

# Development Assistance and Peace Building Projects in Conflict Areas: Background, Tools, Lessons Learned, and Challenges Ahead

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**H**ow does development assistance contribute to peace building? Do projects consider the local conflict settings and are they designed accordingly, or do they – unintentionally – prolong or even reinforce conflicts? And what contributions can peace building projects such as dialogue programs, youth encounters or peace journalism make to peace and reconciliation processes? How do we measure the increase in trust, tolerance or readiness to enter into dialogue? In view of growing international involvement in post-conflict societies at the beginning of the last decade, these questions have become increasingly important for aid agencies and peace building organizations. Thus government institutions as well as NGOs have begun to further develop their planning and management tools in order to assist peace and conflict sensitive approaches to development and peace building in conflict-prone situations. After all, programs and projects have had to be adjusted to the difficult and ever-changing context of violent conflicts and post-war societies. The evaluation of these measures, too, presented new challenges for organizations: how can the results and long-term impacts of work in complex peace processes, that are often subject to setbacks, be measured; how can the experiences be processed and utilized for future activities? As the international debate on civilian peace building has developed, aid agencies and peace building organizations have on the one hand moved closer to one another, while on the other hand, they have faced different questions and challenges in adjusting and developing their tools. This paper will outline the background and the different strands of discussions, the development of evaluation tools and methods, experiences in applying those tools, and the challenges ahead.

## Background

The international debate on civilian peace building started at the beginning of the 1990s (see, for example, Buthros Ghali 1992). Faced with political changes in Eastern- and Southern Europe and Africa, and confronted with a rising number of internal wars, multilateral organizations, bilateral donors and NGOs became increasingly involved in democratization and peace building processes. More or less simultaneously it was recognized that peace cannot be built only by signing peace agreements at the highest political level, but that the society as a whole – economy, academia and education, religious communities, foundations, media and NGOs – had to be involved in the peace process. Thus, strengthening diverse networks of individuals and institutions, which constitutes a »bottom-up« approach to peaceful conflict transformation, became an important goal. The concepts of »multi-track diplomacy« and »building peace constituencies« (see, for example, Dimond and McDonald 1993; Lederach 1997) reflect these ideas and have led to a marked appreciation of the role of NGOs in supporting peace processes.<sup>1</sup>

While in the course of these developments peace building organizations, too, became increasingly active in conflict areas and post-war societies, development agencies initiated a rethink. This was mainly caused by the fact that decades of development processes were destroyed by violent conflicts in a short period of time. The genocide in Rwanda, a former model country of international development cooperation, was traumatic and triggered a debate both on how development cooperation can make a meaningful contribution to the prevention of violent conflicts and on the appropriate measures to be taken to support a peace process. In addition, aid agencies became more aware of the fact that the impacts of development assistance and humanitarian aid in the context of violent conflicts are not always positive. In fact, different experiences such as being forced to pay »taxes« to local warlords or the reorganization of Hutu militia in refugee camps set up by international aid agencies in Congo showed that aid can exacerbate or prolong conflicts. To avoid this, humanitarian aid and development agencies started to adapt and further develop their planning and management tools.

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1. Duffield 1998 presents a critical reflection on the role of NGOs in conflict areas, and points to the »privatization of diplomacy« in this context.

## Developing New Tools

One of the first steps taken towards elaborating new instruments was the so-called »Do-No-Harm/Local-Capacities-for-Peace«-project of the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA), which began in 1994. The outcomes had a marked influence on the debate and the further development of tools. Using a simple analysis matrix, relief and development organizations can identify the peace and conflict potential of their proposed project and plan and implement their work accordingly. The matrix differentiates between dividing (»divider«) and connecting (»connector«, »local capacities for peace«) factors in a given conflict setting. According to this pattern, institutions, networks and stakeholders, as well as their values, experiences and interests are analyzed. An important question in this respect is whether an aid organization either directly or indirectly supports local power structures, or excludes certain groups of society through distributing resources (see Anderson 1996).

Shortly afterwards, institutions such as the International Development Research Centre (Bush 1998), the British Department for International Development (DFID/Warner 1999) and the Canadian International Development Agency (Laprise 1998) started to develop analytical methods using conflict analysis matrixes applied in political early warning systems (see, for example, Versteegen 1999; Goor and Versteegen 1999; FEWER 1999). The aim was to incorporate the analysis of peace and conflict related questions and issues into the entire project management cycle. In this way, intended and unintended, positive and negative results of a given project ought to be assessed early on in order to enhance its peace and conflict sensitive implementation. These methods became known by the terms »Conflict Impact Assessment« (CIA) and »Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment« (PCIA).<sup>2</sup> Although the different methods vary in their complexity and practical applicability, the analysis of core dimensions of a conflict setting is common to all of them. This concerns the historical background, questions regarding political, economic and social structures and processes, as well as the different positions of the conflict parties concerned. Conflict dynamics and stages, structural causes and core problems are also examined. Several organizations have now developed different practical tools to assess these aspects (see, for example,

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2. Leonhardt 2000 provides an excellent review of the different methods and tools.

Fisher et al. 2000; Nyheim, Leonhardt and Gaigals 2001; FEWER et al. 2004).

In the meantime, Do-No-Harm has been tested in the field and governmental institutions as well as NGOs have incorporated it into their planning procedures (see, for example, Anderson 2000; Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation 2004). Furthermore, International Alert in cooperation with other organizations has carried out pilot projects on PCIA in Kenya, Guatemala, Uganda and Sri Lanka (see Leonhardt et al. 2002; Conflict Sensitivity.org). Here, particular attention was paid to the strengthening of local stakeholders in the planning and strategic development of their work. Although the questions and analysis patterns obtained within the framework of Do-No-Harm and PCIA can be easily integrated into an evaluation, it must be noted that neither approach contains a specific method for impact assessment, as they were mainly conceived for planning and monitoring processes and put into practice for that purpose. On the other hand, the evaluations conducted in the mid 1990s rarely include Do-No-Harm questions, and the interrelation between a project and its conflict context remains rather vague. Often, clear and precise criteria for impact evaluation are missing, and one could find only implicit reference to standardized criteria<sup>3</sup> and related questions elaborated by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development/Development Assistance Committee (OECD/DAC) (Spencer 1998: 14ff).<sup>4</sup>

By the turn of the millennium, however, tools and methods for assessing relief aid and development assistance in conflict settings were increasingly being discussed. In 1999, the OECD presented guidelines for evaluating humanitarian assistance in complex emergencies. The guidelines

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3. Standardized criteria for the evaluation of development assistance have been developed by OECD/DAC. They are: efficiency (measures outputs – qualitative and quantitative – in relation to inputs), effectiveness (measures the extent to which an aid activity attains its objectives), relevance (measures the extent to which the aid activity is suited to the priorities and policies of the target group, recipient and donor), impact (measures the positive and negative changes produced by a development intervention, directly or indirectly, intended or unintended), sustainability (measures whether the benefits of an activity are likely to continue after donor funding has been withdrawn) (see OECD/DAC 1991).
  4. Spencer provides an excellent and critical synthesis of 15 evaluations of humanitarian aid and peace building projects, the evaluation methods applied and their shortcomings.

conform to standard evaluation guidelines and specifically consider challenges to the evaluation process in conflict situations (see OECD/DAC 1999). Two years later, the »Reflection on Peace Practice« (RPP)-project of the CDA (see Anderson and Olson 2003), amongst others, raised the question of which criteria should be used to assess the »peace efficiency« of the work of development agencies and peace building organizations. Here, it focused on the major challenge for many organizations, which was to assess the impact of a project not just in the immediate project surroundings (micro level), but within the larger context (macro level, »peace writ large«). According to the results of the RPP process, a project is »peace efficient« when it »[1] causes participants and communities to develop their own initiatives for peace, (...) [2] results in the creation or reform of political institutions to handle grievances that fuel the conflict, (...) [3] prompts people increasingly to resist violence and provocations to violence, and (...) [4] results in an increase in people's security« (Anderson and Olson 2003: 16ff).

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The different strands of discussions on evaluation methods exemplify the fact that, although the international debate on civilian peace building has allowed for development agencies and peace building organizations to draw closer, the steady and systematic exchange of experiences and the integration of respective lessons learned, strategic approaches and methods into their work remain limited.

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At this point, peace building and conflict resolution organizations started to increasingly discuss assessment methods for peace building projects. While the open debate on evaluation methods had formerly been limited to a large extent to relief and development agencies, the question about how to evaluate dialogue projects or trust-building measures was now increasingly being raised. Is it possible at all to measure tolerance, trust, or even peace and reconciliation? What form should the evaluation take in order not to thwart sensitive processes?

The methodology that was developing here, such as »action evaluation« (see, for example, Rothman 1997; Ross 2001), is process oriented and seeks the equal participation of all important stakeholders, as well as a shared learning process. Lederach, for example, one of the pioneers of action-oriented peace research, argues against the development of output indicators for peace building projects and instead proposes an open learn-

ing process (see Lederach 1997: 138ff). In his opinion, the monitoring and evaluation process as such ought to contribute to the promotion of local peace and reconciliation processes. The International Conflict Research Project (INCORE), which dealt with questions relating to impact assessment of peace building and conflict resolution projects over a two-year period (see Church and Shouldice 2002; Church and Shouldice 2003), has summarized and merged recent approaches and has developed a set of evaluation criteria for peace building initiatives. Along with rather conventional criteria, such as appropriateness of intervention and activities, strategic review, accountability and range of results, INCORE takes up questions concerning the underlying theory of change and the theory of peaceful conflict transformation (see Church and Shouldice 2002: 26ff).

The specific challenges involved in assessing peace building projects explain to some extent why the debate among peace building organizations about methodology has been somewhat delayed. Moreover, the problem of unintended negative impacts caused by resource transfer has been considered less than in the context of humanitarian aid and development cooperation, since peace building projects distribute *material* resources to a much lower degree.<sup>5</sup> After all, it was only during the early 1990s that state donors – for example, ministries or agencies for development cooperation – increasingly started to fund peace building organizations. Subsequently, the demands made by donors with respect to planning and evaluation procedures are a comparatively recent phenomenon for these organizations, and the debate on evaluation that has been conducted within the development community for decades, including the wealth of experiences, methods and tools acquired in this area, has received limited attention. The different strands of discussions on evaluation methods exemplify the fact that, although the international debate on civilian peace building has allowed for development agencies and peace building organizations to draw closer, the steady and systematic exchange of experiences and the integration of respective lessons learned, strategic approaches and methods into their work remain limited.

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5. However, evaluations and case studies show that peace building projects can have unintended negative impacts and may put those involved in the projects in great danger (see Anderson and Olson 2003: 21ff).

## Evaluating Development Assistance and Peace Building Projects

Coinciding with the onset of the debate on peace- and conflict-sensitive approaches to development and the initial elaboration of tools, the first evaluations of humanitarian aid and development assistance in conflict areas were completed. In 1996, one of the first studies analyzed the assistance of the international community before and after the genocide in Rwanda (see Steering Committee of the Joint Evaluation of Emergency Assistance to Rwanda 1996). Two years later the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development commissioned a cross-sectional evaluation of German development cooperation programs in Sri Lanka, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mali and Rwanda (see Klingebiel 1999). At about the same time, the OECD/DAC had reconstruction programs assessed in six countries (see Uvin 1999). The World Bank (see Kreimer et al. 1998), UNDP (see United Nations Development Program 2000) and the Norwegian (see Sørbø et al. 1999) and Danish (see Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs/DANIDA 1999) governments also commissioned cross-sectional and country program evaluations. It is very difficult to summarize the evaluation results in view of the absence of common terminology and the differing approaches to methodology and criteria (see, for example, Spencer 1998; Houghton and Robertson 2001). However, the lessons learned so far point to the necessity for better coordination between donors, thorough needs assessments and context analysis, a more coherent programming and the development of long-term strategies tailored to the specific needs of countries in post-conflict situations (see, for example, Houghton and Robertson 2001; Smith and PRIO 2004).<sup>6</sup>

Between 1997 and 1999, Goodhand and Hulme conducted extensive research and in-depth comparative case studies of NGOs and communities in Afghanistan, Liberia and Sri Lanka (see Goodhand and Hulme 2000). Unlike many other studies and evaluations carried out in the late 1990s,

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6. The joint Utstein Study, commissioned by Germany, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK, identifies a major strategic deficit in the peace building efforts: »Evidence outside the survey and national studies show that the U4 are not alone in this strategic deficiency. The problem is visible in the fact that more than 55 percent of the projects do not show any link to a broader strategy for the country in which they are implemented.« (Smith and PRIO 2004:10).

the research of Goodhand and Hulme clearly defined questions, as well as criteria and indicators derived from them. The issues studied included: local conflict context, organizational structures, relationships between the organizations in the context («linkages») and their approaches to development and peace building in the context. Goodhand and Hulme also included Do-No-Harm questions. Their recommendations to NGOs resemble the recommendations to state institutions and call for enhanced context analysis and needs assessments, as well as further consultation of local stakeholders and incorporation of local coping strategies, to mention only a few items. In their synthesis study the authors come to the conclusion that NGOs have »a limited impact on the wider dynamics of conflict,« especially »where there is no effective Track One process« (Goodhand and Hulme 2000: 10ff). Further evaluations regarding the effectiveness and impact of NGOs in conflict settings followed suit (see, for example, USAID and MSI 2001).

Towards the end of the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium the first broader-impact assessments of peace building projects were carried out. Issues examined included the experiences of the South African Commission for Truth and Reconciliation (see Van der Merwe, Dewhirst and Hamber 1999) and cross-border cooperation programs in the Middle East (see Kumar and Rosenthal 1998).

In 2000 the Swedish Development Agency, SIDA, commissioned the evaluation of five peace building projects (see SIPU et al. 2000). The core questions were derived from criteria developed by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance (ALNAP): appropriateness, timeliness, coherence, coordination, connectedness, cost-effectiveness, coverage and impact/outcome. Further studies and evaluations were done by, among others, the Norwegian Government (see Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2000; Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2001), the Canadian Government (see Jacoby 2000), USAID (see Ball et al. 1998; Kumar et al. 1999), the C.S. Mott Foundation (Mayer et al. 1999) and the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management (see Fischer 2001; Wils and Zupan 2004).

To date, few evaluations accessible to the public offer an explicit assessment of the conflict mitigating or aggravating the impact of aid and development projects, or – according to the CDA – the peace efficiency of peace building projects. Drawing on the PCIA method, most of the present evaluations contain a conflict and stakeholder analysis, either generated by a desk study or during a workshop. This analysis can refer to



the macro level as well as the micro level of conflicts and makes it possible – if carried out in terms of the scope of the project or program – to contextualize the project.

However, there is a gap with regard to sets of evaluation criteria and the questions derived *from them*. The reasons for this are the existing barriers between different fields of expertise and a limited transfer of knowledge between researchers and practitioners. Thus, available know-how, best practices and lessons learned have been used only to a limited extent towards the development of new or adapted instruments. However, the elaboration of evaluation tools has not been hampered by an inadequate transfer of existing know-how alone. Yet the varying definitions of core concepts and terms such as »peace« and »peace building« alone render the development of a clear evaluation framework difficult, evaluators are confronted with complex and unstable conflict situations, and very often an adequate data base is unavailable. The following section presents an overview of the most important challenges and first lessons learnt.

## **Lessons Learned and Challenges Ahead**

The words »peace« and »conflict« have strong connotations and reflect certain values. Moreover, the meaning of these terms varies among individuals and organizations and depends on personal experience, living and working conditions, and individual as well as organizational visions. When developing the goals, core questions and indicators of an evaluation, it is significant whether or not differing definitions and understandings exist among the main stakeholders of the evaluation process. Depending on how »aggravating conflicts« or »building peace« are defined in a given context by different stakeholders, and depending on which core assumptions and theories of peaceful conflict transformation they base their work on, the framework of an evaluation shifts, and so do the questions raised. If the terminology is not clarified and no shared understanding of the basic terms and assumptions is developed, misunderstandings, conflicting priorities and questions might arise. As a consequence, there is a risk that the analysis and the recommendations of an evaluation are not shared (and put into practice accordingly).

So far, all evaluations emphasize that a linear input-outcome/impact analysis is almost impossible in complex conflict settings or peace processes. In fact, contextualizing a project (that is, establishing a logical link

between the project, the local context and conflict lines beyond the actual intervention level) presents one of the biggest challenges in evaluation.<sup>7</sup> This challenge can be met to some extent by identifying the core problems leading to conflict and the relevant stakeholders connected to those core problems as a frame of reference. Prioritization of the core problems leading to conflict and the stakeholders by using participatory methods (see, for example, Herweg and Steiner 2002) is an important step in the evaluation process as this helps in establishing logical links between the project and the context and assessing its relevance in the conflict context.

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It seems that many of the evaluation experiences, methods and questions obtained in the course of development cooperation can be applied to both the evaluation of aid and development assistance in conflict areas, and the evaluation of peace building projects if appropriate adjustments are made.

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An impact analysis is further complicated by (1) the absence of baseline studies that enable the assessment of occurring changes, and (2) the short timelines that often do not allow profound and reliable data collection. Evaluators of humanitarian aid and development projects face specific challenges, since relief and development projects rarely define peace building as an explicit project goal. Accordingly, peace and conflict related evaluation criteria and questions often go beyond the defined goals, objectives and indicators of a project. This will complicate an evaluation that is tailored specifically to fit the program in question, and may cause conflicts with those in charge.

What are the criteria and related questions that can be used for an impact assessment of a program implemented in conflict areas or post-war societies? Since the beginning of the new millennium the debate on the applicability of existing criteria – particularly in the field of peace building – has grown more intense, and first experiences have been acquired. It seems that many of the evaluation experiences, methods and questions obtained in the course of development cooperation can be applied to both the evaluation of aid and development assistance in conflict areas, and the evaluation of peace building projects if appropriate adjustments

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7. The difficulty of establishing links is a common problem in evaluation practice and is usually referred to as the »attribution problem« (see Iverson 2003).

are made. Questions regarding a peace and conflict sensitive strategy, relevance, sustainability, and empowerment of relevant stakeholders, the levels of intervention and multiplication and transfer within and between the different levels (tracks) of society are important for assessing the impact of projects in a conflict setting.

It seems that methodological debates on peace and conflict-sensitive tools and methods and remaining challenges in this regard should not distract organizations from the strategic and quite practical challenge of making a meaningful contribution to conflict prevention and peace building. In this regard, an evaluation which assesses the peace and conflict sensitivity of development assistance or the »peace efficiency« of a peace building project is a very important analytical instrument and can in particular serve the development of peace and conflict-sensitive strategies. For this reason it may have far-reaching consequences for setting priorities, developing strategies and the policy of an organization.

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