



*practical learning for  
effective international action*

***Working Papers on Program Review & Evaluation: #3***

# **Evaluability Assessments in Peacebuilding Programming**

**Cordula Reimann**

***Reflecting on Peace Practice Program***

***2012***



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## ABOUT CDA COLLABORATIVE LEARNING PROJECTS

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### OUR VISION

CDA strives for a world in which people are supported to enhance their resilience, drive their own development and resolve conflicts without resorting to armed violence.

### OUR MISSION

CDA facilitates collaborative learning processes among humanitarian, peace, development and corporate practitioners and policy-makers to ensure that their support is effective and accountable.

### OUR PROGRAMS

The oldest of CDA's programs, **DO NO HARM (DNH)**, seeks to identify the ways in which international humanitarian and/or development assistance given in conflict settings may be provided in ways that avoid exacerbating the conflict and maximize potential contributions to peace processes. DNH's conflict sensitivity tools are now used by practitioners around the world to design and implement assistance efforts that improve the outcomes for affected communities.

The **REFLECTING ON PEACE PRACTICE PROGRAM (RPP)** is an experience-based learning process involving agencies whose programs attempt to prevent or mitigate violent conflict directly. One of the central insights from the RPP case studies is that, while individual peacebuilding efforts may be beneficial, they do not necessarily contribute to – or, in the aggregate, “add up” to – what RPP calls Peace Writ Large. The RPP aims to improve the effectiveness of peace efforts and their positive role in building durable peace.

The **LISTENING PROGRAM (LP)** is a comprehensive and systematic exploration of the perspectives and ideas of people who live in societies that have been on the recipient side of international assistance, including humanitarian aid, peacebuilding activities, or human rights work. Listening and responding to local perspectives is critical for donors and aid agencies to live up to the global commitments they have made to listen to and involve local stakeholders and to improve the quality, effectiveness and accountability of their efforts.

The **CORPORATE ENGAGEMENT PROGRAM (CEP)** collaborates with companies to ensure that they have positive rather than negative impacts on the communities where they operate. As part of this approach, the CEP assists companies in the development and implementation of practical options to build constructive relationships with the communities where they work. Ultimately, CEP supports the contribution of the private sector to stability and sustainable development.

## ABOUT THE WORKING PAPERS ON PROGRAM REVIEW AND EVALUATION

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This Working Paper series is based upon findings regarding program review and evaluation processes from across all of the programs of CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (CDA). These include the Do No Harm, Reflecting on Peace Practice, Listening, and Corporate Engagement Programs.

All of CDA's programs are concerned with issues of impact, results, assessment and learning—as well as mechanisms for obtaining feedback and being accountable for program effects. This CDA Working Paper series aims to share reflections and lessons gleaned from across these programs for agencies who are undertaking their own program reviews and evaluations.

CDA produced these papers to offer practical support for practitioners seeking to evaluate the effectiveness and contributions of specific programs across several sectors. The papers do not represent final products and are working documents. CDA would like to acknowledge the generosity of the individuals and agencies involved in donating their time and experience and for their willingness to share their experiences and insights to generate and reflect on the learnings shared in these papers.

### About the Author

**Cordula Reimann** has worked for over fifteen years as a consultant, facilitator, trainer, researcher and lecturer in peacebuilding and conflict and peace studies. She has worked for international and Swiss governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations, including eight years at the Centre for Peacebuilding (KOFF) and at the Swiss foundation swisspeace, where she was head of analysis and impact of peacebuilding. Cordula conducted and led various trainings and evaluations on gender and peacebuilding, conflict sensitivity and the effectiveness and the impact of peacebuilding programs. Her field experience is mainly in South (East) Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East. Her main areas of expertise are conflict sensitivity, strategic conflict analysis, impact assessment, gender, conflict and conflict transformation. She has published widely on gender, conflict and peacebuilding and conflict transformation theory. Cordula recently set up her own consultancy, coaching and training business called “core. consultancy & training in conflict transformation.”

# Evaluability Assessments in Peacebuilding Programming

## I. Introduction

Since September 2003, CDA has been working with active peace programs to test the lessons of *Confronting War* as applied in practice. In this phase of RPP's work, a significant question that has been of concern to practitioners is how to measure the impacts of peacebuilding efforts. In this context, RPP is exploring how its findings concerning *peacebuilding* effectiveness and impacts can be integrated with good evaluation practice. In her review of peacebuilding evaluations, Cheyanne Church concludes that the average peacebuilding evaluation would not be considered a high quality evaluation process according to professional standards in the evaluation field (Church 2011b, 6). And it seems safe to say that the peacebuilding community has been struggling for some years to find appropriate approaches and methods for evaluating the impact, effectiveness and relevance of their projects and interventions. While advances have been made within the OECD/DAC,<sup>1</sup> there is still no widely accepted methodological agreement about how best to conduct evaluations in complex conflict and peacebuilding contexts (Paffenholz 2011).

In a report commissioned by CDA, Church found that the tools and findings of CDA's Reflecting on Peace Practice Program (RPP) have significant acceptance among practitioners in the area of program design and can support evaluative thinking in peacebuilding. (Church 2011, 17-18). Applying RPP concepts and tools prior to evaluation could enhance "evaluability" and program design. An "evaluability assessment" (EA) is "a systematic process that helps to identify whether a programme is in a condition to be evaluated, and whether an evaluation is justified, feasible and likely to provide useful information."<sup>2</sup> Evaluability assessments are well known in the evaluation world, but have not been yet taken up in the peacebuilding community.

Another Working Paper in this series discusses the concept of *program quality assessments* as applied to peacebuilding programming.<sup>3</sup> There is some overlap between evaluability assessments and program quality assessments. Both direct attention to program design as a key element in both program quality and in evaluability. Strengthening program design through a PQA will presumably also make a program more evaluable—and attending to issues such as clarity of goals and measurement of results in an EA will contribute to program quality.

This paper is structured as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> References are based on language from *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility—Improving Learning for Results*. 2012. Paris: OECD-DAC. Provisional guidance on evaluation of peacebuilding programs and activities was previously published in 2008 under the title, *Guidance on Evaluating Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities: Working draft for the application period*. This has been superseded by the 2012 DAC Guidance.

<sup>2</sup> "Guidance Note on Carrying Out an Evaluability Assessment" ("Guidance Note") (UNIFEM Evaluation Unit, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> For guidance on program quality assessments, please refer to the fourth paper in this CDA working paper series, *Working Papers on Program Review and Evaluation*, titled "An Alternative to Formal Evaluation of Peacebuilding: Program Quality Assessments," by Cordula Reimann, Diana Chigas and Peter Woodrow, available at [www.cdacollaborative.org](http://www.cdacollaborative.org). Last accessed December 17, 2012.

As a way of introduction, general comments on evaluations in peacebuilding are provided in the first section. In the second section, this paper introduces important characteristics, steps and challenges of evaluability assessments in the evaluation world. The third section discusses how RPP tools and concepts could be used and infused in “evaluability assessments.” The focus will be on promising entry points and methodological challenges in improving the evaluability of peacebuilding projects and interventions.

The paper is inspired by the standards and latest approaches in the evaluation field, a review of peacebuilding evaluations, experiences of the author and Swiss and international NGOs in evaluation, and assessments of conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding programs in different conflict contexts.

With the methodological debate in peacebuilding evaluations still in its infancy, the paper offers some initial food for thought and a basis for further discussion and research. It does not claim to be comprehensive or exhaustive.

## **II. General Remarks Evaluation in the Peacebuilding World**

The peacebuilding field has so far been rather reluctant and struggling to use evaluations as a systematic professional practice, for a number of reasons.

First, peacebuilding evaluations face specific challenges: for example, how to measure the impact of a micro-level project on the macro-level conflict? This refers not only to the challenges of attribution, but also to the highly complex non-linear processes of social change which cannot be captured by linear cause-effect logic.

Second, there is not yet a well established “evaluation culture” in peacebuilding. This is partly due to a certain ignorance in the peacebuilding community of the field of evaluation and its professional standards and practices. Others suggest more general reasons related to the establishment of peacebuilding itself as a legitimate field. A recent report by the Alliance for Peacebuilding has suggested that the interaction of funding systems and program dynamics as a cause (see Kawano-Chiu 2011, 8-9 and 34-35). Over the last ten to fifteen years, competition among a fast-growing number of peacebuilding organizations for the scarce funding from governmental or private donors has hindered sharing, openness to self-critical discussion and learning from challenges and failures in the field. The peacebuilding community, which has fought long for its legitimacy and recognition in the well-established field of international relations, wants to protect the field’s reputation as a rigorous and professional community of practice.

The twin pressures of scarce funding and the need to establish peacebuilding as a legitimate field have also led to a tendency among peacebuilding programs to ‘over-claim’ results. The Alliance for Peacebuilding depicts this as a vicious cycle of policy pressure and over-claiming by donors and NGOs involved in peacebuilding, leading to (the perception of) failing or ineffective peacebuilding programs. RPP Co-Director Woodrow speaks of an “inadvertent and unrealistic

collusion between funders and program implementers in making unrealistic claims” (Kawano-Chiu 2011, 19).

Examples of over-claiming by peacebuilding programs include lofty, unrealistic goals, such as “harmony and co-existence between the two main ethnic groups.” Such goals have been shown to hinder effective project or program implementation and effectiveness (CDA 2010). Lofty and vague goals are also hard to measure, and thus make it hard to evaluate the program or its impact later on. At the same time, the pressure to “sell the success” of a particular peacebuilding intervention or program to funders is strong. As a result, low quality evaluations whose main aim is to please a donor are produced, and (often) not shared. This, in turn, results in a lack of transparency regarding failures and lessons that may have been identified.

Third, evaluators in peacebuilding often accept limited, if any, accountability and responsibility for use of the evaluation results. Evaluation reports are written and the local staff is left to its own devices with little continuing external support to implement the recommendations of the evaluation (*see* Action Asia 2011, 16).

On a more positive note, as the Alliance for Peacebuilding report signals, there is an increased interest in the peacebuilding community in exploring a range of “new” approaches in evaluation, such as “most significant change” technique (Davies and Dart 2005), empowerment evaluation (Fettermann 2001), and developmental evaluation (Patton 2011), to name just a few. At the same time, fields related to peacebuilding, such as human rights and development, have made significant steps in their own evaluation practices. The most inspiring and recent initiative here is the “Admitting Failure” project launched by a Canadian NGO a few years ago.<sup>4</sup> The project aims to “to establish new levels of transparency, collaboration, and innovation” by publishing project and program failures. While it remains to be seen how far admitting to failures results in meaningful learning from them, this inspiring and in a way liberating way of thinking about practice is still missing in the peacebuilding field.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> “Admitting Failure” was conceived and created by the NGO “Engineers Without Borders Canada.” It is intended to be a collaboration between like-minded NGOs, governments, donors and those in the private sector. The NGO publishes every year a failure report. *See*, e.g., the report of 2011 <http://legacy.ewb.ca/mainsite/pages/howeare/accountable/FailureReport2011.pdf>. *See also* [http://www.ted.com/talks/david\\_damberger\\_what\\_happens\\_when\\_an\\_ngo\\_admits\\_failure.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/david_damberger_what_happens_when_an_ngo_admits_failure.html) Both accessed last on December 18, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Blum (2011) argues for whole-of-field solutions lately pursued by some leading international peacebuilding organizations.



### III. Evaluability Assessments and Their Potential For Peacebuilding

#### 3.1 EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENTS IN THE EVALUATION WORLD

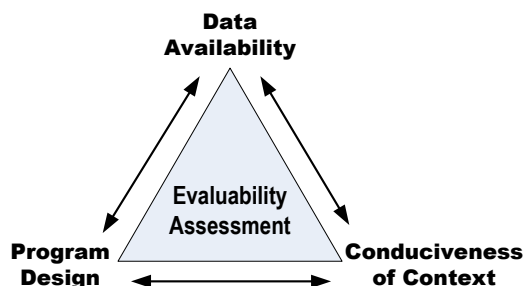
##### 3.1.1 Background and context

“Evaluability assessments” have been well known in the evaluation world since the late 1970s (Nay and Kay 1982, Smith 1989, Wholey 1987, Trevisan 2007). Originally developed to support summative evaluations, evaluability assessments (EA) have proven useful and cost-effective in improving program design, developing a program theory and clarifying goals and objectives (Wholey 1987).

An EA enables us to distinguish between “program design failure” and “evaluation failure” (see Trevisan and Huang 2003, 7). Program design failure occurs when the poor quality of a program makes evaluation difficult and/or leads to the failure of the evaluation. This should be distinguished from “evaluation failure,” which refers to an ill-conceived and poorly conducted evaluation. Evaluability assessments help avoid weak or failed evaluations due to program design failure. Wholey (1979) stresses that an EA can save scarce evaluation resources and recommends evaluations only when the programs are ready—that is, when the questions concerning program design, data availability and conduciveness of context described in section 3.2 can be answered satisfactorily. At the same time, an EA does not replace a formal mid-term or summative evaluation.

##### 3.1.2 Definition and elements

An “evaluability assessment” (EA) is conducted prior to a formal evaluation to assess whether a program or policy can be evaluated and what the obstacles to an effective and useful evaluation might be. Evaluability assessments review the coherence and logic of the program, clarify data availability, and assess the extent to which program managers or stakeholders are likely to use the evaluation findings, given their interests and the timing of any evaluation. Therefore an EA should cover the following three elements, as illustrated in the following diagram:<sup>6</sup>



The three elements are best understood as interwoven and interrelated. If there is no data available, evaluation of the project design and results becomes difficult, if not impossible. If a monitoring system exists as part of the program design, the available data can be gathered and

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<sup>6</sup> This formulation is similar to that found in UNIFEM’s “Guidance Note” (UNIFEM Evaluation Unit, 2009).

systematized. The degree to which a context of a program is conducive to an evaluation is highly dependent on whether relevant, context-specific data is available. If little relevant data exists, what can and should be taken into account? And, of course, the reverse is also true: if a baseline exists, a program becomes more evaluable or suitable for evaluation.

The results of an evaluability assessment fall along a spectrum such as the following:<sup>7</sup>

- Fully evaluable
- Mostly evaluable: can improve
- Limited evaluability: needs substantial improvement
- Not evaluable

Clearly, if a program or project was found to be “not evaluable,” a full evaluation would not be warranted. If a program has been found to be mostly or fully evaluable, the product of an EA might be a program evaluation proposal or evaluation plan. On the other hand, if the results indicated that the effort had limited evaluability or was mostly evaluable, it might make sense to postpone an evaluation and concentrate instead on strengthening the program in ways the EA process has suggested are needed in order to increase its readiness for evaluation.

### **3.2 EXPLORATION OF THE ELEMENTS IN RELATION TO PEACEBUILDING**

The literature in the evaluation world refers to a number of questions for each of the three elements noted above.<sup>8</sup> With small adaptations, they are relevant for peacebuilding programming and are summarized below. In Section 4, we explore the application of RPP tools and concepts to the program design element of an EA, and propose questions specifically for the evaluability of program design in peacebuilding. A checklist for assessing evaluability in the peacebuilding context, and integrating RPP tools in relation to program design, can be found in the Annex to this Working Paper.

#### **3.2.1 Availability of data and information**

In terms of *availability of data and information*, the following questions have to be answered satisfactorily:

- Do program managers and/or stakeholders have the capacity to provide data for the evaluation? What and where are the knowledge gaps?
- Does the program have indicators on key areas of the program?
- Does a baseline exist?
- Does a monitoring system exist to gather and systematize all necessary information?
- Does the program have SMART or CREAM indicators especially on the outcome level?<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See International Labor Organization, “Using the Evaluability Assessment Tool,” Guidance Note 11, I-evaluation Resource Kit (Geneva: International Labor Organization—Evaluation Unit, 2011).

<sup>8</sup> The questions are adapted from the UNIFEM Guidance Note.

<sup>9</sup> SMART and CREAM are acronyms meant “to provide ‘rule of thumb’ guidance to program managers identifying performance indicators” according to the World Bank. SMART stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable and Attributable, Relevant and Time Bound. CREAM stands for Clear, Relevant, Economic, Adequate and Monitorable. World Bank. Undated. “Results of the Expert Roundtables on Innovative Performance Measurement Tools: NOTE #3: Tools to Improve the Quality of Indicators.” <http://www->

Generally, there is a shortage of data in most conflict and peacebuilding contexts. The shortage of data can be partly explained by a weak research base in peacebuilding. As Rogers rightly stresses, many evaluations forget to ask what we already know about intervention methods from research or other evaluations and what the crucial knowledge gaps are (Rogers 2011, 7). The shortage of data is often also an immediate consequence of armed conflicts. In many violent conflict contexts, there are rarely any national surveys and statistics which allow an *ex post/ante* assessment, and obtaining data disaggregated by group, geography or other categories relevant to conflict can be difficult (see OECD/DAC 2012, 33; Paffenholz 2011, 6-7). In addition, security concerns may constrain evaluators' ability to raise issues, collect material and data, recruit local staff, and meet interlocutors (OECD/DAC 2012, 33); even putting a conflict analysis in writing may be dangerous for the staff members involved (Action Asia 2011, 6).<sup>10</sup> The security situation and the relationships between parties may also affect the reliability of data collected—for example, biased or incomplete or (voluntarily or involuntarily) censored information (OECD/DAC 2012). While strategies for addressing these risks, such as recreating baselines, do exist (see, e.g., OECD DAC 2012, 61-65), an EA must assess whether they would provide sufficient reliable data for an evaluation to go forward productively.

### 3.2.2 Conduciveness of the context

Another evaluability criterion is how ***conducive the context*** is for evaluation:

- Is the (both external and internal) context conducive to conducting an evaluation, in terms of security, support of key staff, availability of stakeholders, and seasonal or weather considerations, among other factors?
- Are the resources available to conduct an evaluation, including financial resources, logistics and trained staff?
- Will the evaluation results justify the investment in an evaluation? Are the findings likely to be used?
- Can/will the evaluation be conducted in a conflict-sensitive manner?

The issue of conduciveness alerts us to CDA's Do No Harm (DNH) principles (Anderson 1999), which constitute basic guidelines of conflict sensitivity. Application of the DNH principles and analytical process could help identify whether an evaluation—as an intervention in itself—might do harm and endanger stakeholders and interviewees (see Action Asia 2011, 5). While DNH is often implemented selectively by organizations and is highly dependent on the commitment of individual staff members, the DNH principles represent ethical and professional practice and a starting point for any evaluation.<sup>11</sup> Given the conflict context for peacebuilding

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[wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/06/11/000425970\\_20120611093921/Rendered/PDF/694070BRIOP11303IndicatorEvaluation.pdf](https://wds.worldbank.org/external/default/WDSContentServer/WDSP/IB/2012/06/11/000425970_20120611093921/Rendered/PDF/694070BRIOP11303IndicatorEvaluation.pdf). Last accessed December 18, 2012.

<sup>10</sup> In addition, in many instances, stakeholders have to be interviewed to obtain necessary information on project's history and original set up. Yet, many interview stakeholders might be afraid, do not trust "outsiders" and/or are openly politically biased (see also Paffenholz 2011, 7 and OECD/DAC 2008).

<sup>11</sup> See OECD DAC 2012. The DAC's Guidance on Evaluating Peacebuilding in Situations of Conflict and Fragility notes that an evaluation process should be conflict sensitive. An evaluation report must state measures that were (or were not) taken to ensure conflict sensitivity and how that affected the outcomes of the evaluation itself.

evaluation, the DNH principles are comparable to the guiding principles for evaluations outside the peacebuilding field.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, conduciveness refers to the often limited, internal and organizational capacities and resources of peacebuilding organizations to conduct evaluations. The skills and knowledge of conflict analysis, for example, vary greatly in peacebuilding organizations and among their staff. The same applies to the knowledge of general program management tools.

### **3.2.3 Program design**

As far as the *program design* is concerned, the following questions matter:

- Does the program clearly define the problem that it aims to change?
- Have the beneficiaries or target group of the program and their needs been identified?
- Are the goals and overall objective realistic? Are they measurable?
- Do the goals and objective respond to the needs identified?
- Does the program have a clear, robust and valid theory of change?
- Do the outputs, goals/outcomes and overall objective follow the results chain logic?
- Are there linkages among activities, goals and objectives and a defensible program logic?

We will return to these questions in Section 4 to examine each one in turn and explore whether and how RPP tools and concepts might be useful for assessing and improving program evaluability.

## **3.3 STEPS AND PROCESSES FOR EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENTS IN THE EVALUATION FIELD**

In the literature on evaluation, one finds different steps and processes for how best to conduct an EA. The following six key steps are summarized, as adapted from and influenced by Smith 1989, Trevisan 2007 and Wholey 1987.

- Step 1: Define focus, purpose, boundaries of and responsible staff and stakeholders involved in an EA.
- Step 2: Identify, review and analyze program documentation.
- Step 3: Identify and interview main stakeholders, including those responsible for program implementation and assumed beneficiaries.
- Step 4: Clarify program logic/theory of change/results chain.
- Step 5: Determine plausibility of program.
- Step 6: Draw conclusions and make recommendations if a program is ready for formal evaluation, what needs to be changed and/or what might be alternative evaluation designs.

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<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., the American Evaluation Association's reviewed and revised "Guiding Principles for Evaluators" (2004), available at [www.eval.org](http://www.eval.org). Last accessed December 18, 2012.

### 3.4 WHEN SHOULD AN EA BE CONDUCTED?

A peacebuilding program evaluability assessment can be conducted at different stages of a program. Generally, it is used by an evaluator as a first stage of an evaluation and to prepare a peacebuilding program for a full formative or summative evaluation or to assess whether a full evaluation is warranted. However, it can be conducted as a parallel process from program design to the end of the program, to review and improve program design and implementation and ensure later evaluability. In this sense, EA and program planning can be linked and can inform each other.

### 3.5 CHALLENGES OF EVALUABILITY ASSESSMENTS

There are a number of challenges to conducting an evaluability assessment (*see, e.g.,* Smith 1989):

- *The need for strong group cohesion.* Ideally, an EA should be conducted by a team of stakeholders, program managers or implementers, administration, and the evaluator. If the program team does not function well, it is difficult to carry out the EA effectively and efficiently, and the EA can be painstaking and costly.
- *Time factor.* If there is weakness in the organization, program documentation, the team spirit, or commitments from stakeholders, an EA can be time-consuming.
- *Evaluation overload.* An EA is often conducted as an *ex ante* assessment. This could be seen as introducing an extra evaluation element to an already extensive process and adding unnecessary additional expenditures, time and human resources.
- *Operational constraints.* If a formal evaluation follows shortly after the EA, many smaller organizations especially may struggle to find the operational capacities and time to conduct both.
- *Stakeholder interests.* Stakeholders and staff who fought hard to get their project through approval might feel threatened by an additional critical review.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See European Commission. 2009. *Evaluation Sourcebook: Methods and Techniques (Evaluability Assessment)*, available at [http://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/evalsed/sourcebooks/method\\_techniques/strucuring\\_evaluations/evaluability/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/evaluation/evalsed/sourcebooks/method_techniques/strucuring_evaluations/evaluability/index_en.htm). Last accessed December 18, 2012.

## IV. Use of RPP Tools & Concepts in Evaluability Assessments in Peacebuilding

Among the three elements of EA, the RPP tools are useful mainly for consideration of program design. Until now, many evaluations in peacebuilding have worked with and accepted the poor quality of a program design as a given. The following section will discuss how RPP concepts and tools can be integrated into the processes outlined above to assess evaluability in peacebuilding. It proposes ways that the application of RPP tools and findings can enhance the general questions regarding program design in an EA of peacebuilding programming. This discussion focuses on the question of which RPP tools can best be used to assess whether a program is evaluable and how. RPP tools and findings may also be useful when an EA deems a program to have limited or low evaluability, to assist program teams in improving program design and increasing evaluability in those areas that are weak.

### 4.1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON REFLECTING ON PEACE PRACTICE TOOLS & CONCEPTS

The Reflecting on Peace Practice Program (RPP) is an experience-based learning process that involves agencies whose programs attempt to prevent or mitigate violent conflict. It analyzes experience at the individual program level across a broad range of agencies and contexts, with the goal of improving the effectiveness of international peacebuilding efforts. During its first phase, from 1999-2003, RPP engaged over two hundred agencies and many individuals who work on conflict around the world in a collaborative effort to learn how to improve effectiveness vis-à-vis Peace Writ Large, or the larger societal peace. The findings of three years of analysis and consultation are presented in *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners*, which reviews recent peace practice, assesses elements that have been successful (or not) and why, and presents lessons on how to improve effectiveness. The lessons comprise a set of tools and concepts that are most useful for conceptualization and planning of peace interventions at all levels. They help to answer the questions:

- *What* should we work on and how? Which of the *issues or conflict factors* is a priority? What *approach/methodology* is appropriate in the context?
- *Whom* should we work with? Which actors/stakeholders are most important?
- *Why* should we work on that issue with those people? Is the rationale for our chosen approach solid?

These findings, tools and frameworks have been enhanced, refined and supplemented since 2003 during RPP's Utilization Phase, through ongoing work with peace practitioners and policy makers to apply the findings, as well as additional collaborative research on the cumulative effects of peacebuilding.

In this phase of RPP's work, practitioners have been concerned with how to measure the impacts of peacebuilding efforts. In this context, RPP is exploring how its findings concerning *peacebuilding* effectiveness and impacts can be integrated with good evaluation practice. Church (2011a) examined how the tools and concepts that emerged from *Confronting War* and

the Utilization Phase that followed its publication have been used in peacebuilding evaluation. These tools and findings include:<sup>14</sup>

- A systemic approach to conflict analysis, including identifying and prioritizing key driving factors of conflict (KDFs) and the dynamics and relationships among factors;
- The “RPP Matrix,” a tool for analyzing program strategies and their potential to affect Peace Writ Large. It can be used either in its full form, or broken down into its component findings: constituencies with which program work, either “key people” or “more people” and the linkages between the two; and levels of change sought, either “individual/personal” or “socio-political” change, and the linkages between the two.
- Theories of Change—including defining of goals, how achievement of goals affects the driving factors of conflict or peace, and the program theories explaining how the activities will “add up” to the achievement of the goal. This is often referred to as program logic.<sup>15</sup>
- “Building Blocks for Peace” (formerly Criteria of Effectiveness), which represent a set of intermediate goals in peacebuilding that are useful for stimulating discussion of the aims of specific programs and for formulating robust goals/objectives.
- Linkages across levels of change and people addressed.

In her review of twenty peacebuilding evaluations that used RPP tools in one way or another, Church (2011a) suggests that RPP tools and concepts could be applied to assess and improve the evaluability of programs. Noting that “[w]ithin evaluation processes, RPP tools and findings were used primarily to assess program design” and that RPP tools “can be used to support evaluative thinking,” she suggested that an RPP-infused evaluability assessment could assist in making programs more evaluable and likely to experience a useful evaluation process (Church 2011a, 6-8)

## 4.2 RPP CONCEPTS APPLIED TO PROGRAM DESIGN ISSUES

The remainder of this section highlights where RPP tools can offer an aid or added value to key evaluability questions regarding program design (see section 3.2.3). While some readers will not be thoroughly familiar with RPP tools/concepts, we will attempt to provide enough context and illustrative examples to make them come alive. The questions for assessing evaluability, summarized in the box below, adapt the general questions presented in section 3.2.3 based on RPP findings and tools, to address specifically the issues of program design in peacebuilding. A full evaluability assessment would also address data availability and conduciveness of context, as outlined in sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 above.

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<sup>14</sup> For more complete explanations of the tools and concepts, see Anderson, Mary and Lara Olson. 2003. *Confronting War*. Cambridge: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. See also CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. 2012. *Reflecting on Peace Practice Participant Training Manual*, available at [www.cdacollaborative.org](http://www.cdacollaborative.org). Last accessed December 18, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> The concept of Theories of Change (TOC) was not developed by RPP and has been used widely and in a great variety of contexts and fields. However, RPP applied theories of change in peacebuilding early on as a way to bridge the gap between conflict analysis and programming. RPP has promoted the use of theories of change and has developed explanatory and training materials for peace practitioners. They are therefore taken into account as RPP tools, although the concept was not the product of RPP collaborative learning.

Evaluability Element	Questions Posed by Reflecting on Peace Practice Program
<i>Program Design</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Does the program clearly define the conflict and the key driving factors of conflict that it aims to address?</li> <li>2. Have the peacebuilding needs, or points of leverage in the conflict system, been identified? Has the program strategy been linked to the analysis?</li> <li>3. Are the goals and overall objectives clear, realistic and measurable?</li> <li>4. Does the program have a clear, robust theory of change that is valid in the context? Are there linkages between activities, goals and objectives and is there a defensible program logic? Will activities “add up” to the goals?</li> </ol>

**1. Does the program clearly define the conflict and the key driving factors of conflict that it aims to address?**

The original question in this area addressed the issue of problem definition and analysis. RPP findings stress the need to do a conflict analysis as a first part of a project design or program intervention. A “good conflict analysis” according to RPP identifies and prioritizes the key driving factors of conflict that a peacebuilding program aims to address, the relationships among the KDFs, stakeholders and key actors (CDA 2009, 4-5).

RPP has also extended conflict analysis by incorporating systemic thinking or a systemic approach to conflict analysis. This approach helps to identify and present the conflict dynamics, while at the same time stressing the interrelated and interwoven nature of the causes and the effects of the key driving factors of conflict. The resulting causal loop diagrams and conflict maps serve as the basis for identifying potential points of leverage for promoting change in the conflict system—places where interventions might have larger effects on the dynamics of the conflict, taking into account forces that will resist change (see CDA 2012).

One might ask how a good conflict analysis supports evaluability. A cogent conflict analysis provides one form of baseline, representing the beginning status of the environment and/or the key factors the project/program seeks to influence. Subsequent conflict analyses, in the context of a formative or summative evaluation, can use the preliminary analysis as a baseline for comparison. In addition, the project/program approach should be grounded in the analysis itself, thus providing important dimensions to be examined through an evaluation.

**2. Have the peacebuilding needs or points of leverage in the conflict system been identified? Has the program strategy been linked to analysis?**

This question asks whether a program has clearly identified the problem it intends to address and whether the program’s goals and strategy respond to it. RPP frames the issue in terms of addressing *key driving factors* (identified through a conflict analysis—see above), while considering what has already been tried or is currently underway in the context. There is always a gap between the current situation and a desired future, and between the level of effort required and what is already being done. Peacebuilding needs emerge from this gap, and



points of leverage from an analysis of what changes, if pursued, could be sustainable and promote larger shifts in the conflict.

RPP's concept of Peace Writ Large (PWL), or the larger societal peace, also challenges practitioners to develop strategies for contributing to PWL over time. "Peacebuilding needs" can be interpreted in a narrow or broad sense—and Peace Writ Large promotes a more ambitious and strategic approach. At the same time, RPP also encourages projects/programs to be realistic about what they can really accomplish, and to avoid "overclaiming" results at the highest level of peace or reconciliation.

RPP has found that even when program designers perform a robust conflict analysis, they often fail to link program design to that analysis. Frequently, organizations simply do what they would have done anyway or what they are best at or most comfortable with—rather than what is most needed in the situation or what would be most effective at addressing key drivers of conflict. In another variation, program designs *claim* that they are addressing one or more key factor of conflict, yet fail to show a strong logical or causal link between programmatic activities and the needed changes in the conflict context.

In terms of evaluability, identifying peacebuilding needs or points of leverage for change and linking analysis with program strategy contribute to a cogent program logic, and provides one basis for understanding the relevance and appropriateness of the intended impacts for the conflict context—which can then be assessed through evaluation.

### **3. Are the goals and overall objectives clear, realistic and measurable statements of change?**

Peacebuilding programs often have unclear and unrealistic goals. On the one hand, peacebuilding goals often are vague: "peace," "reconciliation," "co-existence" or any other worthy, but unattainable aim. On the other hand, many programs state their goals or objectives as activities or processes without specifying the desired/expected changes. Thus we see goals like "empower women to participate in the peace process" or "train 1,500 vulnerable youth in conflict resolution skills" without any indication of what those activities will lead to, in terms of observable outcomes or changes. Programs should identify realistic achievements that reflect a *change* in the conflict and represent a significant step towards such lofty ends as peace or reconciliation. This corresponds to the "achievable" part of the SMART goal framework.

Programs whose goals are not articulated as desired changes in the conflict situation, and/or are vague or unclear are more difficult to evaluate, as these must be reconstructed *post-hoc*. The RPP "Building Blocks for Peace" can be used to strengthen these elements of program design. The RPP Building Blocks for Peace (formerly the Criteria of Effectiveness) provide one framework for examining goals and objectives, as intermediate objectives that can be used as a way to identify whether/how an initiative will contribute towards peace.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> For more information on RPP's five Building Blocks towards Peace, see CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. 2012. *Reflecting on Peace Practice Participant Training Manual*, available at [www.cdacollaborative.org](http://www.cdacollaborative.org). Last accessed December 18, 2012.

**4. Does the program have a clear, robust theory of change that is valid in the context? Are there robust linkages between activities, outputs, outcomes, goals and objectives and a defensible program logic?**

A theory of change explains why a chosen approach or method will result in a set of expected changes in the context. In its simplest form a theory of change can state. “If we do X [activity], then it will result in Y [change], because [rationale or pathway to change].” For instance, the theory of change behind a negotiation training program might be, “If we train each of the negotiation teams in fundamental negotiation skills, they will become more credible and competent bargainers, and will make agreement more likely because the negotiators will no longer engage in counterproductive tactics that have stalled previous rounds of negotiations.”

An EA provides a means to test the robustness and appropriateness of assumptions about the nature of the conflict; the relationship between the program goals and Peace Writ Large (overall theory of change); and the relationship between the activities, outputs, outcomes and goals (program theory). It can also test assumptions about the choice of beneficiaries or participants, as well as the choice of approach. Articulation of the underlying theory of change forces a critical examination of the strategy for change. RPP has found that most peacebuilding organizations work with implicit and often unrealistic ToCs. RPP findings underline the importance of explicit and realistic ToCs for effective program design and strategies in peacebuilding. While weak theories of change or program logic do not preclude evaluations (e.g., goal-free evaluations), weakness in this area may suggest that an evaluation may not be useful or yield new information. At the same time, a robust and explicit theory of change and program logic facilitates the identification of outcomes to be assessed, as well as the identification of key questions that might be addressed in an evaluation.

RPP provides additional guidance regarding the effectiveness of peacebuilding programming that go beyond the question of evaluability to address issues of program quality and impact. For instance, RPP findings suggest various kinds of linkages are important (from personal change to socio-political, from work with powerful people to work with broader populations, and links across levels and sectors). While attention to these elements would result in stronger programs, the elements are not necessary to make a program evaluable. The four key elements above are those that support greater evaluability.

## **V. Conclusion**

With an interest in increasing the quality and usefulness of evaluations in the peacebuilding field, this paper has suggested that applying RPP concepts and tools can assist in determining the evaluability of a peacebuilding program. RPP’s findings and tools are most relevant for assessing and strengthening the design elements of a program to make them more evaluable. A “checklist” for evaluability that uses RPP findings to adapt the general questions regarding program design to the peacebuilding context can be found in Annex A of this Working Paper. Use of this RPP-based tool can be supplemented by other guidance for assessing aspects of evaluability related to program implementation, data availability and the conduciveness of the context for evaluation in conflict-affected and fragile contexts. RPP tools and concepts may

become most relevant, however, when a program is deemed not to be evaluable. Systematic reflection on program design using RPP tools<sup>17</sup> can help identify and strengthen those areas of design that are weak and increase its evaluability.

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<sup>17</sup> For a systematic process and for tools that can be used to reflect on program design and to improve areas that may be weak, see CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, “Program Reflection Exercise.” For a demonstration of one organization’s use of the RPP Program Reflection Exercise, see CDA Collaborative Learning Projects. “Application of the RPP Program Reflection Exercise: Addressing Land Related Conflicts in Tierra Firma. Both are available at [www.cdacollaborative.org](http://www.cdacollaborative.org). Last accessed December 18, 2012.

## **Annex A: Checklist for Evaluability Assessment of Peacebuilding Programs**

The following continuums provide a framework for assessing the evaluability of a peacebuilding program and illustrate what makes a peacebuilding program or project less or more evaluable. RPP tools and findings have been integrated into the questions regarding program design.

The red column on the left indicates low evaluability while the green column on the right highlights high evaluability. The dotted lines between the red, yellow and green columns indicate that the division is not clear-cut or fixed.

The team or the evaluability assessor can tick the respective boxes to indicate where the program stands in terms of evaluability. If most of the ticked boxes are in the left, red column, a program is not ready for evaluation, and the checklist indicates where changes in the program design would need to be made. The evaluability assessor could also recommend where to change and improve the program design and hence make the program more evaluable. The field staff and program designers in the field could likewise use the checklist as a monitoring tool that helps them to work on the aspects of low evaluability.

**Program Design (includes RPP tools and findings)**

<b>Low evaluability in peacebuilding</b>		<b>High evaluability in peacebuilding</b>
No conflict analysis at all <input type="checkbox"/>	Partial analysis <input type="checkbox"/>	“Good conflict analysis” prioritizing KDF, stakeholders <input type="checkbox"/>
Implicit analysis/Informal analysis <input type="checkbox"/>	Not updated <input type="checkbox"/>	
No documented analysis <input type="checkbox"/>	Context analysis <input type="checkbox"/> Analysis not updated <input type="checkbox"/> Not linked to strategy <input type="checkbox"/> Biased and narrow <input type="checkbox"/> Too comprehensive <input type="checkbox"/>	
Unclear goals and objective <input type="checkbox"/>	Goals and objective too general and broad <input type="checkbox"/>	Well-defined and robust goals and objectives <input type="checkbox"/>
Goals defined as activities <input type="checkbox"/>	Goals and objective too ambitious <input type="checkbox"/>	Goals are formulated as desired changes at the socio-political level <input type="checkbox"/>
No links between activities, goals and overall objective <input type="checkbox"/>	Indirect und unclear links between activities, goals and objective <input type="checkbox"/>  “Hope lines” (links between activities and outcomes a various levels that are based on weak assumptions) <input type="checkbox"/>	Explicit links between activities, goals and objective of PWL <input type="checkbox"/>
Implicit ToC <input type="checkbox"/>	Implicit and realistic ToC <input type="checkbox"/>	Explicit ToC <input type="checkbox"/>
Unclear ToC <input type="checkbox"/>	Explicit but inappropriate ToC (i.e. ToC contradict/s knowledge of peace-building practice or is not suited to the context.) <input type="checkbox"/>	Clear and realistic ToC <input type="checkbox"/>

## Data Availability

<b>Low evaluability in peacebuilding</b>		<b>High evaluability in peacebuilding</b>
Implicit ToC <input type="checkbox"/> Unclear ToC <input type="checkbox"/>	Implicit and realistic ToC <input type="checkbox"/> Explicit but inappropriate ToC (i.e. ToC contradict/s knowledge of peace-building practice or is not suited to the context.) <input type="checkbox"/>	Explicit ToC <input type="checkbox"/> Clear and realistic ToC <input type="checkbox"/>
No baseline <input type="checkbox"/>	Condensed baseline with data-gathering is focused on a few key indicators for selected goals <input type="checkbox"/> No baseline but a more comprehensive monitoring at the beginning <input type="checkbox"/>	Complete baseline <input type="checkbox"/>
No monitoring system <input type="checkbox"/>	Monitoring system in place but not used <input type="checkbox"/> Insights from monitoring are not translated into program changes <input type="checkbox"/>	Monitoring system in place to gather and systematize all necessary information <input type="checkbox"/>
No indicators <input type="checkbox"/>	Indicators exist, but unrealistic, un-measurable or unclear <input type="checkbox"/>	Indicators are SMART or CREAM <input type="checkbox"/>
No access to stakeholders <input type="checkbox"/>	Difficult and limited access to stakeholders <input type="checkbox"/>	Access to stakeholders <input type="checkbox"/>

## Conduciveness

<b>Low evaluability in peacebuilding</b>		<b>High evaluability in peacebuilding</b>
Conditions (weather, security, availability...) not favorable <input type="checkbox"/>	Some conditions questionable, but generally workable <input type="checkbox"/>	No apparent impediments to access or security <input type="checkbox"/>
No financial resources available to conduct evaluation <input type="checkbox"/>	Financial resources available but limited <input type="checkbox"/>	Full financial resources available <input type="checkbox"/>
No internally driven process <input type="checkbox"/>	Internally driven but only by the heads of agencies <input type="checkbox"/>	Internally driven and locally owned process <input type="checkbox"/>
No ownership of process <input type="checkbox"/>	Not donor-driven process but no local ownership of process <input type="checkbox"/>	
Donor-driven process <input type="checkbox"/>		
Do No Harm principles not applied to the project or the evaluation process <input type="checkbox"/>	DNH principles only partially applied <input type="checkbox"/>  DNH principles applied once but not updated <input type="checkbox"/>	DNH applied: Timing, location of evaluation and selection of interview partners are conflict-sensitive <input type="checkbox"/>

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