Helpdesk Research Report: M&E in Fragile States
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Query: Identify literature on how to measure the impact of donor engagement in fragile states.

Enquirer: Fragile States Team, DFID

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1. Overview

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in the fragile states context is still a developing area. The majority of literature centres on peacebuilding practices and conflict prevention; however, experts have noted that the guidelines and lessons used for peacebuilding are applicable to fragility in general. There is a general consensus on the need to move M&E beyond the project level to the sector and strategic level in fragile states. This is due to the difficulty in attributing positive impacts to any one particular project – given the wide array of projects and actors that are usually active in such environments. Moreover, it is important to assess the overall impact of interventions on stabilising fragile states and promoting sustainable peace – to examine how certain projects/programmes complement and/or undermine one another and the overall strategic objective(s). Joint evaluations and agreed upon objectives, among government departments (in the case of ‘whole-of-government’ approaches) and with other governments and relevant actors are useful in providing this comprehensive picture.

The recommended toolkits for M&E include assessments of relevance/appropriateness; strategic alignment; efficiency; effectiveness; impact; outcomes and sustainability; and policy coherence/coordination. This differs little from M&E in other contexts. However, there are additional factors that must be taken into consideration in fragile environments, including rapidly changing contexts; difficulties in obtaining reliable data; and capacity limitations. In order to address these challenges, it is recommended that M&E practices should:

- be flexible and iterative;
- utilise quantitative and qualitative data, without imposing strict requirements on purity of data;
- allow for a phased process, whereby local governments begin with simple M&E processes that increase in complexity as capacity increases; and
- involve stakeholders in a participatory manner, which can itself promote stability and conflict prevention by providing a safe space for dialogue and learning.
2. Key documents

**World Bank**

This short paper examines the extent to which the Timor-Leste government is ready to manage and monitor the effects of its national development plan and donor contributions. It notes that Managing for Development Results (MfDR) is an iterative process; governments and agencies have moved away from inputs and processes towards results, which include key policy milestones, outcomes and assessment of the impact of development interventions, and knowledge transfer. It emphasises that a phase-in MfDR approach is necessary for fragile transition states, which would allow for such countries to master one level of monitoring before moving on to the next (based on an input – output - short term outcome - long term outcome - overall impact methodology). This phase in approach recognises that institutional, social and behavioural changes take time and effort; and that the development of processes, procedures and systems is an iterative process, incorporating lessons learned at each stage.

**UNDP**

This manual discusses Results-Based Management (RBM), which looks at inputs, activities, outputs (specific products of a particular project), outcomes (changes in the real world) and impact (long term, sustainable changes in the real world). It represents a movement by UNDP and other development organisations away from a focus on processes towards clear results. The movement was driven by the fact that while many projects had appeared successful in the past, living standards in the countries in which they were implemented did not increase. The manual provides various toolkits and guides on quantitative and qualitative monitoring of projects and programmes, looking at design and relevance; efficiency; effectiveness; impact; and sustainability. It also incorporates conflict-sensitivity monitoring. It emphasises the importance of recognising that “assistance in the context of conflict is not neutral, but becomes a part of the context” (p. 13). It is important to monitor the impact of the conflict context on the project and vice versa.


This results-based evaluation assesses the extent to which UNDP has helped to address the structure conditions conducive to conflict – based on interventions in Afghanistan, the DRC, Guatemala, Haiti, Sierra Leone and Tajikistan. Of particular relevance to this query is the section on Methodology (pp. 3-10). The report outlines its evaluation methodology. Resources used included case studies, data on human security indicators, macroeconomic statistics, questionnaires and interviews. The criteria for assessment of the UNDPs’ role were:

- relevance and positioning: how relevant were UNDP’s strategy/programmes within the framework of the international community’s response?
- results and effectiveness: did the UNDP’s programmes contributed to the achievement of human security and if so, how?
- efficiency: were the interventions timely and cost-effective?
- coordination: how successful was the UNDP in coordinating external assistance/working with partners?
- substantive leadership and credibility: how successful was the UNDP in defining the development agenda/priorities; how is the UNDP perceived?
OECD


This factsheet discusses the challenges of M&E in a conflict prevention and peacebuilding environment, including the large number of differing activities; the difficulty of accessing reliable data; and high politicisation. It emphasises that the evaluation process itself can have unintended consequences that influence the behaviour of conflict protagonists. It outlines key questions for evaluating conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities and policies related to:

- Relevance/Appropriateness: whether interventions relate to the drivers of (potential) conflict;
- Efficiency: whether the interventions are cost effective;
- Impact: whether there are positive/negative changes/impacts on the conflict;
- Effectiveness: whether the defined objectives are achieved;
- Sustainability: whether the benefits achieved are sustainable even after the withdrawal of donor support; whether the role of ‘spoilers’ has been addressed;
- Coherence/Linkages: whether activities in related policy areas are reinforcing or undermining.


This detailed report elaborates on the DAC criteria outlined above. It notes that while there is no “right” methodology to address all situations of conflict prevention and peacebuilding, there are some common M&E principles, which include: inclusiveness; the testing of underlying theories of change; the use of qualitative and quantitative methods; testing assumptions and learning; ethical standards for approaching informants and handling the reporting of findings. It emphasises the importance of joint evaluations in order to produce a fuller picture of whether various interventions “add up” and the importance of recognising the potential involvement of the government in the conflict when considering partner country roles. The report examines the relevance of existing DAC M&E tools on pages 26-31; and provides a detailed step-by-step process in preparing evaluation methodologies on pages 38-56, including additional issues for conflict prevention and peacebuilding environments.

DFID


This short paper provides a monitoring framework for Nepal’s Country Assistance Plan. In addition to project cycle monitoring, the framework is designed to monitor and evaluate interventions at the programme and strategic level – to provide evidence of their impact on poverty reduction and social exclusion. The three main components are conflict impact monitoring; livelihoods and social inclusion monitoring; and context monitoring – assessing changes in the broader operating environment, including the state of democracy, human rights and rule of law.

Norway/Utstein Countries

This review assesses the impact of Norwegian and intentional development assistance on conflict transformation in Timor Leste. “The review process used a four-part methodology adapted from draft OECD DAC tools:

- Develop a composite of the conflict analysis done by the international community, which served as the baseline for programme development;
- Identify the main characteristics of the international assistance portfolio;
- Map the relationship between the conflict analysis and the characteristics of assistance, to identify whether they were consistent;
- With the benefit of hindsight, conduct a new conflict analysis for the same period, to make observations on the original conflict analysis and on the impact that assistance has had on conflict dynamics (p.1)

Appendix B discusses in detail how this methodology was applied.


This joint study looked at 336 peacebuilding projects implemented by Norway, the UK, the Netherlands and Germany and identifies a major strategic deficit in peacebuilding efforts. Of particular relevance to this query is the discussion on impact assessments (see pp. 14-15 and 59-60). The study stresses that while it is still important to evaluate projects, impact assessments should not be carried out at the project level since it is impossible to assess the peacebuilding impact of an individual project. While each activity may contribute to positive effects, it is not possible to attribute the positive impact directly to any one project. Instead, impact assessment should be shifted to the strategic level – assessing the prospects of peace itself, and should involve joint evaluations by donor governments and other key peacebuilding actors.

CIDA


This paper outlines criteria and frameworks for identifying where Canada should engage and how it can evaluate that engagement. It highlights the current difficulties of monitoring and evaluating Canada’s ‘whole-of-government’ approach due to the problems of ‘bureaucratic silos’, whereby each department conducts its own M&E of operations or projects - resulting in lack of information sharing and common problem definition. To address this, it recommends a joint “lessons learned” and “impact assessment” process. The paper provides a model for assessing impact of engagement in fragile states, which can be used to monitor and forecast failed/fragile states (to decide whether to intervene) as well as to monitor and evaluate subsequent interventions.

NGOs and Consultants


This manual discusses the differences between monitoring and evaluation and provides detailed guidelines for establishing indicators; monitoring contexts; preparing, managing and utilising evaluations. It stresses the importance of context monitoring – the continuous updating and refinement of conflict assessment, which allows peacebuilding practitioners to anticipate changes; make proactive programmatic shifts; and ensure the safety of participants, partners and staff. Using a Conflict Transformation Evaluation Framework (CTEF), it outlines the following evaluation objectives:

- Appropriateness Consideration: whether the intervention strategy is best for the situation/desired goal;
- Strategic Alignment: whether activities match the organisation’s goals/mission;
- Management and Administration: how well the project is organised and run;
- Cost Accountability: how funds are used and accounted for;
- Implementation Process Appraisal
- Output Identification: what are the immediate results;
- Outcome Identification: what are the changes produced;
- Impact Assessment: what are the consequences or changes following intervention in the conflict situation, or in a component of that situation. These assessments are difficult to conduct and require much time and financial resources.

The manual also offers a comparison of DAC criteria in the humanitarian and development field and the CTEF (see pp. 105-106).


  The paper was prepared for the panel: ‘Monitoring and Evaluating Conflict Interventions: Theory vs. Practice’. It discusses M&E information systems – to improve programme impact and understand how to best contribute to peaceful development in situations prone to violent conflict. It also looks at examples of general M&E and project M&E and case studies (Nepal, Iraq, Rwanda and Ukraine) in order to outline strategies and tactics for peace-precarious situations. The author identifies specific challenges, which include dramatic changes in the status of institutions and individuals; the physical security of the programme team; and less reliable data combined with the urgent need for information. The paper provides several recommendations, including the need for:
  - flexible M&E systems that can provide useful information under extreme uncertainty;
  - a ‘good enough’ philosophy regarding data collection as opposed to insistence on social science purity;
  - strategic selection of indicators and metrics; and
  - a system for dialogue and feedback.


  This paper looks at methods to assess impact of interventions; and identifies two distinct groups: The first are ‘Frameworkers’, who use a linear cause-effect method and examine impact with respect to the achievement of particular outputs and larger objectives. They focus on “SMART” indicators: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound. The second are ‘Circlers’, who look at relationships and adopt a flexible, non-linear approach. They focus on ‘unmeasurable’ results – and seek to engage transformative processes with communities. The author suggests that the ‘Most Significant Change’ (MSC) methodology can bridge these two groups. MSC looks at complex social changes, relying on a systematic selection of stories at the field level, which are considered most significant and which capture the change/impact of the particular programme.


  This toolkit for peacebuilding practitioners is designed to promote learning and reflection. It discusses theories of change related to the four identified dimensions of conflict: personal, relational, structural and cultural; and provides tools for exploring change in conflict transformation, based on these four dimensions. Chapters 11 to 13 examine monitoring and evaluation as learning and draw out lessons, including:
  - Linking M&E with theories of change;
  - Ensuring stakeholder participation;
- Documenting experiences and learning; and
- Using monitoring such that it becomes a part of the peacebuilding process (a safe space to gather together different actors).


While not an actual guide on ways to measure impact of donor engagement in failed states, this recent book provides an assessment of recent efforts by individual donor governments to achieve policy coherence and integrate defence, diplomacy and development in failed states. It looks at efforts to promote policy coherence by the UK, US, Canada, Australia, Germany, France and Sweden. It addresses briefly the additional challenges of M&E in failed states, including the presence of a vast variety of aid streams and agencies; disagreement over fundamental objectives of joined-up efforts; and the lack of clarity and agreement over metrics to measure these overlapping (and sometimes) competing goals.


This handbook comprises a collection of papers and responses by scholars and practitioners. It contributes to the dialogue and debate on Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) – and is used to evaluate peace practices and conflict transformation activities. Some of the findings that emerge are:
- There is no single concept of PCIA; however, the availability of a variety of approaches may be advantageous;
- Most contributors to the handbook prefer a micro-level project approach to PCIA because of the uniqueness and specificities of local situations and projects; and the ability to involve local stakeholders with this approach;
- Donors need to encourage PCIA processes, learning and reflection: “As long as projects are rewarded for good practices only, the willingness to discuss “failure” or negative consequences is reduced – and a learning opportunity missed” (p. 8).

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Websites visited


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