Executive summary

The high human, economic, political and social costs of violent conflict – coupled with a growing sense that such suffering and devastation could be avoided or at least mitigated – have led to increasing shares of development and humanitarian assistance being spent in settings of violent conflict and state fragility. In the decade to 2009 the share of overseas development assistance (ODA) to fragile, conflict-afflicted countries doubled to USD 46 billion and 37% of total available ODA. International actors now recognise the centrality of these challenges for global development.

Yet the scale of that effort is not reflected in its results. Findings from evaluations in these fields show that there are substantial weaknesses in programme design, effectiveness, and management. Peacebuilding and statebuilding support is often not based on a clear, strategic understanding of the conflict and (potential) role of international support in transforming key conflict drivers. Programmes lack basic conflict sensitivity and are not well adapted to the context in which they operate. The logic and assumptions underlying many activities in these fields are untested and objectives are unclear. Sketchy understanding of a conflict and unchecked assumptions can produce interventions that actually worsen tensions and fuel the conflicts they seek to mitigate.

The need for more and better evaluation in conflict settings

Furthermore, a persistent evaluation gap (few or weak evaluations of peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities), and little to no evaluation activity in settings of violent conflict, has meant that there is often very little credible information about the effectiveness and results of such endeavours. Learning and accountability have been weak. Research and experience, including the testing of the draft guidance, have shown that evaluations in these fields tend to be weak in terms of data, methods and validity of findings. Fewer rigorous methods are used and questions of causality are often inadequately addressed. Many evaluations in this field focus on process and mapping the context. Both internal and external validity tend to be quite low – meaning it is hard to draw broader lessons that can be applied to other contexts and it is difficult to draw credible conclusions about effectiveness and what works.

How and why guidance was developed

Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility (hereafter referred to as "the *Guidance*") was developed by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC) through the collaboration of its subsidiary bodies working on conflict and fragility and on evaluation. In 2008, the OECD produced a draft guidance, (*Guidance on Evaluating Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding Activities – Working Draft for Application Period*) that was used to evaluate a range of activities. The findings from that application phase led to the 2008 draft

being revised. The result is the present guidance, *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility*.

This guidance aims to help improve programme design and management and strengthen the use of evaluation in order to enhance the quality of conflict prevention and peacebuilding work. It seeks to guide policy makers and country partners, field and programme officers, evaluators and other stakeholders engaged in settings of conflict and fragility by supporting a better, shared understanding of the role and utility of evaluations, outlining key dimensions of planning for them, setting them up, and carrying them out.

This guidance is to be used for assessing activities (policies, programmes, strategies or projects) in settings of violent conflict or state fragility, such as peacebuilding and conflict prevention work and development and humanitarian activities that may or may not have specific peace-related objectives. This encompasses the work of local, national, regional and non-governmental actors, in addition to development co-operation activities. The central principles and concepts in this guidance, including conflict sensitivity and the importance of understanding and testing underlying theories about what is being done and why, are applicable to a range of actors.

Understanding key concepts

The document begins with a discussion of key concepts and provides an overview of current policy debates. It describes the convergence of the concepts of peacebuilding, statebuilding and conflict prevention and addresses the emerging international consensus that such contexts require specific, adapted approaches. It considers the principles for engagement in fragile states as the backdrop to evaluating such engagement and outlines the preconditions for evaluability, which should be handled by those designing and managing such programmes. Such conditions include setting clear, measurable objectives for peace-related activities, collecting baselines data and monitoring activities.

Challenges of evaluating in fragile, conflicted-affected settings

While no two situations of conflict and fragility are alike – all are specific to a place and time – they share some characteristics, many of which make evaluation particularly challenging. Evaluations in the field of conflict prevention and peacebuilding expose both evaluators and evaluated to violence. International engagement in settings of violent conflict is often highly politicised, complex and multifaceted, encompassing not only development activities, but ones that are humanitarian, diplomatic, and even military in nature. Evaluators may struggle to maintain safe "evaluation space" where they can produce credible, defensible findings. It can be particularly difficult to establish clear attribution and causality in settings that are complex and where changes for peace (or renewed violence) are often non-linear and unpredictable. Further complicating evaluation in these settings are the relatively weak programme designs and the lack of agreed upon, proven strategies for effectively working towards peace. Baseline and monitoring data, including information on implementation, is often lacking. These weaknesses in design and programme management can make peacebuilding and statebuilding activities less effective and particularly difficult to evaluate.

Overcoming challenges by understanding the conflict context

Moving from the discussion of challenges, the guidance outlines a number of basic principles to help overcome them, setting the stage for a description of key elements of planning for, preparing, implementing, and learning from an evaluation. The guidance argues that conflict analysis – which includes understanding conflict dynamics and actors as well as the economic and political context – is essential for designing and implementing strategies and programmes, as well as for evaluating such work. A clear analysis of the causes, drivers and dynamics of conflict and fragility sets the analytical framework for evaluation, and should also be used to ensure conflict sensitivity. Adjusting the evaluation to be sensitive to the conflict context may have implications for methodology, data collection and findings.

Conflict sensitivity and theories of change

Conflict sensitivity is an overarching principle highlighted in this guidance. All engagement (including evaluation) in such settings should be sensitive to conflict and avoid doing harm. However, conflict sensitivity does not of itself build peace and being sensitive to the conflict is not synonymous with being effective. Questions of conflict sensitivity will therefore be evaluated alongside an assessment of effectiveness and other criteria.
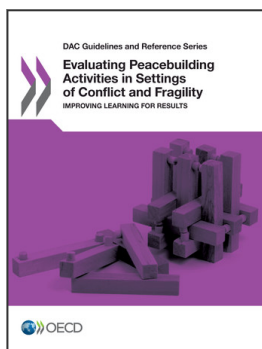
The concept of theory of change is presented as a way of encouraging critical thinking about the assumptions and strategies of peacebuilding and statebuilding. A theory of change is the understanding of how a specific activity will result in achieving desired changes in a particular context – it is the logic that underlies action. Developing better founded, more clearly stated theories about how peacebuilding and statebuilding can be achieved and supported is a key message from this guidance for decision makers, managers, and programme staff. Policies and programmes should use theories and assumptions that are tested and evidence based, which set out in clear cause-effect terms how they intend to produce outputs, outcomes and impacts. Doing so will not only help in the assessment of effectiveness and impact, but also contribute to knowledge about violence, peace and development. Untested or incorrect theories of change are often one reason why development assistance is failing to produce peacebuilding results. Evaluation contributes to testing theories of change and to building up the evidence base on peacebuilding and statebuilding.

Evaluations at work

Analysis against the DAC criteria constitutes the main substance of the evaluation study. Evaluators examine relevance, sustainability, effectiveness, efficiency and impact of activities in relation to the specific conflict context in order to answer the main evaluation questions posed in the terms of reference. The guidance describes how these criteria might be adjusted and offers examples of conflict-related lines of query. Data availability and other challenges may affect analysis, particularly when assessing impact. The last phase of an evaluation is to draw the conclusions and feed the findings into relevant planning, management, learning, research, or accountability processes. Dissemination strategies should be tailored to the target audiences, reaching them with timely, relevant information backed up by sound evidence. Actionable recommendations based on the conclusions should be presented as opportunities for learning and commissioning institutions should

ensure systematic response to the findings. Such an approach will increase receptivity and the chances that findings will be fed back into programme design and decision-making.

In these ways, more and better evaluation will contribute to identifying strategies and programmes that progress towards "peace writ large".

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