

Experiences with Impact Assessment: Can we know what Good we do?

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1. Introduction

Discussions of current conflicts often highlight their complexity. These conflicts involve many people, civilian and military, in both direct and indirect ways; they relate to internal, inter-group histories and to external, international interests; they are driven by multiple and competing motivations, some of which are lofty and grand while others are selfish and narrow. Furthermore, these 'complex humanitarian emergencies' (CHEs) prompt many types of international responses that range from humanitarian efforts to reduce suffering to grass roots and high level efforts to end fighting.

But, under circumstances of such layered complexity, how can international agencies that undertake programmes to promote survival and/or peace determine what their impacts are? How can they trace and assess the outcomes of their work as these affect inter-group conflict?

The difficulty of tracing and assessing humanitarian or political attempts to lessen conflict has two dimensions. The first has to do with the criteria or indicators for assessing progress. What are the appropriate forms and means of measurement of progress in relation to conflict reduction?

The second dimension involves attribution. When so many things are happening in a complex environment, how can one know which actions bring about which outcomes? If positive steps are overwhelmed by destructive violence, does this mean no progress occurred? If violence abates, can this honestly be traced to programmatic efforts to reduce violence or are other factors responsible for change?

In the pages that follow, we shall address these questions regarding the impacts of agencies that work in or on conflict. We shall begin, in Sections II and III, by describing two collaborative efforts undertaken by agencies to learn more about their impacts on conflict within the societies where they work. The first, the Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCCP), involves a number of humanitarian and development assistance agencies seeking to understand how their efforts to save lives, alleviate suffering and support indigenous development interact with, and in some cases reinforce, inter-group conflicts in areas where they provide aid. The second project, Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP), involves a number of agencies that specifically work on conflict; that is, those agencies that undertake inter-group mediation, reconciliation, peace education, conflict management, conflict transformation and other approaches to reducing the dangers of conflict. In these sections we describe the background, approaches and outcomes of these two projects.

In Section IV, we turn to a review of what has been learned through LCCP about how to assess the impacts of humanitarian and development programmes on conflict and, in Section V, we present the findings about how to assess outcomes of efforts intended to reduce conflict and build peace. Finally, in Section VI, we discuss the similarities and differences in assessment techniques required, depending on whether one is working in conflict or on conflict.

2. The Local Capacities for Peace Project

In 1994, five years after the end of the Cold War, many international humanitarian and development assistance NGOs found themselves working in areas where serious, often violent, inter-group conflict had erupted. Many of these became areas of extreme civilian-based civil wars, fought between subgroups of what had previously been functionally cohesive societies.

Many NGO staff, both local and expatriate, were concerned by the evidence in front of them that the assistance they provided was regularly compromised. They were aware that the aid they provided very often ended up in the hands or under the control of local warlords, militias or partisan politicians, though they intended it to be targeted only to civilians in need and to be impartial with regard to the sides at war.

Sometimes goods were stolen and used to feed armies or buy weapons; sometimes authorities controlled the locations and timing of aid deliveries as a means of controlling population movements for the purposes of warfare. The misuses and abuses of humanitarian aid were endemic and prevalent. Although some aid workers believed these to be inevitable in the context of localised, inter-group warfare, others began to look for ways to avoid such negative aid-produced impacts.

Under these circumstances, the Local Capacities for Peace Project was organised as a collaborative effort of many operational NGOs working in conflict zones. The project was intended to pool the broad and varied experiences of these agencies and, through comparing and analysing them, to find out whether the conflict-worsening impacts of aid were, though regrettable, an inevitable aspect of 'doing business' in warfare or whether there were options for providing aid that would limit, or eliminate, such negative effects. LCPP set out to consider how can international aid agencies (working in both humanitarian and development assistance) do the good they mean to do in conflict areas without, at the same time, having their aid feed into, exacerbate or prolong the conflicts. Further, how might such assistance be given so that, rather than having negative, conflict-worsening effects, it instead helps local people disengage from conflict and begin to establish the systems they need for dealing with the issues that underlie the conflict?

During the next years, LCPP involved hundreds of individuals working with dozens of NGOs and other assistance agencies in examining their work and analysing it to understand how they might ensure better outcomes. In the first eighteen months of the project, fifteen case studies were written about aid programmes in fourteen conflict zones.

In the next year, over twenty feedback workshops were held, most also in conflict areas and some with NGO headquarters staffs in donor countries. In these workshops, participants were invited to test the learning from the case studies against their own experience. They were urged to add to, alter, amend, improve and rethink these lessons to make them more valid and truer to the realities faced across the spectrum of conflict areas where agencies worked.

The cumulative learning from these workshops provided the basis for the publication of the book, *Do No Harm: How Aid Supports Peace – or War* (Anderson 1999). Then, the usefulness and effectiveness of the LCPP lessons were put to the test in real time and real space by the field staff of a range of operational NGOs working in twelve active conflict areas around the world. These staff people experimented with using the 'do no harm' approaches in the ongoing design and implementation of aid projects and, from this, learned more about how to trace the impacts of international assistance on inter-group conflicts. When this phase of LCPP ended in September 2000, a number of agencies launched what they called mainstreaming efforts, taking the field-based lessons back into their headquarters to ensure that people throughout their agencies were working in the same way and with the same understanding.

What was learned through the LCPP? Three lessons have pertinence to the impact and assessment issues discussed here.

First, by looking across many settings and including many types of assistance programmes, the LCPP was able to identify clear and repeated patterns in the interaction between humanitarian and development assistance and conflict. Specifically, we now know exactly how aid can exacerbate conflict through the transfer of aid's resources and through „implicit ethical messages“ (Anderson 1999). It is important to note that these patterns were identified by many aid workers reflecting on their own experiences in many different types of aid programmes in many different types of conflicts. They embody solid, field-based learning rather than hypotheses about how things might occur.

Second, the broad overview of conflict settings also provided insights into the characteristics of conflicts that have important implications for how aid and conflict interact. LCPP found that all conflicts are characterised by two types of forces. On the one hand, people within conflict areas are divided from each other along the lines of subgroup identities. On the other hand and at the same time, people within conflicts also remain connected to each other across divisional lines. The latter is especially true where conflicts occur within nations where people have previously lived as neighbours and friends; it also pertains in cross-border wars such as that between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

That wars are characterised by divisions between groups is self-evident. However, if aid workers are to understand how their aid affects conflict, they must also understand the bases and dimensions of these divisions. For example, aid personnel need to understand which subgroups are in conflict and why. They need to identify the sources of tension between groups to determine if they arise from systemic root causes or from manipulation, opportunism or other proximate causes. They need to know which issues, practices, institutions or experiences divide people. Without such clarity about ‚dividers‘ between conflicting subgroups, aid workers are unable to understand whether the aid they give feeds into and worsens (or helps to relieve and reduce) them.

Similarly, aid workers need to understand how people remain connected to each other in spite of warfare. LCPP found a number of types of ‚connectors‘ that served to link people on different sides of conflicts. These included: shared systems and institutions (such as infrastructural or market systems); attitudes and actions (such as when families ‚adopt‘ children from the other side who have been separated from their families in the confusion of warfare); past or present common experiences (such as a common history of colonialism or the current reality of warfare); shared values and interests (such as a shared religion, or the value placed on children) and shared symbols and occasions (such as monuments or national holidays). Again, without awareness of these linkages between people, aid workers are not able to know whether, or how, their work either ignores and, thus, undermines connections or positively recognises and, thus, reinforces them.

People involved in LCPP have found that international assistance can worsen war when it reinforces inter-group divisions and tensions and when it undermines and weakens inter-group connections; it can promote peace when it reduces inter-group divisions and when it supports and strengthens inter-group connections.

Third, the experience collected through LCPP shows that it is in the details of an aid programme that its impacts either reinforce divisions or connectors. Programme decisions about whether to provide aid, where to work, when and for how long, who to hire locally, whom to target, the roles of international staff, how to deliver goods – these and other basic management decisions – all have effects on inter-group relationships in the areas where aid is provided.

In all situations encountered by the range of humanitarian and development assistance workers involved in LCPP, it has been possible to find ways of providing assistance that lessen, rather than worsen, inter-group divisions. It has also been possible to find programming options that

acknowledge and build on existing linkages rather than undermining them. Aid workers have also been consistently creative about finding options and alternatives ways of working to avoid the negative implicit ethical messages.

Through all of the stages of the LCPP – the case studies, the feedback workshops, the application of do no harm approaches in actual project settings and the mainstreaming of do no harm into agency-wide structures and modes – the focus has been on tracing and assessing aid's impacts on conflict.

3. The Reflecting on Peace Practice Project

In September 1999, following the model of LCPP, a number of international agencies engaged in working on conflict joined together in the Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) project. The purpose of this effort was to look systematically at the collective and comparative experiences of these agencies in order to learn more about which of the activities they undertake are effective and which are not, and under what circumstances their actions do or do not work. Again, a broad range of experience was gathered through multiple case studies of different types of peace-promotion activities undertaken by different agencies in various stages of conflicts across a broad geographical spread of locations. Twenty-six case studies were completed and, through several consultations to read, discuss and analyse these cases, involving peace practitioners both from within and outside conflict zones, eleven issues were identified as being central across all settings to the effectiveness, or lack of it, of peace work.

Over the next months a series of feedback workshops was again held, this time with peace practitioners in many regions of the world (and in many conflict areas) to probe these issues and to learn what experience could teach about them. As more and more workshops were held, the discussions became increasingly focused on effectiveness. The central questions were a) the knowledge about a conflict that a peace agency needs in order to plan and execute effective programmes, b) the kinds of work that are effective where and when and c) the ways to assess effectiveness in the complicated arena of peace work.

Somewhat to the surprise of all who were engaged in this project and who work daily in the complex world of peace practice, clear lessons emerged that have proved helpful for tracing and assessing effectiveness. These are gathered in a publication entitled *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners* (Anderson and Olson 2003). In September 2003, RPP will continue as groups of peace agencies working in specific areas of the world will take up RPP lessons and apply them to their ongoing programming efforts to test their usefulness and impacts over a two-year period.

For the purposes of our focus here on assessing impacts, three lessons learned through RPP are relevant.

First, a wide range of peace practitioners agree that a thorough knowledge of the context of conflict is essential for effective work. However, there is little agreement about how much knowledge is enough, which knowledge is most important and how knowledge translates into useful analysis. Nonetheless, the evidence of RPP experience did point to four essential aspects of context analysis that, if not understood, seriously undermine the likelihood of effectiveness. These four aspects of context analysis are:

1. What and who needs to be stopped? Many peace activists concentrate on how to build positive alternatives to violence or conflict, believing that if they can build a strong enough alternative, conflict will end. Experience shows, however, that many if not most conflicts are driven by

the interests of people who gain politically or economically from the conflict. Unless these are understood, analysed and some explicit programmatic approach is taken to address these interests, attempts to establish peace will be consistently undermined by spoiling acts.

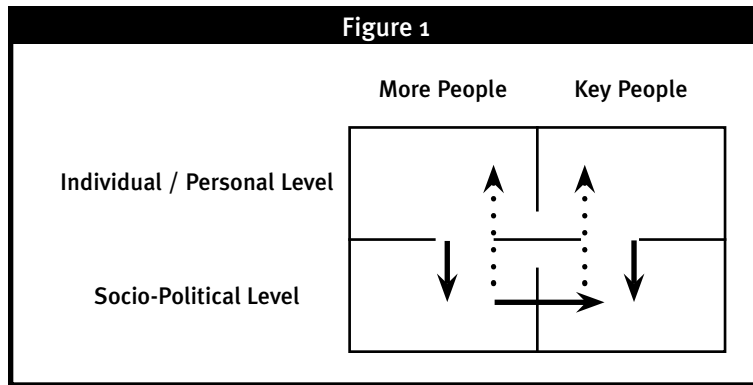
2. What and who needs to be supported? Too often, peace activists develop peace programmes without first identifying and analysing the areas where people do not fight and the issues about which there is agreement rather than disagreement. Without this knowledge, peace programmes miss opportunities for supporting existing mechanisms for peace.
3. What are the external, as well as the internal, factors in the conflict? Most wars have international and/or interregional, as well as local dimensions. To be effective, peace practice strategies must take account of the factors outside the actual fighting area that influence, and sometimes perpetuate, violence.
4. Has the proposed activity been tried before and, if so, with what results? Too often, peace practitioners repeat programmes that others have tried without effect. For example, many people organise dialogues, implicitly assuming that more is better. But, unless analysis of the context shows that this is true, or that a particular dialogue will succeed when others have failed, then people will be working at something that has little chance of making a difference.

Second, peace practitioners seem to agree on two major long-range goals of their work – namely the ending of violent conflict and the building of a just, sustainable peace. Some agencies concentrate on one of these goals; others focus on both simultaneously. However, experience shows that although some peace practice is explicitly directed toward reducing violence (as for example, inter-positioning and accompaniment efforts), the ultimate goal of a just, sustainable peace is more often assumed to be linked to project activities rather than directly factored into project choices and strategies. Many people do many things ‘for peace’ assuming that, someday, ‘they will all add up.’ The evidence gathered through RPP suggests that this assumption is not true. Many good actions do not simply add up to peace.

Third, although participants in RPP were at first staggered by the range of activities undertaken for peace and covered by the case studies, over time it became clear that all peace practice can be depicted in a simple chart (Figure 1 below). What this matrix shows is that strategies for peace range from those that are based on the belief that peace is built through the engagement of many people to those based on the belief that peace is possible only if certain people, holding key positions, are engaged. This range is shown in the columns under the heading ‘More People’ and ‘Key People’. Further, peace programmers work at two basic levels, some concentrating on individual, personal change (as in programmes focused on changing attitudes or teaching peace values) and others concentrating on socio-political change (such as programmes directed toward reform or development of the institutions of justice, political inclusion, etc.). These are shown in the matrix in the rows labelled ‘Personal/Individual’ and ‘Socio-Political’ levels.

This simple charting of different strategies and different levels of work enabled the people involved in RPP to trace which types of work are, or are not, effective under which circumstances. Here the findings were remarkable.

RPP found that work that stays only at the individual/personal level, without translation into institutional impacts at the socio-political level, has no discernable impact on peace. It may be good and useful work (participants may gain from it individually) but its effectiveness in either reducing conflict, or in contributing to a sustainable peace, is not traceable. A change in people’s attitudes has no effect on peace unless they also act differently in the public sphere. Such work becomes effective only if it is linked to, and engaged with, work also at the socio-political level.



In addition, RPP found that work that focuses on more people cannot, by itself, achieve sufficient momentum to end conflict or build peace; nor can work concentrated only on key people. For effectiveness, efforts to engage more people in peace practice must also link to efforts involving key people and vice versa. If leaders make treaties, for which people are not ready, these agreements will not hold; if many people want peace but they cannot affect the decisions of their leaders or the perpetrators of war, peace will not come.

These two findings – that individual/personal level work must be linked to socio-political developments and that more people and key people strategies must be linked – are shown in figure 1 by the arrows that go downward and across the bottom of the matrix.

4. LCPP Experience in Assessing and Evaluating Impacts

1. Aid agencies work with tangibles

Over the years, aid agencies have become adept at assessing the direct impacts of their work. They regularly document how many people have been fed, how many houses have been repaired, how many children have been inoculated and so on, as a result of aid. Many go further to report accurately on some of the indirect impacts of their work such as the reduction in disease that results from improved water and sanitation systems. Most aid agencies accept responsibility for tracing the impacts of the resources they provide in the spheres where these resources are intended to benefit recipients.

However, LCPP was concerned not with the direct impacts of aid but with its side effects on conflict. This required that aid agencies make a significant shift in their understanding of accountability, accepting responsibility for the unplanned and often unintended political and social impacts of their work. They were concerned that this involved them in areas where they had no expertise and required that they measure what are essentially immeasurable outcomes.

2. Patterns as Valid Evidence

These concerns abated when the LCPP process was able to identify clear, repeated and prevalent patterns in how aid interacts with conflict. The cumulative evidence regarding (for example) the manipulation of food aid to support armies or force population movements, drawn from specific, grounded experiences in multiple settings, became as compelling as any measure of the impact of food aid on nutritional status. The specificity and precision of this cumulative experience provided evidence that was seen by aid workers to be accurate and valid.

3. Differences in Assessing Negative and Positive Impacts

LCPP found that it is easier to trace the elimination of aid's negative impacts than to know precisely its positive impacts on conflict. When an NGO identifies some way that its aid is feeding into conflict, it can then take steps to end this. Identifying a specific problem makes it possible also to know when that problem is solved. For example, one agency working in a West African country found that it had inadvertently hired all of its local staff from only one of the ethnic groups in the conflict area. The result was a one-sided programme which favoured villages and individuals also from that ethnic group and, thus, fed into inter-group tensions. Once the agency staff had identified the problem of single-ethnicity, and once they had analysed how their hiring procedures led to this outcome, they were able to broaden their recruiting to other groups and reinforce inter-group connections rather than feeding into inter-group tensions. In another area, an aid agency found that every time it trained mechanics to maintain its fleet of delivery trucks, these individuals were conscripted by the local militias to maintain the military vehicles at the front lines of the war. Having recognised how their training was supporting the military, this agency decided to recruit and train women as mechanics. Women were not subject to the draft.

These two examples illustrate how the specificity of problem identification, whether concerned with the hiring of several hundred staff engaged in programmes across an entire region of a country or with the more limited impact of only a few hired mechanics, enables corresponding specificity of a solution to the problem. If we know exactly how we are making conflict worse, we can find alternatives and assess their effectiveness in eliminating the original negative effects.

4. Using Dividers and Connectors as Indicators

LCPP also found that dividers and connectors provide specific indicators of aid's impacts on conflict. The advantage of understanding conflict in terms of dividers and connectors is that these embody observable aspects of inter-group relationships.

When aid staff have identified and analysed inter-group divisions, they can observe whether these are worsening or abating. For example, if inequality in access to housing has divided groups, changes in access (opening access or further reinforcing its restrictions) can be assessed. Further, divisions between people can be seen in the rise and fall of inter-group tension, also observable in people's behaviours. Are roads considered safe and in use or dangerous and to be avoided? Do people move freely across boundaries or stay within the confines of their own groups?

Similarly, when aid agency staff have identified and analysed connectors, they can observe whether people are increasing or decreasing their use of these. For example, if trade has been a connector, are people still (or again) meeting in markets or do they avoid them? Do they send their children to schools together, do they build new separate schools or do they keep children at home?

Dividers and connectors provide a focus for immediate, observable facets of life which reflect inter-group relationships.

5. Dynamic Assessment

Through LCPP, it became clear that because conflicts are dynamic, impact assessment must also be a dynamic process. A positive impact in one period may have negative implications under other circumstances. As aid agencies analyse dividers and connectors to ensure that their impacts support the reduction of conflict, they need to keep re-doing their analysis. Under the changing circumstances of inter-group conflict, a divider in one period can become a connector (for example, war divides people but, under some circumstances, the experience of warfare actually creates a link among civilian groups) and vice versa.

6. Attribution

In some cases it is very clear that an aid programme caused a specific outcome. Our stories about hiring staff illustrate such cases. However, in most situations so many things are occurring that it is difficult to be sure how one programmatic effort has affected broad outcomes.

Nonetheless, in LCPP's work it became clear that very often people in conflict situations do attribute outcomes to specific actions. They 'know' whether an aid agency's programmes fuel the fires of suspicion and competition or are seen as fair, even-handed and inclusive. They can provide clear indications of why they know what they know. They cite evidence of cause and effect. They have opinions on impacts.

These opinions provide a very good source of attribution available to aid agencies. Knowing what people are saying about a programme's impacts is an exceedingly important measure of real impacts. Further, if people report a change of opinion and this change is observable in changed behaviour, the evidence is even better.

5. RPP Experience with Assessing Impacts of Peace Practice

Peace practitioners work largely with intangibles. They focus on attitudes, beliefs, trust, perceptions of security and other factors that contribute to inter-group tensions or to growing peace. RPP found that many peace practitioners were dubious about efforts to identify criteria by which to assess the effectiveness of their work.

There were four basic arguments against assessing effectiveness that arose repeatedly in RPP discussions. First, some noted that peace 'takes a long time to achieve' and thus, 'it is too soon' to know the outcomes of particular peace efforts. Second, some said that because peace is complicated, it is impossible to know which activities make which contributions to progress. Third, many claim that it is 'impossible' to assess what is essentially so intangible as progress toward peace is. And, fourth, some feel that they are 'called to be faithful' and 'to do what is right' rather than to 'be effective.' Many peace practitioners are motivated by their moral commitment to living and acting according to certain standards; they are less concerned with achievements and success.

At the same time, the vast majority of people involved in the RPP also noted their deep dissatisfaction and unease with the limited results they see from their intense, and often brave and sacrificial, efforts to make peace. Most wanted to find some way to improve outcomes, and to know when they were (and were not) making the difference they intended.

It soon became clear that specific indicators of peace progress are impossible to generalise across contexts. For example, in an area where no one has yet taken any explicit action to end a conflict, a public initiative undertaken by two people may represent a major step forward whereas in an area where anti-war demonstrations of hundreds of people are routine, another such event may represent no progress. Thus, to establish an indicator that counts, numbers of people engaged in explicit anti-war work would not capture the reality of each of these situations. The context, and what has been done, need to be understood to assess the real impacts.

However, through the broad RPP consultations, it was possible to identify generalisable criteria (not localised indicators) by which to assess the contribution of different activities to the two long-range goals of peace practice (ending violence and building just, sustainable peace.) Four criteria of effectiveness were identified as having universal usefulness for impact assessment.

Criteria of Effectiveness

The evidence collected through RPP found that a peace practice effort is effective (makes a significant contribution to the long-range goals of peace – ‘Peace Writ Large’ – if:

- it causes participants to take up initiatives for peace work on their own;
- it contributes to the reform or building of institutions that address grievances that underlie the conflict;
- it enables people increasingly to resist violence or manipulation to violence;
- it increases the security of people and their perception of security.

Experience also shows that an effort that does all four of these is more effective than an effort that contributes to only one of these criteria.

The project also found that three additional questions should be asked of any peace practice to assess effectiveness relative to other programmes:

- is it ‘fast enough?’ That is, is the approach we are taking making a positive difference in real time or is there some other approach that could produce results more rapidly?
- is it ‘big enough?’ That is, is our approach related to the scale of the conflict or are we being content with a small, marginal activity when there are other options that would have greater impact?
- is it going to endure? That is, will our effectiveness be fleeting or have we chosen a strategy that, above others, will have a lasting, sustainable impact?

The four criteria of effectiveness have been found to apply across contexts. Each represents a factor in increasing momentum away from conflict and toward peace. The three additional questions establish another benchmark by which to compare options and approaches. Using these criteria and questions, peace practice agencies can, having analysed the context where they are working, select the programming approach(es) that offer the greatest possibility of effectiveness in relation to the large goals of peace. Further, during and after programmes, judgments can be made as to their impacts in the four realms identified by the criteria categories.

6. Commonalities and Differences between LCPP and RPP

RPP and LCPP were both organised to involve many people active in the fields with which the projects were concerned. They were organised for inductive, rather than deductive, learning. They began with the collection of broad experience and, through analysis and comparison of findings, sought common themes, issues, lessons and patterns. They both had built-in feedback processes to engage thinkers and actors in testing and re-testing the lessons that were extracting.

There was, however, one major difference between the two projects. Whereas LCPP focused on learning about side-effects of international assistance (namely, how such aid, even as it alleviates suffering or promotes development, influences conflicts), RPP was focused on learning about how agencies working on conflict achieve, or do not achieve, their primary purpose (reducing conflict and promoting peace). In spite of this essential difference, many findings about assessing impacts were common to the two projects.

Five of these are:

1. Impacts are not abstract

Impacts are observable. One of the problems encountered in attempts to create generalisable impact indicators is the problem of distance. Both the LCPP and the RPP experience showed that, on site, it was often very easy to know, without ambiguity, the immediate impact of

some programme activity. For example, one could see that male mechanics were being drafted but women mechanics were not. The specific identification of a problem facilitated the specific identification of the solution. Dividers/connectors analysis provided this specificity for LCPP because programmatic impacts on peace and conflict are observable in these elements of inter-group relationships. For RPP it was clear when, for example, participants in some activity took initiatives of their own, beyond those of the project planners (effectiveness criterion 1), or when communities that under specific circumstances had a history of violence faced those same circumstances and did not take up conflict (effectiveness criterion 3). For example, peace practitioners in Kenya report that, historically, when elections occur many communities experience (sometimes severe) inter-group violence. However, after concerted work by peace agencies, in the election of 2003 many communities avoided all violent conflict, recognising that they had previously been manipulated to actions that undermined their own welfare and served the interests of others.

2. Numbers Matter

In both LCPP and RPP, the accumulation of patterns, representing the experience of many people in many settings, provided convincing evidence about programmatic impacts on conflict. If a particular outcome is observable again and again and if many actors close to the situations under review agree with the interpretation of causation, the sheer numbers of examples and breadth of agreement support the credibility of findings.

3. Disaggregation of Goals Helps

Through LCPP, it became clear that assessing how a programme eliminates a harmful effect is easier than knowing with certainty how a programme promotes a positive effect on conflict. Similarly, in RPP, it is easier to trace the reduction of violence than it is to assess progress toward the ultimate goal of reconciliation and peace. The more immediate and specific the goal, the easier it is to know effectiveness in reaching it. Disaggregation of large goals (such as peace) into smaller, clear steps along the way provides a useful way of assessing progress. (However, setting small and limited goals may also be a way of avoiding accountability for more significant effectiveness. We return to this below).

4. People ,Know‘

LCPP and RPP both found that people in the situation where programmes are carried out have opinions (and, often, valid opinions) about impacts and causation. They attribute outcomes to particular events. They provide a critical source of information about, and confirmation of, impacts.

5. Impacts are as Dynamic and Changing as the Surrounding Events.

Because in the contexts of conflict things change rapidly and constantly, any attempt to trace the programme impacts in these contexts must recognise that they also are dynamic. In particular, it is important to follow impacts over time to determine whether (how) they are changing. (For example, in LCPP it could have been possible that the decision to train women as mechanics resulted in a shift in conscription policies so that women were drafted).

Interestingly, the RPP lessons about assessing impacts differed from those learned through LCPP in two ways. Whereas for LCPP, context analysis focused on dividers and connectors appears to be sufficient for tracing impacts of humanitarian and development assistance on conflicts, RPP evidence showed that the more comprehensive the understanding and analysis of the history, dynamics and current interplay of conflict, the more likely an agency is to be effective. The four

specific elements of context analysis, cited in the RPP findings above, were observed as necessary for assessing effectiveness. Beyond those, far more can be, and should be, known by peace workers who want to do effective work. Because peace practitioners intend to have a direct and lasting impact on the achievement of peace, they must engage more deeply and more broadly in the society where they are working. The specifics of what must be known in any given area are, however, particular to each area according to RPP. Generalisation about these was not, in RPP experience, possible.

The second important difference relates to the finding, for RPP, about the importance of linking work undertaken with different strategies and at different levels (depicted by the four quadrants in the matrix in figure 1). For LCPP, collaboration of multiple aid agencies in analysing dividers and connectors and coordination of their approaches to aid was important in ensuring that, overall, aid programmes did not feed divisions and did support connectors. However, the RPP found it central and necessary for effectiveness to link personal/individual work to socio-political activities and to link the more people strategies and the key people strategies.

A single aid agency can avoid doing harm and can support local capacities, but an agency taking one approach to peace that does not connect with work in the other quadrants will miss the mark in peace work. For peace agencies wanting to be effective, there is no option of working in isolation.

7. Final Comments

The lessons learned through LCPP and RPP about tracing and evaluating outcomes have gone some way toward demystifying impact assessment. On site, with specific goals in mind, attentive to the opinions and behaviours of local people, it is possible to know what has happened as a result of a programme effort and to evaluate the impact of this work on the immediate manifestations of conflict. Both also show that, as the goals of an effort become more lofty and far-reaching, the difficulties in tracing and evaluating impacts increase.

Earlier we noted that disaggregating a large goal into immediate and specific steps helps in the tracing of impacts. However, a danger of such disaggregation emerged in the RPP Project that is worth reporting here. Because peace is large, intangible and complicated, some peace practitioners identified a tendency toward ‘feel good, do nothing’ programming. In the face of such complexity, programming in small steps may simply not deal with what is required to end war and promote peace. Peace practitioners cannot be content with small progress or be patient with continued suffering. There is an urgency to be more effective and have broader impacts.

Increasingly, aid workers also are recognising that they can, and must, do more than do no harm in their programmes.

Aid workers and peace practitioners must increasingly embrace and push impact assessment as integral to their work because they have seen, through experience, that, using the knowledge gained over many years of broad work, they can in fact increase their effectiveness and contribute significantly and lastingly to the achievement of just societies that solve differences without resort to violence. Of all professions in the world, those involving the delivery of aid and the promotion of peace should constantly strive to work themselves out of a job.

8. Further Reading

- Anderson, Mary B. 1999. *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – or War*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
- Anderson, Mary B. and Lara Olson (with assistance from Kristin Doughty) 2003. *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners*, Cambridge, Mass: Collaborative for Development Action, Inc.