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# REFLECTIONS ON PEACE DIRECT'S APPROACH TO EVALUATING LOCAL PEACEBUILDING INITIATIVES

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## INTRODUCTION

Wherever there is violent conflict, there will be local people trying to build peace. If this were not the case, societies would be ungovernable wildernesses. Instead, we see islands of peace even where stronger forces are making determined efforts to stir up violent antagonism.

Peace Direct supports locally led peacebuilding initiatives. We back local ‘peace entrepreneurs’ to carry out the strategies they believe will have the greatest chance of success, not to implement Peace Direct’s ideas. We believe that they can learn most from their peers, who have faced similar challenges. Our approach to evaluating the impact of their work has been developed through discussion with our local partners over a series of Peace Exchange conferences, organised by Peace Direct’s programmes team.

Because we select peacebuilding organisations partly for their rootedness in their communities, our partners tend to be reflective and strong on learning from their programme experiences. However, many have not yet developed the capacities or systems to fully capture the impact of their work, or to meet the requirements of larger donors. We have developed a series of tools and training exercises that can be adapted to each of our partner’s context-specific projects.

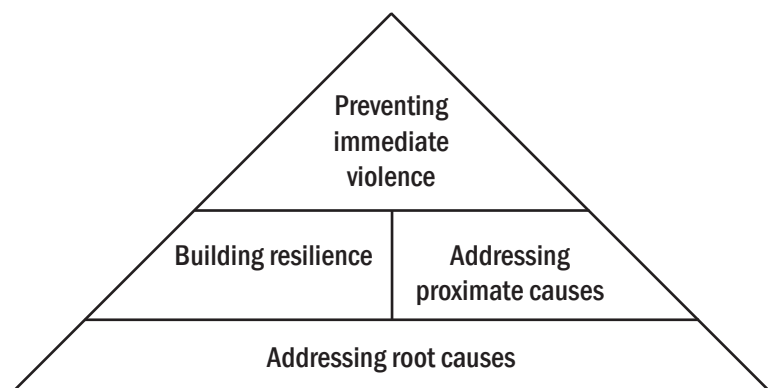
As well as working directly with our partners to improve their locally-led monitoring and evaluation (M&E), Peace Direct also works to influence others to do the same. For example, we are currently consulting for the British Council in Pakistan to improve the M&E skills of their implementing partners, who are undertaking peacebuilding activities across the country.

We still have much to explore and test. This paper shares what we have learned so far. The peacebuilders mentioned below are Peace Direct partners in the field.

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## WHAT IS THE WORK OF LOCAL PEACEBUILDERS?

We look at the work of our partners in terms of the following model of different types of intervention. The model grew out of our realisation that the common emphasis on addressing the ‘root causes’ of conflict ignores other approaches of real value. We do encourage our partners to reflect on root causes, when developing their theories of change. But we also recognise that, in many situations, the root causes of conflict (eg regional disparities) are intractable not just for local peacebuilders but for everyone, including host governments and international agencies. Yet this does not mean that nothing can be done.



This model shows our partners’ range of activities, with urgent work heading the pyramid, and leading down to more long-term work at the base. These activities include:

- **Stopping immediate violence:** for example through assisting in the disarmament and demobilisation of combatants (D R Congo), or through rapid interventions via Task Forces (D R Congo), peace committees (Sudan and South Sudan) and trusted mediators (Nepal).
- **Addressing proximate causes of conflict:** for example through land courts (D R Congo), through securing compensation for war victims (Nepal), or through developing skills in non-violence among officials (Zimbabwe).
- **Building resilience:** for example through training young people to resist extremist propaganda (Pakistan, Kashmir), through bridging ethnic, religious or political divides (Kashmir, Sri Lanka), or through uniting polarised communities (Zimbabwe, Sudan).
- **Addressing root causes:** for example through challenging Sinhala triumphalism among Buddhist clergy

(Sri Lanka), through developing livelihoods in conflict-affected communities (DRC), or through working with oil companies on community relations (Sudan, South Sudan).

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## WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF EVALUATING IMPACT?

Our partners are all motivated by a desire to serve their communities through building peace. In most cases, they began as all-volunteer organisations. While they want external funding in order to scale up their work, and want to improve their ability to demonstrate impact, they need to balance this against a wish not to overburden their volunteers with reporting.

Peace Direct is interested in evaluation because we raise funds for our partners on the basis of their impact. As the Collaborative for Development Action pointed out a decade ago, in *Reflecting on Peace Practice*, 'hope is not a strategy.' The fact that well-intentioned people, embedded in the conflict-affected community, believe they are pursuing an effective strategy, does not negate the need to test whether the strategy is in fact creating positive, lasting change. Some of our funders are more demanding than others in terms of evaluation, and these have helped to set the pace for the development of our current approach.

We also need robust evidence in order to make the policy case for the importance of giving local peacebuilders a central role in strategies to deal with conflict.

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## WHAT IS OUR APPROACH?

Peace Direct's recommended approach to M&E follows the well-established cycle of activity:

1. Conduct a conflict and stakeholder analysis in the project area, or revisit and update an existing one.
2. Consult with participants (we prefer this word to the more passive sounding 'beneficiary') in the design of the intervention.
3. Develop and articulate Theories of Change.
4. Agree indicators that the participants regard as meaningful.
5. Implement the work while collecting data on the activities (outputs) and indicators (outcomes).
6. Analyse the data, reflect on successes, failures, unexpected consequences and broader impact of the programme.
7. Redesign and repeat.

Partners have strengths in different areas of the cycle, which can relate to the nature of the groups with whom they are working.

For example, in Sri Lanka, the Centre for Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (CPBR) carries out work with religious clergy and with young people, the latter under the Young Visionaries programme. With both groups, CPBR bring people together across religious/ethnic divides to understand and appreciate 'the other'. Yet despite winning two global awards in 2012 for work with religious leaders, CPBR does not collect data that would demonstrate that they are changing attitudes among religious leaders.

But CPBR is exceptionally strong in their painstaking design work, to ensure that a project has the best chance of succeeding. They judge their success primarily by the willingness of a growing number of religious leaders to take part, as a result of the reputation that the work has gained, and by individual stories of the impact it has made on the wider community (for example of the Buddhist monk who, after taking part in the programme, travelled to an area where Hill Tamils were unable to get official ID cards in order to access services, and signed documentation for over 1,000 people).

In Nord Kivu, in a different context, Centre Résolution Conflits (CRC) has pioneered the development of indicators that programme participants regard as relevant to judging success. CRC takes responsibility for the reintegration of former combatants, after supporting a process of disarmament and demobilisation that typically also involves UN or DRC government agencies. CRC works with the former combatants and the communities that will receive them, developing livelihoods programmes (such as co-operatives or microfinance schemes) in which both groups participate together.

In this situation, the host community members are naturally very concerned to know that the former combatants have renounced violence for good. The indicators that they and the ex-combatants agreed on were:

- The participant has built a house.
- The participant has married.
- The participant has given up the use of black magic.

With such clearly defined indicators, it is possible not only to evaluate the success of CRC's programme, but also to compare results in communities that have had support from CRC, with those that have had support from other agencies, and those that have had no support. Preliminary results clearly suggest that CRC's

programme of support is having its intended effect. (See our case study *Coming Home*, 2011, pages 16–27.)

Where organisations are working to resolve disputes, whether in situations of impending violence, or as part of a community justice programme, partners may use indicators that have characteristics of both output and outcome. For example:

- Number of disputes resolved.
- Seriousness of disputes resolved.
- Number of disputes that recur.
- Number of disputes settled using own resources, rather than those of the rapid response fund.

These give quantitative data that can be translated into 'cost per dispute resolved', and thus potentially enable comparisons between different programmes, and even between programmes in different conflict areas. On their own, the data do not necessarily assess either satisfaction with the decisions or an improvement in citizen's sense of security. However, use of the dispute resolution mechanism may be the best proxy for satisfaction with the service (and see below for the limitations of 'customer satisfaction surveys').

The 'gold standard' of evaluation is the randomised controlled trial. This is not a realistic aim in situations of 'hot conflict', where a dynamic environment makes it impossible to maintain parallel communities in the same state. But when conflict is no longer intense, it can be possible. In D R Congo, a method is being trialled where 38 communities have been split into three groups. Each group is part of the project, but work starts in different years. Thus Years 1 and 2 have a control group (Group 3) but ultimately no group is excluded. This saves resources, uses the baseline as a control, and avoids the ethical dilemma of deliberately excluding communities in the interests of evidence.

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## SOME ISSUES

### a) Attribution versus contribution

It is rare that a single organisation can take the credit for a transition to a more peaceful state. The more the goal is 'peace writ large', the truer is this statement. This makes it hard to move from measuring outputs to measuring impact. However, where an organisation is the main provider of an intervention (as YAPE is of mediation services in Kavre Province in Nepal, or as CRC is of resettlement assistance in certain communities), then it may be possible to go beyond their impact on direct beneficiaries (for example those who have received compensation as a result of YAPE's advocacy) to their impact on broader societal attitudes.

### b) The pitfalls of 'consumer surveys' and the value of measuring voluntarism

A standard component of evaluations is the survey of community members to assess their rating of a service, or the degree to which they feel safer, have more ability to move around, or other indicators that peace is growing. While not discounting the relevance of such enquiries, we need to recognise the factors that may work against complete honesty. Such factors may include fear of reprisals, or of being shut out of services, or more importantly the not unreasonable belief that negative answers may lead to the service being withdrawn: they may feel that whatever its quality, some service is generally better than none.

An alternative way of looking for evidence that community members value a service lies in the measurement of voluntary contribution. This may be in hours of time that volunteers donate to the project, or it may be in how far participants find costs for work-related travel out of their own pockets. For example, the volunteer peace committees involved in Peace Direct's South Kordofan Rapid Response Fund pay the costs of approximately half of its interventions.

### c) Aggregation

One of the characteristics of Peace Direct's way of working, namely backing peace entrepreneurs not rolling out standard approaches, is that it is hard to aggregate the impact of everything that we fund. Volunteer hours are the one common factor that we have so far identified, across all of our partners, and we are seeking to gather data that would allow us to aggregate these.

### d) Baseline surveys

With much funding being project-based, and the length of a project rarely exceeding three years, the time taken to conduct a baseline survey may eat into the implementation period. Partners are likely to prioritise implementation over surveying, because of their drive to improve the situation of their communities. But

in a long-term relationship, of the kind that Peace Direct seeks to have with partners, one project's final assessment may provide the basis for the next project's baseline. Failing this, resources need to be planned in at the start of the project, so that the baseline survey can be conducted in parallel with the programme set-up.

#### d) 'Emergent peace'

Rosemary Cairns, a respected evaluator, has argued that much work needs to be done in building relationships and social capital, before the programmatic peace work can be effective. This work, which she compares with the submerged portion of an iceberg, is particularly hard to measure, unless it manifests itself in new structures (such as the Task Forces which CRC has brought together, which now take on responsibility for identifying and dealing with impending disputes that could lead to violence).

This links with the building of resilience – one of the most important tasks for local peacebuilding. It can potentially be measured by such things as reduced recruitment to armed groups, the creation of self-sustaining peace committees, and self-sustaining institutions that create strong social bonds across religious or ethnic divides.

#### f) Theories of change versus log frames

Successful peacebuilding requires the ability to seize opportunities, defuse crises and overcome unexpected obstacles. The improvisation required sits uncomfortably with log frame methodology.

By contrast, Theory of Change approaches involve the definition of the desired end state, and the mapping out of a path to get there, and provide greater flexibility to alter the path in the light of circumstances.

An example of an unexpected consequence came when CRC asked villagers whether they felt safer in specific ways, following a programme that disarmed Mai Mai members. After a period of relative tranquility, the 'space' previously occupied by the Mai Mai was taken over by FDLR members (a militia group with roots in Rwanda) and attacks and sexual violence returned to the previously high level. Thus, while the programme activities had been successfully completed, the goal had been diverted by outside factors, and a log frame approach proved to be insufficient to deliver the desired end state.

A more positive example would be the success of another project (which we cannot name for security reasons) in introducing training in non-violent conflict transformation into the police service. This has now been internalised, with a unit being set up within the police service to promote it, and female police officers requesting their own specific training. This could not have been envisaged in the log frame.

#### g) Long-term evaluation

The real test of any intervention comes not at the end of the programme, but several years later. We all fear that if we were to revisit an area several years after programme funding ended, we would find little trace of the change we had sought to make. Yet this is the only true test. Making change endogenous, as in the Zimbabwe police example above, is what we should be aiming for. If funders were prepared to commit to long term post-programme evaluation, it would change the way that programmes are designed, in the direction of long-term sustainability.

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## CONTACT

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- To find out about our partners' work, please visit [www.peacedirect.org](http://www.peacedirect.org).
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