.gov.mw/>

Aid Management Platform Nepal

<http://portal.mof.gov.np/>

Aiddata <http://aiddata.org/>

DFID Development Tracker

<http://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/>

International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)

<http://www.aidtransparency.net/>

Publish What You Fund

<http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/>

SIDA Openaid <http://www.openaid.se/en/>

exchange between statistical results and evidence from qualitative data, such as interviews and observations in the field. Such a dialogue needs to take place from the first project design to the final analysis: Knowledge about local understanding for certain concepts has to be taken into consideration when developing the survey tools; results from surveys need to be interpreted in the light of local context, and perhaps local idiosyncratic events.

Concepts

Another lesson is that researchers should not underestimate the many conceptual difficulties involved in impact assessments. It is not only difficult to gather data on the key variables

“aid” and security, it is often also a conceptual problem to define measurement for these variables. Above, we have briefly described how we constructed measurements for aid. Aid is not the only difficult concept, of course. Other concepts are no less difficult to define and measure. We could easily write lengthy academic papers on the many challenges involved in defining good measures for concepts such as security, material household resources, or positive attitudes. Finding valid measures is a time consuming activity that is best done in workshops with both statisticians and regional experts.

Cooperation between researchers and development practitioners

As described above, this impact assessment was a cooperation between independent researchers and the evaluation unit of the Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. We think that such an organisational set-up has some advantages. Getting access to data and receiving logistic support for conducting fieldwork in difficult regions can be an incentive for researchers. As a result, they bring in their methodological skills and considerable amounts of research time. But, in order to make such cooperation effective, it is important that researchers are quite familiar with the inner workings of the development organisation and with the history and scope of the programs. This requires much learning, and the cooperation should therefore be long-term. Furthermore, it is important that there is a constant exchange of information between researchers and development practitioners. For organisational learning, frequent exchanges matter perhaps more than a lengthy final report. Finally, researchers-consultants should learn to present information in other ways than only in often highly technical and voluminous papers.

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FriEnt is a working group of:

Bread for the World – Protestant Development Service
Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES)
Heinrich-Böll-Foundation (hbs)
Misereor/Catholic Central Agency for Development Aid
Civil Peace Service Group (CPS)
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