

# Introduction

## Why guidance on evaluating peacebuilding activities in settings of conflict and fragility?

In recent years, the international community has paid increasing attention to situations of conflict and fragility, acknowledging that they are one of the great development challenges of our time. As growing shares of resources, time and energy are devoted to projects, programmes, and policy strategies for countries affected by conflict and fragility, more evidence of the effectiveness of these endeavours is essential. Donors, practitioners and developing country governments show mounting interest in learning more about what does and does not work, and why, and in improving understanding of what contributes positively to sustainable peace and development.

The project of developing guidance to strengthen evaluation and learning in these contexts began with the identification of a persistent evaluation gap (too few or weak evaluations of peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities). Development actors undertake little to no evaluation activity in settings of violent conflict and the peacebuilding and conflict prevention fields have been under-evaluated (OECD, 2007a). Part of the explanation for the lack of evaluation activity is that evaluating in these contexts presents unique challenges. This guidance considers that the main challenge specific to evaluations in fragile and conflict-affected settings is the threat of violence. Other challenges covered in this guidance are: complexity, weak theoretical foundations, data collection, attribution, a highly political environment and multiple actors and multiple agendas. Challenges are further discussed in Chapter 2.

The lack of attention to evaluation and the challenges described above have meant that there is little credible evidence of the effectiveness and results of peacebuilding and conflict prevention endeavours. Research and experience, including the testing of the draft guidance, have shown that evaluations in these fields tend to be weak in terms of data, methods and validity of findings.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 (FAFO 2006). Validity, both internal and external, tends to be low-meaning it is hard to draw broader lessons that can be applied to other contexts and difficult to draw credible conclusions about effectiveness and what approaches work.

The process of developing *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility* (also referred to as “the Guidance”) was spurred by a recognition in the peace and conflict prevention community of the lack of solid information about the actual results of peacebuilding efforts. Recognising the need for better, more tailored approaches to evaluation in conflict settings, the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee (DAC) launched an initiative to develop guidance on evaluating conflict prevention and

peacebuilding activities. The initiative brought together practitioners and policy makers from the International Network on Conflict and Fragility (then the DAC Network on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-operation) with evaluation experts from the DAC Network on Development Evaluation. The OECD (2008a) produced draft guidance in 2008 which was used to evaluate various conflict prevention activities and external peacebuilding and statebuilding support in a number of major conflict settings including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sri Lanka, Southern Sudan, and Afghanistan. The guidance has been revised on the basis of the substantive and methodological findings from this application phase.

The goal of this guidance is to promote critical reflection. It aims to help fill the learning and accountability gap in settings of conflict and fragility by providing direction to those undertaking or commissioning evaluations and helping them better understand the sensitivities and challenges that apply in such contexts. At the same time, it aims to assist policy makers and practitioners working on peacebuilding and statebuilding to better understand the role and utility of evaluation and grasp how an evaluation lens can help strengthen programme design and management. With these objectives in mind, the *Guidance* offers advice on aspects of evaluating donor engagement in conflict-affected and fragile situations that differ from evaluation in more stable environments. To provide a complete picture it also covers some steps that apply to all development evaluations.

### **Who will benefit from this guidance and how should it be used?**

Different target audiences will benefit in different ways from this guidance. The primary audience includes policy staff, donors, field and desk officers in foreign service offices and development agencies, partner country governments, non-governmental and international organisations (NGOs), and United Nations (UN) organisations involved in commissioning or supporting evaluations in situations of conflict and fragility. Secondly, it targets evaluators and evaluation managers, including the evaluation departments of developing countries and development agencies. Evaluators will benefit by gaining a clearer view of what commissioners expect from their work. Given the diversity of the intended audience, some sections may be more relevant than others to individual readers.

*Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility* provides an overview of key concepts relevant to evaluation in conflict situations and fragile states. It can be read while designing a programme or developing a strategic policy, while commissioning or programming an evaluation, and during the planning and carrying out of a specific evaluation.

This is not a prescriptive instruction manual. Rather, it seeks to contribute to fostering thoughtful, critical approaches by highlighting and clarifying specific challenges for evaluation. It should be viewed as a living guidance that will continue to evolve as evaluation methodologies and peacebuilding practices improve. It outlines key steps and main points to consider at each stage in the evaluation process and suggests tools that may support that process. The information and advice it volunteers should be applied carefully, based on an evaluation's context and intended purpose. To that end, this guidance is designed to be practical and to respond to the particular challenges that characterise fragile, conflict-affected situations and which evaluations must address.

## Scope and structure of the guidance

*Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility* builds on existing literature and experience in development agencies and countries affected by conflict and fragility. This includes the lessons learned during the two-year application phase of a draft version of this guidance, when the suggested approach was tested in evaluations of external support in conflict settings. The draft guidance was employed for evaluations of multi-donor engagement in Southern Sudan (Bennett *et al.*, 2010), Sri Lanka (Chapman *et al.*, 2009), and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Brusset *et al.*, 2011), as well as single-donor evaluations of the Norwegian contribution to peace in Haiti (Norad, 2009), the Swedish Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan (unpublished), the German Civil Peace Service Programme (Paffenholz, 2011), and the European Commission's peacebuilding portfolio (EC, 2011).

Chapter 1 outlines the conceptual background of international engagement in settings of conflict and fragility, including main donor policy commitments, and examines why better understanding of conflict and fragility matters in today's development context. It is of particular relevance to those with limited experience in the conflict and peace domains and presents the overarching concepts that guide and inform decision making and evaluation.

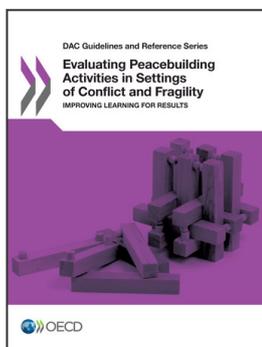
If Chapter 1 is the theory, Chapters 2-4 are the practice. They form the "hands-on" core of the guidance and will be useful for all readers, particularly those with limited evaluation background. These chapters also provide seasoned evaluators with further ideas drawn from experience. They are guidance for planning, managing, implementing, and learning from evaluation. Underlying the chapters is the importance of understanding that each evaluation differs in its scope and purpose. Methodologies can and should be tailored accordingly.

Chapter 2 describes challenges to evaluation in settings of conflict and fragility. It then considers the principles that should guide evaluation and help it rise to the challenges of a fragile, conflict-affected setting. It emphasises the importance of a conflict analysis for assessing an intervention and for ensuring that the evaluation itself is conflict sensitive. Evaluations should also seek to be ethically responsible and transparent about strengths and weaknesses.

Chapter 3 considers the key steps in preparing an evaluation. It looks at the stages of defining an evaluation's purpose and scope and conducting a conflict analysis. It then examines timing and logistics, co-ordination with other actors, management methods, and hiring evaluation teams.

Chapter 4 deals with conducting an evaluation – from performing initial research to identifying the logic behind the development intervention, plugging gaps in data, and using OECD evaluation criteria of relevance, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and efficiency to assess the activity. Finally, it gives advice on follow-up, learning from evaluations, and feeding the lessons back into programming.

The annexes provide additional detail to complement Chapters 1-4. Annex A goes into further detail on conflict analysis, looking at different approaches and the use of the analysis in evaluation. Annex B provides further detail on the concept and use of theories of change. Annex C considers how to draw up a terms of reference document, using the example of an imaginary peace journalism training course. An extensive bibliography provides references and resources for further reading.



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