Permanent Evaluation of Conflict Resolution Interventions: A Proposal

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I. INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of intervention processes in the extensive field of conflict environments into peace building, conflict resolution and even its prevention, has gained significant importance in recent years all over the world for various reasons, which could be gathered in three reflections¹.

1. The lessons learned from these experiences lead to question the motives, actors, models and methodologies that have been put to practice in order to achieve real impact and fulfill the objectives initially envisaged. The proliferation of conflict scenarios across continents whether emerging, recurring of non resolved, are clear symptoms pointing to the need for revision of intervention processes.

2. The different typology of intervention forms in scenarios of this type is of an extremely subjective nature, as it is subject to the modification of processes deeply ingrained in the field of individual and collective psychology, as well as in the field of cultural expressions of each particular context. This characteristic has forced the gradual modification of the conceptual bases of evaluation processes, going from a positivist-quantitative outline to a dialectic-qualitative vision with an increasingly integrated focus. This transition has opened an intense debate around evaluation practices of all kinds, questioning the practical expression as well as the philosophical bases that have traditionally sustained it.

3. Given the foregoing reflections, it is necessary to identify the challenge, define the problem and establish the strategy of revision processes, both practical and theoretical, that have sustained our experiences. It is expected that some might indicate the existence of a real crisis not only of evaluative processes but of intervention processes as well, as the difficulties inherent to the assessment of a practice point to the need for questioning this practice again and again. Now, the challenge has also an important qualitative change, the need to confront individual experiences with others of the same environment, i.e. it is no longer an individual but a collective effort.

The questions raised as the practice and its respective evaluative processes were further enhanced and explored have become true dilemmas and revitalized the whole context relating to this type of intervention, allowing for an increasingly clear visualization of the issues around which it is important to reflect and work and the identification of the issues that will be analyzed in the first part of the document:

a) Explicit and implicit conceptual dilemmas that underlie the evaluation practice
b) Different types of expected impacts and the purposes of the evaluation
c) Actors involved in evaluation processes
d) Values considered in the evaluation
e) Evaluation methodologies, techniques, activities, resources, times

The second part is a short description of the experiences and materials that may be useful in exploring and learning about this field of evaluation of conflict resolution interventions. Each sector, region, institution and organization has developed its own evaluation strategies; however, the process of gradually knowing, sharing and systematizing these strategies is still incipient. In this respect, it is only intended to indicate where to find sources that will allow us to explore, analyze and reflect on in this task.

The first and second part are inputs that allow us to get to the third: contribute elements that permit the formulation of a useful, informed, realistic, practical and flexible proposal around the evaluation practice, which is increasingly becoming a fundamental component of intervention practices in conflict environments.

Therefore, the nature of this document responds to three issues for consideration; first, performance of a critical analysis of the experience and current situation around the issue; second, creativeness and determination in the face of a crucial dilemma around the budgets that have oriented intervention processes, how to evaluate them; and finally, in the third place, socialization of the experience, both in the analysis and the proposal, so that it does not become an individual exercise restricted to each organization.
II. EVALUATION OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION INTERVENTIONS: PREVENTABLE, ACTIVE AND POSTCONFLICT

- Conceptual Frame

1. Relationship between objectivity and subjectivity in evaluation processes

Existing budgets in evaluation practices have historically aimed at objectivity as a qualification comprising confidence, assurance and impartiality, all of which implies that as objectivity increases so does contact with reality. In other words, the aim is to validate a reality perception process. Therefore, evaluation in processes oriented to theoretical and practical issues is among the major present and past challenges because of its deep implications from an epistemological perspective. This methodological exercise is basically framed within the philosophical paradigm that supports any type of approach or treatment of the issue. However, we seldom try to identify it.

The relationship between the subject and the reality that he/she studies or wishes to learn about becomes an epistemological subject-object relationship, and the answers historically provided by various schools of thought differ according to how interaction dynamics between both are explained. The variety of proposed solutions to this dilemma could be synthesized in two great solutions.

Schools holding a positivist-mechanistic approach try to explain this by depicting a passive subject who observes reality and tries not to interfere with it; indifferently, he/she observes, registers and interprets incidents. There is no room for subjectivity in this approach. There is one basic difference in schools holding a dialectic and dynamic approach of society: the subject is a social, specific and tangible person, who has a history of feelings, knowledge and perceptions which come necessarily alive whenever he/she interacts with his/her environment.

In this second approach, the necessary subjectivity is part of human nature, as no one can really detach himself/herself from what he/she really is: a historical-social product. To find support on this philosophical vision may contribute to walking with a firm step in objectivity and subjectivity debates. However, it is of the foremost importance not to confuse objectivity with impartiality/neutrality, inasmuch as the first refers to an open-minded attitude that is kin to learn about reality notwithstanding our own individual acceptance of it.

Impartiality/neutrality, in such demand in this conflict environment and almost a prerequisite for the success of intervention processes in any scenario, is what generates debate, as the actor involved in an evaluation process is forced to maintain a distance between the expected impact of the project in which he/she is involved and his/her own opinion of the experience. This condition underlies almost all evaluation issues as a fundamental concern. And this is so because what is basically put to question is the
weight of interventions, considering the type of expected impacts, actors, funding or methodologies.

Addressing this aspect will be a priority to the whole evaluation context and include conflicts, interventions and peace building.

Subjectivity is most certainly a quality inherent to human beings. Nevertheless, it is necessary to know where, how and why it affects us in order to attempt the desired objectivity. Conflict scenarios necessarily jeopardize our perception of events, which is expressed in sensations, emotions and feelings that may come across as sympathy, hate, suspicion, distrust, etc.; in other words, in psycho-affective behavior intervening in personal interaction processes.

The processes that determine these emotions are complex because they put us in touch with our own experiences, our code of values and our hope in the possibilities for solving conflicts; in other words, they put us in touch with our expectations. When considering all these elements, we may need to be sufficiently mature, both personally and professionally, to openly include them as a steady element in evaluation processes in order for subjective interaction to become a contribution and an opportunity for analyzing these processes as thoroughly as possible. Otherwise, we run the risk of letting these factors permeate our analysis of reality without being aware of it.

This issue is therefore just as relevant to the evaluation environment as to the context of “conflict intervention”, as reflection should go beyond that: to the reasons, justifications and expectations that a person, an institution or an organization establishes for interacting in a specific scenario and, on that basis, generate an intense and critical revision of these motivations (sometimes clear, sometimes dark and ambiguous), which are present in all intervention processes.

2. Relationship between the process and the product

Up to the present time, the evaluation of conflict resolution interventions has been influenced by the practice enacted in academic environments, particularly in the field of social sciences. This is an important condition, as the term has gone from being used in exact/natural sciences to its utilization in educational, sociological and anthropological environments. The conceptual parameters and categories used in these disciplines have somehow been transferred to the field of practice and, by the same token, considerably influenced this field.

The term “evaluation” is broadly developed within the environment of education sciences, mainly with the traditional vision of quantifying learning, and is then transferred to anthropology and sociology on the incorporation of these sciences to project practice, which calls for measuring the impact and efficiency of the project. Thus, the “evaluation of research projects” would establish a meaning indicative of the
idea of visualizing whether an objective proposed within the frame of the investigation was fulfilled or not.

An illustration of the influence of these sciences in the practice of conflict interventions is the strong ongoing debate on the use of a qualitative versus a quantitative approach. The evolution of this discussion in the area of social sciences went from an initial idea of “evaluation”, that included a basically quantitative criterion mainly influenced by natural and exact sciences, to a criterion where interests in the contents of a qualitative nature were obvious, ensuing in a debate -similar to that of social sciences- and its solution: integrate quantitative and qualitative techniques in order to obtain information, as well as an integrated vision of the process.²

By and large, evaluation has always been conceived as an action that allows for obtaining information in order to establish a balance between a previous and a new situation, i.e. identify if changes were made and of what type in a particular process. The exercise itself should contribute adequate elements for comparing situations and provide an assessment of achievement or failure.

For various reasons, conventional practices are inclined to turn evaluation into an exercise that must yield an anticipated product. Therefore, evaluations are performed at project completion in order to establish whether the effort has yielded or not a product. This deeply mechanistic and lineal vision has been gradually modified to the extent that the vision of project practice and its evaluation are focused from a more realistic, dynamic and dialectic perspective, which is therefore integrated, just like human processes. Here again, we have a deeply philosophical-epistemological backdrop.

Reality is subject to constant change and the process of interaction with reality has multiple sequences of impact, learning, reflection, just as any intervention process; it is not lineal and static. This change of perception has led to the formulation of a different evaluation practice, which we present in four reflection axes:

- Traditional vision: A final evaluation does not systematize or examine the process that led to the final product. Change: the final product must be a summary and an integrated sum of the whole process, it should explain it.
- Traditional vision: It is not possible to reflect upon or correct a component that is not producing the expected impact, and which could have been modified during process. Change: It is possible to make modifications during process in order to create, remove or change identified components, as necessary, without having to wait until the final process.

• Traditional vision: Final evaluations do not usually involve project stakeholders in the process. Change: Project stakeholders directly involved in the project must be part of the process in order to reflect on their own action and modify it.
• Traditional vision: The value of the process itself is lost and assessment includes only the product. Change: The process is just as important as the final product.

This change in perception will necessarily lead to modification of practices, as appropriate, looking to visualize the dynamics that influence and gradually modify ways of interacting with the environment and the social context, allowing at the same time to learn during the process and make the necessary changes towards the achievement of expected impacts. This includes the possibility of revising these changes over and over again.

3. Concept of Lessons Learned

In reflecting on the evaluation practice, it has been often found that results do not lead to actual learning. Rather, the evaluation report is submitted only to the interested parties and then filed. This responds to a very clear conception of the evaluation as a product that is an end in itself. Therefore, it is worthwhile raising the following question: to what purpose is an evaluation performed if its results are not at all implemented?

This question must be seriously and thoroughly reflected upon. If results obtained through an evaluation process are a waste of time and not made the most of in order to reflect on the same practice, the evaluation loses its true purpose and becomes a mere formality or requirement that is performed as a routine. An alternative vision would lead to assessing the evaluation as an exercise from which we constantly learn.

This process has been identified as Permanent Evaluation, where constant observation, registration, systematization and analysis throughout project implementation become not an end in themselves but an additional tool towards continuous building of theoretical-practical processes that will allow for further achieving the real impact intended and make amendments, as required. This vision is based on the criterion that complete experiences do not exist but rather dynamics that will always allow the opportunity to grow and enrich the practice itself.

Human experiences accumulate to consolidate a particular lesson, a conscious behavior. This process will allow us the opportunity to conduct it properly and develop the potential that experience grants us but mainly to establish a relationship between theory and practice:

“Learned Lessons” is a new concept that helps us to identify that relationship between theory and practice. What is important to underscore in that relationship is the mutual and permanent interaction between what is imagined and what is designed, what
is planned and what is materialized, in order to move from here to a new construction that incorporates that balance between what is intended and what is achieved, mainly identifying three components: what to change, what to strengthen and what to create.”

The idea of incorporating this reflection to evaluation practices is to ensure utilization of results of an experience, linking results to the design of new projects or the creation of new teams, or as a historical recovery of the experience. In fact, a lesson is not learned if it does not help us to reflect and modify our practice.

The foregoing is fundamental in conflict resolution intervention processes for many reasons. First, because many are experimental; second, because not two cases are the same, there are no exact models to follow and each person must learn from within and his/her context; third, because the subjective nature of many indicators require permanent revision: and, fourth: because conflict contents are extremely vital, often needing the modification of initially envisaged impacts, times, resources and methodologies.

Expecting a permanent evaluation vision to become common practice is still a challenge on which we must reflect and work for the future.

**Expected Evaluation impacts**

1. **Typology of expected impacts: political, humanitarian, economic-administrative, cultural, psycho-social**

The issue of expected impacts from an evaluation seems so obvious that more often than not we do not pause to reflect on it. Practice is so dynamic and sometimes exhausting and overwhelming that it leaves no time for reflection. After reading an evaluation report, we find that its purpose is not always explicit. Nonetheless, a good exercise demands that the methodology, the purpose and, above all, the beneficiaries and users of the evaluations be clearly described.

There are surely a number of reasons for which purposes are not as explicit as they should be. Perhaps the purpose is either ignored or considered unimportant. Perhaps the evaluating mission is not able to identify it because it responds to totally different interests, or probably it is not required to do so. If we attempt to visualize the possible types of impact in a conflict resolution intervention process, we could identify at least five: political, humanitarian, economic, administrative and cultural.

The political impact of an evaluation will necessarily be linked to the interests of project implementing institutions and funding entities. Among them we may find:

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influence in the geopolitical aspect of a particular country or region where declining conflict would contribute to strengthening certain power interests; consolidation of a space for advocacy or expansion of security zones ensuing in disruption of threats and risks that a particular conflict might generate. The evaluation report will contribute in two ways: on the one hand, it will prove there is political will to grant spaces for peace and, on the other, it will provide a systematic report on the particular conditions that underlie the development of each process, which could be useful in emergency situations.

With respect to the humanitarian impact, an unresolved dilemma is always present. On one side, there are those who think that a “pure” humanitarian objective does not exist, that assorted interests are always behind. On the other side, there are those who support the existence of absolutely uninterested humanitarianism. Regardless of who contributes to argue in favor of one position or the other, there will always be people or groups willing to contribute to alleviate the sorrow, suffering and emotional turmoil of people involved in conflict, beyond the shadow of doubt.

The description of impacts of this type in an evaluation usually departs from profound humanistic values that pursue the construction of consensus in the face of problems or conflicts. These values are primarily linked to the achievement of peace through restructuring trust, building communication links, creating and strengthening the capacity for dialogue, openness and assertiveness, and consolidating alternative attitudes for verbal or physical violence.

Outlining an impact of this type is an extremely complicated task and its achievement may prove difficult to establish with accuracy inasmuch as such a process spans a long time and involves cultural and psycho-emotional elements that must be thoroughly addressed. Humanist impacts would center on collecting information on capacity for human devotion, good intentions on the part of donors or countries, systematization of the intervention experience, and perhaps on the justification of a practice that has been increasingly consolidated in recent decades. Nevertheless, it must be revised. If the purpose of an evaluation report is to establish whether substantial changes were introduced or not, there may be serious implications that could question the whole intervention process and its moral validation, leading to highly complex problems in the field of ethics.

Economic impacts are easier to identify but a lot more complex to assess. An evaluation will aim at verifying the usefulness of invested resources. These are generally important investments linked to interests of some type and often very close to politicians. Soundness of the investment, on one side, and the justification for future investments in the same context, on the other, will directly depend on the quality-efficiency of the use of resources in a particular context.

An aspect linked to the evaluation are prevailing fear and lack of trust with regard to the administration of cooperation funds in conflict contexts. The dilemma will center on how to determine the proper use and administration of funds, which are issues directly
related to the design and methodology of the evaluation. An underlying concern in this area is the issue of honesty and transparency of the project and the evaluation itself, implying an ethical dilemma that is not openly expressed.

In the cultural and psychosocial fields, impacts are highly complex because of their subjective nature. In conflict scenarios, these become the core of the evaluation, mainly to identify the changes in challenging behaviors that respond to deeply ingrained cultural factors or juncture conditions where irreconcilable positions caused the fragmentation and disruption of the social thread.

One of the most important impacts in this context is the creation of adequate conditions that allow for building non-violent spaces where conflicts can be solved, in addition to all it entails. But - as relevant literature indicates - it is extremely difficult to “measure” if there is more hate than love, more real dialogue than silence, more trust than distrust, more hope than hopelessness.

On the whole, these are the main purposes of projects and also a major challenge because, on one side, the categories of subjective analysis intervene and, on the other, a change in human perceptions, attitudes and behaviors is not achieved in the short term. That is to say, a series of observation and listening techniques are required, as well as in-depth interviews, etc., which must be appropriately designed. Furthermore, project periods do not allow for sufficient time to achieve real and tangible results.

2. Who decides on the typologies? The users of the evaluation

The persons responsible for performing an evaluation assume a large responsibility in laying down the objectives of the evaluation, whether explicitly or implicitly. Usually, the implementing institution and the donors (a combination of interests) are anxious to learn the results of an exercise where material and human resources are invested but it would be worthwhile enquiring if these persons had fully agreed on the parameters of the evaluation.

The definition of criteria may emphasize certain contexts (political, humanitarian, etc.) according to the type of organization, intervention or donor. Furthermore, some donors whose funds proceed from taxes collected in their countries may focus the humanitarian aspect. Academic foundations might place an emphasis on the psycho-cultural field. Chancelleries could focus the political aspect. In other words, the undertones and approaches of an evaluation would be generally consistent with the diversity of interests of those involved in the intervention project.

Another binding issue pertains to the future user of the evaluation. Along these lines, the most important reflection is that an evaluation exercise should make sense to a user who intends to apply it to a particular purpose. The general consensus is that reports are read and filed but do we actually know if this is so? In any case, it should be
determined if the exercise is managed on behalf of the user, and if this should or should not be the case.

A major proposal emerging in various spaces is that the evaluation should become a true exercise that contributes to further the knowledge of actors involved. The implemented practice should be reflected upon and wholly analyzed in order to modify theoretical budgets as necessary, e.g. conceptualization of “peace” and “conflict” in each context, as well as interaction with reality, adjusting and adapting generic methodologies used in intervention processes.

3. Congruency, transparency and socialization of impacts

In designing the objectives of the evaluation, it is important to consider three characteristics in order for the evaluation to be a useful exercise for the project in question and ensuing experience.

The first requirement would be congruency between expected impacts and aspects to be evaluated. This would seem obvious; nonetheless, the main impacts are not always taken up. Moreover, if these were modified, it should be specified why. All projects have specific expected impacts, and these serve – or should serve – as a guide, as the backbone of the project throughout its implementation. The evaluator should bear them constantly in mind in order to have something specific to fall back on at the time of identifying changes or extensions.

For instance, a group of actors intending to reach consensus on a particular conflict has failed to do so at the time of evaluation but it was observed that after a number of sessions the persons sitting at the table were perfectly able to establish a dialogue. How do we go about designing an indicator to reflect this – was the objective really achieved or not? The answer should be cautious and conscientious. If our purpose was to reach consensus as an exercise to strengthen the capacities for dialogue and establishing trust but not as an end in itself, we could establish that the objective was fulfilled. If, however, we were only interested in reaching consensus then the objective was not fulfilled.

All these connotations are important in designing indicators but above all at the time of their assessment, which should include flexible answers to what may be actually found. Therefore, it is recommended that instead of only appraising findings as achieved or not achieved, a third alternative be incorporated, i.e. in process.

The second and third characteristics are central in achieving an active, dynamic and authentic participation of the actors involved in a project. The expected impacts should be clearly socialized among actors of all levels: local actors, the implementing organization and the donors. The possibility of an objective evaluation will be optimized to the extent that this is actually achieved.
The actors involved in the evaluation

1. The evaluation: internal – external – integrated

The modalities used by institutions or organizations to further develop evaluations have been basically:

Internal, when the exercise is developed within the frame of the actors implementing the project; in some cases, it is also identified as self-evaluation. These evaluation modalities are essential in intervention contexts but are not performed on a regular basis as a permanent exercise of self-critical revision of implemented actions. We tend to feel a great amount of resistance when our work is being questioned. The positive aspect of these exercises is that they provide an invaluable opportunity to learn about practice. As a parallel, it optimizes the integration of local teams in terms of strengthening their capacities for consolidation. Furthermore, results help identify useless elements and modify them, as well as achievements in order to strengthen them.

External evaluations are those most commonly used and require staff outside the project, even outside the organization or institution. There are two reasons for this: first, an external evaluator is considered to be more impartial and objective and, second, trained staff is not always available within the institution. The weak point of these evaluations has to do with frequency, as they are only performed at the final phase, which does not allow for visualizing what has been systematized over the course of the process.

Experience has demonstrated that both evaluation models are useful to the extent that they can be integrated as a combined or mixed methodology that includes a permanent internal process and an external evolution at the end. In this way, one can make the most of the positive aspects of both: vision, perception and assessment of implementing actors directly involved and of an actor totally unrelated to the project; a permanent experience and a final evaluation; the possibility to compare and hence verify the information obtained.

Nevertheless, performing integrated evaluations is not an easy task. It entails coordinated work in order for the final result to be as close to reality as possible. On the other hand, this type of modality requires installed capacities in projects, institutions and organizations that allow for the development of evaluation processes. Although it was not always visualized this way, experiences in diverse contexts increasingly point to the need of doing it.
2. The role of donors

What is the role of donors in an evaluation? This is a fundamental question, as the interests of cooperation are not arbitrary and the results of the evaluation may provide the elements for continuing or not funding projects in a particular line or in a specific context.

This aspect is directly linked to the issue of expected impacts of the evaluation, whether political, humanitarian, economic, etc. in conflict situations. Investments in projects focused on a post conflict situation need careful consideration. It is often felt that risking capital in an uncertain situation is not worthwhile; therefore, the presentation of a project to the donors and its justification should fulfill a series of minimum valid requirements in order to warrant funding.

The intervention of donors in the design and methodology of the evaluation is closely related to resistance to the evaluation, as pointed out by Ken:

“One of the most immediate, practical obstacles facing peace-building impact assessment is the high level of suspicion, resistance, and anxiety which evaluation processes appear to inspire in project staff, especially those working at the field level. There are several reasons for this. One is a universal factor – to the extent that evaluations are viewed as mechanisms of oversight, control, and accountability by donors and headquarters, project officers will always feel a certain unease at the prospect of project weaknesses and failures brought to light. This unease can take on a cultural and political dimension, particularly when most evaluations are conducted by and for northern donors on work implemented by third world project staff. This can produce resentment against what one researcher called the “mechanistic Northern-led quest for mainstreamable products”’” (Bush 2002). Another study suggests that staff ambivalence about evaluations stems from unease with overt discussion of power in relationships between project stakeholders; the peace-building and conflict resolution field is in general uncomfortable with power, and prefers discussion framed by notions of partnership and collaboration. Project evaluations tend to expose the power relationships – between donor and agency, headquarters and field, project and local community – which are unavoidably part of the process (Church and Shouldice 2003: 7). “

In conclusion, the role of donors and HQ is an important issue. The alternative for obtaining good results of such interaction is to build sincere and transparent communication among stakeholders in order to minimize resistance, placing efforts benefiting the society in implemented areas as the main objective.

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3. The role of institutions and organizations

Institutions and organizations, as well as countries implementing conflict resolution intervention projects through specific programs, have accumulated vast experience, allowing for raising dilemmas or questions around some aspects of their practice. One of these aspects refers to evolution.

“The literature on peace-building assessment is young – the first significant discussions of measuring peace-building occurred only about six years ago. Though there are dozens of reports and studies on the topic, only a handful have broken new ground and are worth highlighting. As a general rule, these studies have excelled at highlighting the difficulties and dilemmas of assessment. They have also advanced our capacity to integrate conflict and peace impact assessment in the formulation and implementation stages of conventional aid projects. But they have made less progress developing new approaches and tools of measurement for assessment of actual project impact. Some have gone so far as to conclude that the field of peace-building impact assessment remains in a state of “methodological anarchy” while others have suggested that the quest for such assessment capacities, as part of the “Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment” (PCIA) movement, have reached a “practical dead end” (Hoffman 2002).”

However, Ken declares that progress has been made. Departing from experience and existing literature, at least one of them has identified the areas that need work, focusing three broad aspects: recognizing that diverse environments in need of attention in the context of conflict are countless. Therefore, a finished, final and closed outline cannot be used. Instead, ample and flexible guidelines for action and reflection should be visualized if they are to be useful tools in diverse contexts.

On the other hand, it has become increasingly clear that institutions and organizations need to build capacities and develop aspects related to the evaluation process. This is a task that cannot be postponed to the extent that evaluation has become a parameter of revision and reflection in intervention processes. Evaluation has encouraged the articulation of unresolved dilemmas and, in that sense, it is the best tool for revising-modifying-strengthening conceptual budgets related to “conflicts”, on one side. On the other, how are these expressed in practice, are there congruencies or inconsistencies?

4. The role of local actors

The participation of actors that were the subject-object of an intervention project in evaluations has taken the shape of interviews conducted by the evaluating missions, whether internal or external. The actors are consulted with regard to previously designed indicators and the result is a series of interviews that contain their perceptions, analyses and criteria with relation to the project in which they participated.

On certain occasions, the weight or value granted to this information and assessment has become the central part of an evaluation despite the fact that this tool might be subject to pressures, interests and perceptions that must be carefully considered in learning about the context. If some actors or sectors feel that the project as a whole could not answer their questions, it would be natural for their assessment to be pessimistic, or vice versa. Hence the recommendation to visualize the widest possible scope of actors towards enhanced information that will allow for the best possible balance of the impact and results of projects.

On the other hand, there is the possibility of using the modality of permanent evaluation, where local actors are not left on the side of the evaluation but become part of the design and implementation of the evaluation process. Somehow, this type of experience has been increasingly emphasized on the grounds that an external actor, i.e. an evaluator hired for a month to perform the final evaluation of a project, is hardly a person knowledgeable of the context, social dynamics, and a series of factors intervening in highly complex manner in a social process of conflictive nature.

By way of a conclusion of the foregoing with regard to the role of each actor, we have identified three ideas that may prove useful to an exercise of reflection on the issue:

1. The role of each actor and his interrelationship with others in an evaluation process should be visualized and revised with utmost transparency in order to deal with its subjective nature, as it is always present.

2. The role of the donors in an evaluation is fundamental to the extent that their expectations and interests will determine future projects and the assessment of local actors and institutions or organizations responsible for the project. Nevertheless, these interests must be seen in the light of the interests of local actors in order to neutralize paternalistic, imposing and manipulating attitudes or those outside the dynamics of the implementation.

3. The role of local actors in the evaluation should become the key pillar of projects, consolidating evaluation proposals as a process so that, on one hand, timely remedial action in a project leads to improved results and, on the other, systematization of this experience converges with and complements the final evaluation.

- **Chart of values in evaluation**

One of the nodal themes in an evaluation exercise of any intervention practice is the axiological theme. Due to the implications involved, it becomes a crosscutting issue not only of the evaluation process but also of the whole conception of the project from which it emerges and to which it grants meaning. That is, the assessment load to be
applied in identifying the changes introduced during and after a project is necessarily interwoven in the same conceptual frame that sustains the project.

From this highly important reflection, it is inferred that the analysis categories and the concepts used in conflict resolution intervention processes contain their own assessment load. An institutional actor who designs and implements a pre/post or during conflict project has his own conception of terms and concepts such as: peace, war, conflict, trust, dialogue and participation, just to quote those mostly used.

The ensuing dilemma and uncertainty, experienced as acute anxiety by various cooperation fields and intervention areas, is that the same concept of these terms does not necessarily exist at the levels of all stakeholders. And so, it would be natural for a cooperation agency or international institution to assume there are no differences and, therefore, its intervention purposes would depart from its own reality, failing perhaps to recover and gather the actual political, economic and cultural conditions. And so would its evaluations.

Therefore, management of the assessment load should be thoroughly revised in order to visualize these aspects and on that basis build an adequate evaluation methodology that is congruent with the structural context, the juncture, and the interests of cooperation agencies and local actors.

In this sequence of analysis, we include three concepts that need to be addressed, differentiated and clarified. The categories - a set of social phenomena that take on a different meaning according to context, i.e. war, peace, conflict, etc. The values - that will serve as benchmarks to the analytical balance of changes or extensions during or after a process; for instance: achieved, not achieved, in process. And, finally, the indicators - the main challenge, as they comprise the other two components.

1. Categories

There are various typologies for classifying evaluation models. For instance, a separation by level of actors is used. Macro/medium/micro. However, this division has generated controversy, as it is not specified whether macro is structural and micro is sectoral; or if macro involves the global national level and micro the local level; or whether macro is the highest level of actors and refers to government authorities and micro to the civil society. In other words, if this classification is to be used, it has to be clearly defined.

There is also the short, medium and long duration category. However, this will vary depending, first, on the definition of each institution/actor/context for these periods; second, on whether they consider using the evaluation as a process supported by follow up and monitoring strategies or it is only a final evaluation with strategies for a possible evaluation exercise after a period.
The foregoing contributes elements for reflection. Nevertheless, practice and literature use many categories in dealing with conflict related aspects. Our classification will use the delimitations of social sciences, which does in no way imply that they are far apart; actually they are closely inter-related. The purpose of this analytical exercise is merely identification: the sociologists, the psychologists and the anthropologists.

In the sociological area, we find terminology relating to the security and defense policy: war, peace, scale of conflicts, civic-military relationships, democracy, and authoritarianism. As a whole, these will try to identify the field of political regimes and the historical-structural forms in which they respond to the struggle for power and confrontation of interests. Basically, identify changes and their degree of intensity in the following aspects: ideological, institutional, organizational, and expression forms related to the type of political regime.

In the psychological area, we find a whole range of perceptions, feelings, emotional states, sensibilities and behaviors of individuals and the society, such as: love, hate, trust, distrust, unpleasantness, empathy, aggression and fear. This is possibly the most complete field of all, as the management of emotions is a difficult process to identify and interpret and transformations of this type can take a long time. Here, it is important to verify the change in individual and group behaviors in order to facilitate the construction of interaction processes in and with the social context.

The anthropological field refers to cultural aspects and forms of expression used by communities in interrelating. We basically refer to certain aspects, i.e. organizational capacity, regulation of community mechanisms, management of disputes, capacity for consensus, and attitudes such as: fraternity, solidarity, violence. Anticipated changes in this context respond more to issues linked to tolerance, understanding of “that other” that is different. This is very important in the case of projects that include components concerning multiculturality.

The capacity for real evaluation of an intervention process will certainly depend on actual coherence between similar or close conceptual routes, between the nature of the project and the social context, and between these factors and the cooperation and the implementing institution.

A final reflection suitable in this space is a highly controversial issue taking place within the frame of the overall evaluation of intervention processes: that related to structural changes. This is visualized as the limitations and challenges of a conflict resolution intervention process (pre-post). Since the onset up to the present time, a relative qualm has been: if processes do not produce significant changes at structural levels, other changes will not be consolidated or remain for a long time beyond the life of a project.
2. Values and indicators

Conventional evaluations prioritizing only one exercise at the end of the project tend to manage a close assessment load, that is, as the nature of this type of evaluation has only one temporary stop – of the process – it emphasizes two values: that achieved and that not achieved, based on initial expected impacts proposed at the beginning of the project. The quantitative aspects are prioritized at the same time.

However, the process of revision of intervention models has forced the adoption or creation of new evaluation methodologies. Development of these processes in conflict areas has emphasized two aspects. First, social incidents are not closed forms but processes susceptible of verification through the application of a series of tools that include management of times and prevailing subjective variables. Second, not two contexts are equal, not even in the same country because each project has its own rationality; therefore, there are no formulas or serial models to be indiscriminately applied.

These two reflections have generated new methodological approaches that include, on one side, the incorporation of a new value against the conventional: considering the process. Thus, values may revolve around what has been achieved, what has not been achieved, or that in process. And, on the other hand, they include the design of indicators or research and analysis guidelines, which must be adjusted to each context and project in particular. This does not imply invaliding existing criteria or general values but rather their careful use and assessment.

The issue on indicators has generated extensive debate in the context of evaluation of projects of this type, precisely towards visualizing what we have previously mentioned. Along these lines, with regard to the construction of indicators, the following recommendations must be observed:

- **Flexibility**, to discard some of the previously established indicators which, as the project moves forward, may prove useless, redundant or distracting, or in order to modify, discard or introduce new indicators that respond to identified needs.
- **Coherence**, there should be congruency between the methodological philosophical vision, the project’s specific purposes and its perspectives.
- **Realism**, objectively identify actual possibilities – for implementation and evaluation.
- **Simplicity**, be practical in order for tools to be easily understood by actors of all types in the intervention process and by users of the evaluation.  

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Latin American Office
• **Evaluation Methodology**

1. **Techniques, tools, resources, times**

Planning the evaluation of a project entails the design of a strategy that allows for combining the evaluation’s expected impacts with tools, human resources and materials within the frame of a specific context. The decisions taken in this respect are very important, as they will not only validate the evaluation process in itself but might also validate the intervention project as a whole.

The activities and techniques mostly used are usually those inherent to the qualitative research of social sciences, short interviews and in-depth interviews. In some cases, work is done in small workshops or sessions, and complemented with extensive consultation of printed, visual and audiovisual material, whenever available. However, this depends on many factors. The first thing to be identified is whether the evaluation is permanent or an exercise performed at project completion.

Planning a permanent evaluation activity entails its incorporation in project planning towards its coherent integration to practice. This requires a responsible person and a specific methodology, as well as a program of activities that coincides with specific project stops and a sequence of activities that will ensure two things. One: gradual incorporation of partial results as a continuous reflection for changing the project strategy or methodology; two: systematization of all activities and changes in order to enrich inputs for the final evaluation.

A final exercise requires the design of a careful methodological strategy that will allow for rescuing part of the process and the final results.

In both cases, the methodological procedure has exactly the same nature of a research process:

a) Obtaining and consulting printed, visual, audiovisual sources; interviews; observation and listening.

b) Having short and in-depth interviews.

c) Participating in project activities.

d) Organizing workshops or group meetings.

e) Analyzing obtained material.

f) Elaborating partial or final reports.

g) Providing feedback to the process.

The most used techniques, as reported, are:

- Reading reports, studies, printed material and any other text generated within the frame of the project or reflecting its impact.
Consulting public sources of information, i.e. printed press and magazines containing information on the project over the course of its implementation. This is useful on some occasions in order to visualize some sort of an impact. In this case, it is necessary to be careful with assessments, as the absence of context in the media can lead to error.

Short interviews with actors at all project levels: the institutional team in charge; actors from all sectors directly or indirectly involved in the project; donors; and any other person considered useful.

In-depth interviews with key project actors, whose profiles suggest deep knowledge of the context and the project.

Workshops or group meetings with key project actors, facilitated by the evaluator.

The participation of evaluators in a project activity is extremely useful to the extent that they are able to foster observation and listening that will provide important information and not necessarily what was detected and is not recorded anywhere. This is a basic tool for analyzing and understanding the actors’ behavior and attitudes.

Analysis of visual material. Photographic or audiovisual material is useful in order to learn more about the type of activity, the type of actors and the type of working conditions. Although this material is seldom utilized, its use is encouraged to the extent that a written narration may not provide sufficient information for the evaluation and because the exercise is more complete and richer when additional sources of information are available.

III. EXPERIENCES AND MATERIALS RELATED TO THE EVALUATION OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION INTERVENTION PROJECTS

“Interest in developing more accurate methods to measure the impact of post-conflict peace-building projects has grown considerably in recent years. This is the result of the confluence of two distinct trends. First is the rise of much more systematic approaches to project monitoring and evaluation in non-profit and UN development programmes in general. Prior to the 1990s, project monitoring, reporting, and evaluation tended to be relatively unstandardized and impressionistic. Over the past decade, more rigorous templates for setting defined objectives and more systematic, results-oriented measurement tools have been adapted (largely from the private sector), and are now a ubiquitous feature of virtually all work conducted by non-profit and multilateral agencies. This trend is apparent in the large non-profit sector working on domestic assistance and outreach as it is in international aid programmes. Wherever one turns, agencies, donors, and foundations are devoting considerable time and energy to developing tools and approaches for impact assessment. It would probably not be an exaggeration to claim that measuring outputs and impact is at this point in time the single biggest preoccupation of the non-profit sector -- aside from the perennial preoccupation of funding. This trend is driven by a number of factors, including donor demand for greater accountability and cost-effectiveness, and a desire to capture lessons learned in a manner which fosters cumulative knowledge about various aid interventions.

Second, the 1990s also witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of complex emergencies, protracted wars, and post-conflict reconstruction challenges – Sudan, Somalia, Congo, Rwanda, Haiti, Mozambique, Afghanistan, and Guatemala, to name only a few. These crises -- and the sometimes spectacular failures of international response to those crises -- produced a growing realization that conventional development approaches were insufficient and in some instances
counter-productive in post-conflict settings. This in turn led to calls for post-conflict approaches which address root causes of conflicts and which integrate peace-building, conflict prevention, and conflict management capacities into reconstruction and development.

The statement in the foregoing paragraphs addresses two main issues that we have tackled from various angles in this paper: the dilemmas of the evaluation itself, as an epistemological-methodological challenge, and the theoretical-practical relationship; in other words, to what extent have evaluations of conflict resolution interventions provided real lessons learned which have contributed to correct errors and reconstruct what is useful. In other words, up to what point have we learned and how have we applied our knowledge?

Indeed, the road has not been easy. War and conflicts, as components of the history of humanity are among the most complex issues that humankind has faced. Their prevention, management, solution and consequences have nourished the schools of philosophy, anthropology, sociology and history, and yet conflicts do not go away – their study has not entailed their disappearance – but tend to grow, deepen, multiply or recur for long periods in human history.

In recent years, the concern of individuals, countries and diverse sectors – all with well-defined interests - around this situation produced a rather particular phenomenon in contemporary history, the intervention in conflict contexts. Within this frame, two large fields of expertise developed: one relates to practice and so-called “practitioners”, in other words, experiences on pre-conflict, conflict and post-conflict intervention. The other refers to the field of theoretical-conceptual development where social sciences explore human nature from diverse approaches in an effort to learn and explore, understand and manage conflicts.

Up to the present time, countless topics for analysis, study and reflection have been opened in both fields of expertise. Nevertheless, this particular issue on the evaluation of interventions has been basically developed in the field of practice rather than as a conceptual-theoretical concern. However, the need for increased understanding of these incidents requires the support of conceptual tools. From a more general perspective, it is necessary to link theory to practice in the shape of a dialectic exercise. In a sense, the design of the road is already underway, and this effort by UNDP’s Democratic Dialogue Program is an example.

It would be difficult to put together all existing experiences and bibliography in connection with the evaluation of conflict resolution intervention processes. Some exercises and other material are already available for use. On the other hand, it is worthwhile getting acquainted with these efforts, which should be systematized in order to continue to explore this topic and profit from the lessons learned.

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The very nature of the conflict problem, its intervention and evaluation has led to the production of materials and exercises of a diverse nature and not necessarily in the same category but rather focused to specific themes. For example, some efforts are directed to impact evaluation in post-conflict environments, and others to peace building and development, mediation and resolution of conflicts, consolidation of democracy or the impact of dialogue processes. In other words, the field is diverse and highly heterogeneous.

An important effort in this direction is the study developed by the Evaluation Unit of INCORE:

“Addressing the causes, effects, solutions and post-settlement impacts of such wars has been the role of the UNU Institute for Conflict Research at the University of Ulster (INCORE) since it was established in 1993. INCORE is a joint research institute of the United Nations University (UNU) and the University of Ulster. It seeks to address the management and resolution of contemporary conflicts through research, training, practice, policy and theory.

The Research Unit undertakes, commissions and supervises research of a multidisciplinary nature, particularly on post-settlement issues, governance and diversity, and research methodology in violent societies.

The Policy and Evaluation Unit is committed to bridging the gaps between theory, practice and policy. It seeks to ensure that conflict-related research and practice is incorporated in grassroots programming and governmental policy.”

An INCORE effort greatly contributing to this context was the exercise Conflict Resolution & Evaluation held in July 2002 in its facilities in Londonderry, Northern Ireland. It intended to bring together 28 experts in evaluation to analyze and discuss the main identified dilemmas. The exercise was rich in speeches, discussions and in-depth group analyses, and the results of the discussion tables were published in a pamphlet that will be most useful in the study of this topic. The themes discussed in this meeting were:

- Indicators & Criteria
- Conflict Context & ‘locals’ in Conflict Resolution Evaluation
- Success & Failure
- Transfer
- Assessing the impact of a project in the short, medium and long term

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- Macro-Micro level in evaluation
- Internal-External Use of Evaluation
- Testing Theories of Change

INCORE has two valuable publications ensuing from its research efforts: *The Evaluation of Conflict Resolution Interventions: Framing the State of Play* and *The Evaluation of Conflict Resolution Interventions. Part II: Emerging Practice & Theory*, both written by Cheyanne Church and Julie Shouldice.⁹

The non Governmental Swiss Organization War Torn Societies Project (WSP-International) has explored and developed the evaluation issue and has produced the following inside material: *Learned Lessons System, Monitoring and Evaluation in the WSP* and *Impact Assessment in Post-Conflict Peace-Building: The State of the Art. For the War-Torn Societies Project-International*, April 2003.

On the specific issue of evaluation and development of indicators related to the type of regime, International IDEA has published two studies which develop the topic: how to evaluate democracy: *Handbook on democracy Assessment* and *The State of Democracy, Democracy Assessments in Eight Nations Around the World*.

The George Mason University has developed material focusing on the formation and support to the design of evaluation strategies, of which an outstanding example is *A Step-by Step Guide to Planning and Implementing Evaluation Strategies*.

Other materials that become indirect sources of information on evaluation analysis are the publications addressing the problems of interventions, their dilemmas, achievements and challenges, i.e. David Rieff’s: *Una Cama por una Noche [A Bed for one Night], El Humanitarismo en Crisis [Humanitarism in Crisis]* and ONGD. *Historia, aciertos y fracasos de quienes quieren ayudar al Tercer Mundo [History, success and failure of those who wish to help the Third World]* by Intermón Oxfam.

Another source of information and analysis directly contributing to this reflection on evaluation, interventions and ensuing dilemmas is the literature of conflict, a field that has been opened as a clear specialization within the context of social sciences and interventionist practice. The study of conflicts (Conflictología) and related themes - particularly the anthropological issues on tolerance and violence - has become a common space where we find prominent experts such as Ross, Vinyamata, Baró and Kaufman, to mention some of them.

Finally, it is worthwhile underscoring that, within this frame, UNDP effort - this exercise on the creation of a community of dialogue where evaluation is among the themes for analysis, socialization and discussion - will greatly contribute to the development and exploration of this issue. A relevant input is the document: Some

⁹ The texts mentioned in this section are included in the bibliography.
Ideas on Building a Community of Practice on Democratic dialogue and a Common Framework for Assessment.

IV. PROPOSAL: HOW TO INCORPORATE THE LESSONS LEARNED. A proposal to overcome dilemmas and orient future actions based on reflecting on experience and identifying the lessons learned in practice.

The following development proposes to underscore the main aspects to be addressed in order to visualize and design a guide for discussions, analyses and the construction of a useful and flexible proposal, therefore realistic, for the future work of institutions and organizations in the field of evaluation of conflict resolution intervention processes.

However, the most important aspect of this effort is that the practical and theoretical experiences accumulated in recent years by a large number of actors and sectors, local and international, will permit the incorporation of lessons learned. In other words, to visualize the lessons drawn from the successes and failures experienced by each actor in his practice. In socializing them, they will contribute to the accumulation and systematization of the experience as a collective effort.

The reflections stemming from systematization of the experience, consultation of the bibliography and the exchange of information with different experts in this practice, have allowed for identifying a thematic agenda that will serve as the basis for the development of future work. These reflections are described below as guiding ideas rather than developed themes. They do no follow any hierarchical order, as each one has a potential value by itself. It is important to consider that an evaluation practice involves all the components included here. We have described them separately in order to emphasize each one of them. However, it must be constantly kept in mind that they are part of a whole and that the evaluation should always be an integrated exercise where all its elements are compatible.

1. Coherence between expected impacts and practice. They must be realistic and pertinent to the environment.

The design of an evaluation should take as a point of departure the expected impact of the project under evaluation. Coherence must be maintained between what was intended to achieve and what will be evaluated. Although this seems to be an obvious principle, in practice it is common to lose sight of the origin, the motivations and the reasons that led to the implementation of the project. This will be useful in visualizing not only the achievement-non achievement of expected project impacts but also in identifying partial or final results that were never contemplated. In fact, modifying expected impacts over the course of a project is a symptom of adjustment of what was initially planned to what is
actually found, which is liable to encourage increased interaction with the environment.

2. Ethics and subjectivity: the role of actors in the evaluation

Experience has shown that subjective interaction of individuals involved in an evaluation process is an issue of great concern to the practitioners, the implementing institutions and the donors of an intervention project. However, the role of subjectivity should not be overestimated, as objectivity is totally viable to the extent that each actor is clear about his role and explicit thereof, particularly in relation to his agenda of personal and institutional interests. However, in order to achieve this, it is necessary to consolidate an ethical practice that grants credibility to the evaluation effort.

3. The methodologies: indicators, tools, times, resources and activities

The methodological development of evaluative practices is in full evolution. Moreover, reflections on what has been applied and addressed are being revised in diverse contexts and by different sectors. It will be important to visualize the integrated nature of the methodology, the existence of a driving force and a conceptual axis that grants harmony to the whole evaluation strategy. The design and construction of indicators, tools, times, resources and activities should be oriented in the same direction in order for the evaluation result to be meaningful and strongly supported, particularly because all its components validate and complement each other. For instance, possible contrast between printed sources and interviews, as well as among involved actors, will allow for the construction of a more objective analysis of the process and project results.

4. Identifying changes and extensions: The support of theory

Theory and practice have seldom converged with clarity in this context. However, the challenges currently identified in the evaluation practice evince the need to enrich practice with theoretical inputs, particularly those contributed by social sciences to the study of communities and societies. The exercise evaluation field would be strongly enriched by all specializations related to social, psychological, anthropological, economic, historical and pedagogical facts, which should be used to enhance the understanding of evaluation and intervention processes.
5. Managing an approach with principles instead of finished models

Experience has shown that this is a fundamental principle: understanding that each evaluation is a particular and specific exercise because each project has a different logic. Even in the case of similar projects in the same country, or in the case of similar projects in different countries, facts are never identical and each situation will have its own nature and dynamics. The inclination to homogenize evaluation processes should, therefore, be oriented towards a series of principles rather than to the elaboration of finished models to be indiscriminately utilized. This requires a comprehensive development of two capacities: the ability to maintain coherence among guiding principles in the evaluation; and the ability to adapt the evaluation practice to each project, context and need.

6. Evaluation as a permanent process: How to incorporate in practice the results of the evaluation

Finally, the most valuable lesson drawn from practice is that we must develop the capacity to learn from what we have done, but above all from what we are doing. The traditional practice of performing evaluations merely focusing project completion and the assessment of its products, phasing off the process and what could have been learned, corrected or modified over the project period, has entailed costs and risks but, particularly, the loss of an opportunity to optimize the vital capacities of a project.

This reflection has increased the awareness of organizations implementing conflict resolution intervention projects, inasmuch as human beings have a changing nature. This dynamic condition allows human beings to reflect on their reality, develop the capacity to modify it for their own good and then interact in a positive and stable manner in the construction of their environment according to their real needs.
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