**Reflecting on the Practice of
Outside Assistance:**

Can we know what good we do?

Mary Anderson

Abstract

Discussions of current conflicts often highlight their complexity. Under such difficult circumstances, how can international agencies that undertake programs to promote survival and/or peace determine what their impacts are? 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?

In this article, we shall address these questions regarding the impacts of agencies that work in or on conflict. Sections II and III describe two collaborative efforts undertaken by agencies to learn more about their impacts on conflict within the societies where they work: Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCPP) and Reflecting on Peace Project (RPP). Section IV turns to a review of what has been learned through one of them, LCPP, about how to assess outcomes. Finally, Section V, considers the relevance of LCPP's lessons learned for those agencies involved in RPP and others that work directly on conflict. We also discuss how differences in approach may pose specific challenges and require variations in assessment approaches.

About the Contributor

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

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

The tracing and assessing of humanitarian or political attempts to lessen conflict is difficult along two dimensions. The first has to do with the criteria or indicators for assessing progress. What are the appropriate forms and means of progress measurement as it pertains to conflict reduction?

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

In the pages that follow, we 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 in which they work. The first, the Local Capacities for Peace Project (LCPP), involves a number of humanitarian and development assistance agencies seeking to understand just how their efforts to save lives, alleviate suffering and support indigenous development interact with, and in some cases reinforce, inter-group conflicts in the areas in which they provide aid. The second project, Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP), includes a number of agencies that work specifically on conflict, that is, those agencies that undertake inter-group mediation, reconciliation, peace education, conflict management, conflict transformation, and other methods of reducing the dangers of conflict. In these sections, we describe the background, approaches, and outcomes to date of these two projects.

In Section IV, we turn to a review of what has been learned through LCPP about the process of assessing outcomes. Finally, in Section V, we consider the relevance of LCPP-learning for those agencies involved in RPP, as well as for others working directly on conflict. We also discuss how differences in approach may pose special challenges and require some variations in assessment techniques.

II. The Local Capacities for Peace Project

In 1994, five years after the end of the Cold War, many international humanitarian and development assistance non-governmental organizations (NGOs) found themselves working in areas characterized by serious and often violent inter-group conflict. Many of these became sites of severe civilian-based civil wars, fought between subgroups of what had previously always seemed to be a functionally cohesive society.

A number of NGO staff, both local and expatriate, became concerned with the evidence of what they saw as a regular compromising of provided assistance. Although it was intended to be impartial with regard to the sides at war and targeted only to civilians in need, it seemed that the aid they provided very often ended up in the hands or under the control of local warlords, militias, or partisan politicians.

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 localized, inter-group warfare, others began to look for ways of avoiding such negative aid-produced impacts.

As a response to this problem, the Local Capacities for Peace Project was organized 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, by comparing and analyzing them, to discover whether the conflict-worsening impacts of aid were, while of course regrettable, unfortunately an inevitable aspect of "doing business" in warfare, or whether there might, in fact, be options for providing aid that would limit or even eliminate such negative effects. The questions LCPP set out to answer were: 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 even prolong the conflicts? Furthermore, how might such assistance be given so that, rather than having negative, conflict-worsening effects, it instead helps local people to disengage from conflict and begin to establish the systems they will

need in order to deal successfully with the issues that underlie the conflict?

Over the next six years, LCPP involved hundreds of individuals working with dozens of NGOs and other assistance agencies, helping them to examine their work and analyze it in order to understand how they might ensure better outcomes. In the first eighteen months of the project, fifteen case studies were written about aid programs in fourteen conflict zones, ranging from Somalia to Guatemala, from Afghanistan to Georgia/Abkhazia, from Lebanon to Tajikistan, from Burundi to Croatia, and elsewhere.

In 1996-1997, over twenty "feedback" workshops were held, most 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 in which agencies were active.

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). Finally, both the usefulness and the effectiveness of the LCPP lessons learned have been "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 have experimented with using the "do no harm" approaches in the ongoing design and implementation of aid projects and, from this experience, learned more about how to trace the impacts of international assistance on inter-group conflicts. (This phase of LCPP ends in September 2000.)

What has been learned through the LCPP? Four lessons have pertinence to the impact and assessment issues discussed here.

II.1 Aid Affecting Conflict

Firstly, by looking across many settings and including many types of assistance programs, 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). Table 1 summarizes the impacts carried through resource transfers.

Box 1: How Aid Affects Conflict through Resource Transfers

1. Theft. When the resources of international aid agencies are stolen by armies and militias, and then used either for their own purposes or sold to raise money for the purchase of arms, these resources directly feed into the conflict.

2. Distribution Effects. International aid agencies target their resource inputs to certain groups. This will mean that some people obtain aid while others do not. When the group receiving resources exactly overlaps and matches one of the subgroups in society that is in conflict with others, the fact that they receive aid's resources while others do not may increase inter-group tensions. On the other hand, aid that is given across subgroups can serve to lessen the divisions between groups.

3. Market Effects. International aid has a significant impact on wages, prices, and profits. These effects can either reinforce incentives to continue warfare or, on the other hand, promote and support non-war economic activities.

4. Substitution Effects. To the extent that international aid agencies assume responsibility for civilian survival in war zones, the aid they provide can serve to free up whatever internal resources exist for the pursuit of warfare. Furthermore, this can also permit local authorities to define their own roles entirely in terms of military control and, thus, to abdicate their own responsibility and accountability for civilian responsiveness.

5. Legitimization Effects. International aid legitimizes some actors and activities, while delegitimizing others. When the effects of aid are to legitimize war activities, aid worsens conflict; when the effects are to legitimize non-war activities, aid can lessen conflict.

Box 2: How Aid Can Affect Conflict through Implicit Ethical Messages

1. Arms. When international aid agencies hire armed guards to protect either their staff or the goods they import, the implicit ethical message can be an indication that it is legitimate for armed providers to determine who is to receive food, health services and the other benefits of aid. This is, of course, also what warfare is about. Or, alternatively, the implicit ethical message could be that, in the midst of the chaos of warfare, the international agency has now established a place where law and order will rule, and people and property will be safe. Such a message could then counter the mode of warfare.

2. Collaboration. When international aid agencies refuse to cooperate or co-ordinate activities with one another, and, even worse, when they bad-mouth each other and compete for "clients", expressing mutual disapproval of the other agencies' ways of working, the implicit ethical message is that if you do not agree with someone, you do not have to work with them or respect them. This is, again, another message of warfare.

3. Impunity. When international aid agency staff take the agency vehicle to the mountains for the weekend for much-needed "rest and relaxation" when petrol is in short supply in the war zone, the implicit ethical message is that, if you control goods, you may use them for your own pleasure without accountability to the people for whom the resources were intended, even when their needs are great. This is, again, the way that warlords are often perceived to operate.

4. Different Value for Different Lives. When international aid agencies publish evacuation plans which call for the evacuation of expatriate staff while leaving local staff behind or, even worse, the evacuation of expatriate staff, vehicles, and radios ahead of local staff, the implicit ethical message is that it is acceptable to value different lives differently or even that some things can be deemed more valuable than some lives. This is another of the messages of warfare.

5. Powerlessness. When international aid agency staff say "but you cannot blame me for what happens; I am only one small person in a complicated situation and, furthermore, it is my headquarters (or my donor) that make(s) me do this", the implicit ethical message is that individuals need not accept accountability for the impacts of their actions in complex situations. This is, of course, also what people in war zones say.

6. Belligerence. When international aid staff are evidently nervous about conflict and approach every encounter at checkpoints or with local authorities with an attitude of belligerence, suspicion, and an implicit threat to invoke their power ("we can withdraw our aid; you need us"), the implicit ethical message is that relationships are rightly based on power, suspicion, and toughness. This, again, reinforces both the modes and the tone of warfare.

7. Publicity. When international aid agencies make use of pictures of atrocities in order to raise funds, the implicit ethical message is that war can sometimes be understood in terms of "innocents" and "villains". But most wars are in fact far more complicated than this; often local warlords, knowing that they can drum up political and material support if their side is seen to be suffering, actually have inflicted suffering on their own people. Agencies thus can play into and reinforce warfare.

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 programs in many diverse conflicts. They embody solid, field-based learning, rather than hypotheses about how things might occur.

II.2 Dividers and Connectors

Secondly, the broad overview of conflict settings also provided insights into those characteristics of conflicts that have important implications for how aid and conflict interact. The focus here is on understanding how people in these areas carry on in the face of conflict. LCPP found that all conflicts are characterized by two types of forces: on the one hand, people within conflict areas are divided one from another 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 when conflicts occur within nations in which people have previously lived as neighbors and friends. It also pertains in cross-border wars such as that between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

That wars are characterized by divisions between groups should be self-evident. However, if aid workers are to correctly perceive just how their aid affects conflict, they must also understand the basis and the dimensions of these divisions. For example, aid personnel need to know which subgroups are in conflict with each other and why. They must identify the sources of tension between groups in order to determine whether they arise from systemic "root" causes or rather from recent manipulation, opportunism, or other proximate causes. They need to know which issues, practices, institutions, or experiences in fact divide people. Without such clarity about "dividers" between conflicting subgroups, aid workers will be unable to understand whether the aid they give feeds into and worsens (or rather helps to relieve and reduce) these dividers.

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 infrastructure or market systems);
- attitudes and actions (such as the "adoption" of 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 will remain unable to know whether, or how, their work either ignores and thus undermines connections or (hopefully) positively recognizes and thus reinforces them.

II.3 Details of Planning and Timing

Thirdly, the experience collected through LCPP shows that it is the details of an aid program that effectively serve to either reinforce or weaken divisions and/or connectors. Program decisions as to whether to provide aid at all, as well as where, when and for how long to work, whom to hire locally, whom to target, how to define the roles of international staff, how to deliver goods - these and other basic management decisions will all have profound effects on inter-group relationships in the areas in which aid is provided.

Fourthly, the collective experience with the application of "do no harm" approaches in active conflict zones has both clarified approaches to impact assessment and shown how, in some situations, impact assessments need to take account of longer-range processes that may take time to unfold and that may involve activities at multiple layers of society. For example, if food aid is being stolen by militias, such aid is obviously supporting their abilities to pursue warfare. Stopping such theft will clearly reduce the aid's negative impacts on conflict. On the other hand, if an aid agency must negotiate with local authorities in order to gain access to the communities it seeks to serve, experience shows that this can enhance the legitimacy of those authorities in the given community. Unfortunately, however, in the context of war, such local authorities are often the very agents exploiting the population and using them in pursuit of the goals of warfare. It may be clear to these agencies that negotiation with such authorities supports conflict; but finding options that will enable them to eliminate this negative impact may be far more difficult. Nonetheless, in LCPP, some of the aid agencies did find strategies for working within local authority structures to engage them in assuming responsibility not just for violent control of the countryside, but also for legitimate caring for civilian interests. Since these efforts develop over time, tracing their actual impacts is of course difficult.

Nonetheless, in all situations encountered by the range of humanitarian and development assistance workers involved in LCPP, there has been a strong sense that, given careful analysis of dividers and

Table 1: Dividers and Connectors

Dividers / Sources of Tension	Connectors / Local Capacities for Peace
Aid Program	

Dividers / Sources of Tension	Connectors / Local Capacities for Peace
Contending Versions of History **Insecurity (ethnic conflict, intra-communal conflict, etc.)** • Police discrimination • Inability to travel **Stereotyping** **Unemployment** • Especially among young people • Recruitment into armies **Biased or Inflammatory Media Activity** **Business** • Profiteering, smuggling, etc. • some people have vested interests in keeping the war going **Language** • Barriers among uneducated groups **Religion** • Fundamentalism and infusion of religion into politics at national and local levels • Attacks on religious symbols **Politics** • Corruption, cronyism, impunity, etc. **Militarization of Communities** • Presence of troops • Aggressive recruiting • Declining efficiency of customary problem-solvers (e.g. clergy, teachers, professionals, other local leaders) who have lost ground to police, military, or other authorities **Ethnic Demographics** • Real and perceived disparities between communities in resource allocations and opportunity with historical roots. This includes: Land, Employment, Provision of services, Access to Education • Confusion over land tenure / ownership, with growing ethnic dimension • Continued engineering / manipulation of ethnicity **Aid** • Jealousy and competition between haves / have nots: aid serves as a flashpoint when one group is perceived to receive more than another	**Shared Past** • Memories of multicultural society before going to war: there was a time, when people got along **Intermarriage** • But numbers have declined since war **Bureaucratic and Administrative Structures** (e.g. postal service, pensions, etc.) **Concern for Children** **Business** • Has an interest in stability and peace **Language** • Lingua franca among elites in all communities **Religion** • Shared festivals / religious holidays **Local Leadership** • Willingness of some respected local leaders to meet / work / solve inter-communal problems with counterparts from other communities **Aid Agencies and NGOs** • Aid crosses lines • Multiethnic staff • Host communities benefit from assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs)

WHY?
- Ending poverty, social injustice, and conflict. Guided by local action.

WHAT?
- Assistance to internally displaced people and affected communities. Sectors include:
- infrastructure (schools, roads, wells)
- health and nutrition
- income generation
- training

WHERE?
- Border areas of uncertain security
- Multi-ethnic and multi-confessional

HOW?
- Through local partners and representative local committees

FOR WHOM?
- (Participants / Beneficiaries)
- Internally displaced persons (IDPs) in areas of origin; and areas designated by government
- Communities with large numbers of IDPs

STAFF, PARTNERS
- Multi-ethnic
- Multi-confessional

connectors in any particular situation, it is nearly always possible to find some way of providing assistance that will alleviate rather than worsen inter-group divisions. Indeed in most cases, it will also bepossible to identify programming options that acknowledge and build on existing linkages, rather than undermining them. Aid workers have also been consistently creative in their efforts to find options and alternatives that manage to avoid the negative implicit ethical messages outlined in Table 2 above.

Through all the stages of the LCPP - the case studies, the feedback workshops, and the application of "do no harm" approaches in actual project settings - the focus has been on tracing and assessing aid's impacts on conflict. Below, we will examine just what has been learned through LCPP that could have relevance in the broader field of conflict resolution. However, in the next section we first turn to a review of another project through which agencies have collaborated effectively in order to learn about these issues.

III. The Reflecting on Peace Practice Project (RPP)

In September of 1999, following the collaborative model of LCPP, a number of international agencies working on conflict joined together in the Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) project. The purpose of this effort has been to look systematically at the collective and comparative experiences of these agencies, in order to learn more about which of their activities seemed to be effective, as well as identifying the circumstances under which things do work or do not work. The idea was to collect experience from multiple case studies of a broad range of peace-promotion activities undertaken by different types of agencies in various stages of conflicts in a broad geographical spread of locations. The experimenters expected (perhaps the more accurate word would be "hoped") that such a broad examination of experience would help to identify patterns that will in turn enable these agencies to improve their future effectiveness.

By May 2000, ten case studies had been completed, and twelve more are now planned. Some case studies involve agencies' work in several countries and regions. Many focus on the effortsof local people to endconflict and bring about peace and examine justhow these groups operate with international agencies to support their activities. Some start instead from the perspective of the international agencies undertaking initiatives and examine how theserelate to or attempt to encourage existing, local initiatives for peace. And a third set of case studies examines and compares a range of efforts, both local and international, undertaken in given conflict locations.

Many of the case study writers (as was the case with LCPP) come from agencies that work in this field. Usually, these practitioners visit and write about the work of an agency other than their own, though in some situations, a case study can be written by the staff of the agency under review. Sometimes case study writers are experienced consultants or academics intimately familiar with the region and its peace work. The cases are intended as "authentic" and "credible", rather than "impartial" or "without bias". That is to say that RPP engages people who themselves are activists in conflict/peace work in order to examine experience, analyze it, and extract lessons about effectiveness.

When all the cases are written, the RPP plans a number of broad consultations involving a wide range of practitioners and analysts to review the material These consultations provide a critical "testing" ground of the ideas of each case individually and of all the cases collectively. If there are consistent patterns across cases, i. e. generalizable lessons that might apply under a range of circumstances, these consultations will identify them. (And, if these do not exist, the consultations will also discover that!) The project is scheduled to complete its work in mid-2001.

Table 2: RPP Case Studies (author indicated in brackets)
The following case studies have been completed:
1. Forging a Formula for Peaceful Co-Existence in Fiji: a case study on the Citizen's Constitutional Forum (Peter Woodrow)
2. An Overview of Initiatives for Peace in Acholi, Northern Uganda (Mark Bradbury)
3. Extending the Humanitarian Mandate: Norwegian Church Aid's Decision to Institutionalize its Commitment to Peace Work (Mary B. Anderson)
4. Two views of the Georgia-South Ossetia Dialogue Process conducted by the Conflict Management Group and the Norwegian Refugee Council (Susan Allen Nan, Lara Olson)
5. Building Peace Through Third Party Impartial Facilitation: the Story of OAS-ProPaz in Guatemala (Orion Kriegman)
6. International Service for Peace (SIPAZ): Promoting Peacebuilding and Non-Violent Conflict Transformation in Chiapas, Mexico (Carlisle Levine)
7. Kenyan Peace Initiatives: Kenya Peace and Development Network, the Wajir Peace and Development Committee, the National Council of Churches of Kenya, and the Amani People's Theatre (Janice Jenner, Dekha Ibrahim Abdi)
8. When Truth is Denied, Peace Will Not Come: the People to People Peace Process of the New Sudan Council of Churches (Hadley Jenner)
9. Networks for Peace: the Coalition for Peace in Africa (COPA) (Sue Williams)
10. Networks for Peace: the Cooperation for Peace and Unity, Afghanistan (CPAU) (Sue Williams)

Case studies currently underway (to be completed by October 2000):

11. The Interreligious Peace Foundation: Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus addressing the conflict in Sri Lanka (Alex Bilodeau, Rienzie Perera)
12. Osijek Region Peace Teams: a Project of the Center for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights in Osijek, Croatia, and the Life and Peace Institute (Michelle Kurtz)
13. A Context Case of Multiple Interventions in Burundi: International Alert and Search for Common Ground (Lennart Wohlgemuth)
14. Christian Peacemaker Teams in Hebron (Joseph Bock, Sue Lyke)
15. Balkan Dialogue Project of Peace Research Institute Oslo and the Nansen Academy
16. Agenda for Reconciliation: the work of Moral Re-Armament (MRA) at its annual Caux conference and a selected field site (Donna Isaac)
17. South Africa: local and international NGO peace initiatives in the transition to democracy (Greg Hansen)
18. Local peace constituencies in Cyprus: the bi-communal trainer's group (Oliver Wolleh)
19. Comparing Catholic Relief Services peace programming in Philippines/Mindanao and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Reina Neufeldt and other CRS personnel)
20. Preventing Violence in Roma-Hungarian Conflicts: Partners for Democratic Change, Hungary
21. The Papua New Guinea-Bougainville Peace Process (Andy Carl)
22. The Center for Education and Networking in Nonviolent Action - KURVE Wustrow, Bosnia-Herzegovina (Martina Fischer)

Cases in planning stage (for completion by December 2000):

23. Multiple interventions in Colombia
24. Mennonite Central Committee in El Salvador
25. Views of Israeli and Palestinian "influentials" on the impact of NGO unofficial peace efforts over the last 30 years (Everett Mendelson)
26. Basque Region - to be defined
27. Selected peace efforts in the Asia-Pacific Region (to be identified - possibly Indonesia, Solomon Islands)

Some case studies reflect direct mediation efforts; others involve accompaniment and witnessing for peace. Some have to do with humanitarian aid agencies that have undertaken explicit peace efforts; others involve partnering arrangements between aid agencies and conflict management agencies. The majority is concerned with agencies that work directly to address conflict and promote peace. They cover most regions of the world, including the South Pacific area (Fiji), Asia (Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Afghanistan), Africa (South Africa, Kenya, Uganda, Burundi, Southern Sudan), the Middle East (Palestine and Israel, Cyprus), Europe (the Basque Region in Spain, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Crimea, Croatia, Georgia and South Ossetia in Georgia), and Latin America (Colombia, Guatemala, Chiapas in Mexico).

Both RPP and LCPP are organized in such a way that they involve many people active in the fields with which the projects are concerned. They aim to foster inductive rather than deductive learning. The projects begin with the collection of a broad range of experience and, through analysis and comparison, and then seek to identify common themes, issues, lessons, and patterns. They incorporate built-in feedback processes, engaging thinkers and actors in testing and re-testing the lessons that are extracted.

There is, however, one major difference between the two projects. Whereas LCPP was aimed at learning about the side effects of international assistance (namely, how such aid influences conflicts, even as it alleviates suffering or promotes development), RPP is instead focused on the discovery of how agencies working on conflict achieve, or do not achieve, their primary purpose (the reduction of conflict and the promotion of peace).

The people who work in both of these fields are to be commended for their willingness - even eagerness - to engage in these learning processes since, as they do so, they will learn as much about what they have done badly as about what they have done well. But they are usually willing to take the risks that this exposure entails precisely because they are committed to and earnestly want to be effective in achieving proper goals. They are ultimately committed to working for the cessation of war and the achievement of lasting peace.

IV. Assessing Impacts and Evaluating Effectiveness

In both the Local Capacities for Peace and the Reflecting on Peace Practice projects, a central challenge is just how impacts are to be assessed and effectiveness evaluated. As noted above, there are two troublesome aspects to assessment and evaluation. These are: (1) identifying appropriate, accurate, and useful indicators of impacts, and (2) tracing the causation between program activities and these outcomes. It is difficult both to know what effects our work actually has (impacts) and to gauge which activities cause which results (attribution).

Both of these issues are further complicated when a time variable is introduced; that is, if we not only want to know what our immediate impacts have been, but also seek to determine outcomes from our efforts over a longer time period. Since RPP is still very much in process, it would be premature to conjecture on those efforts' findings with regard to impacts. But LCPP, with almost six years' experience of focusing on field-level effects, has addressed these issues directly. In this Section, we review what LCPP has discovered about the assessment and evaluation of impacts.

IV.1 LCPP Experience in Assessing and Evaluating Impacts

Aid agencies work with tangibles. Over the years, they have become increasingly 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 even 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 or the decrease in malnutrition achieved through feeding programs. Most aid agencies accept responsibility for tracing the impacts of the resources they provide in the spheres in which these resources are intended to benefit recipients.

LCPP, however, was concerned not with the direct impacts of aid, but rather with its ancillary effects on conflict. This in turn required aid agencies to effect a significant shift in their understanding of accountability: accepting responsibility for the unplanned and often unintended political and social impacts of their work. The affected agencies were naturally concerned that this might involve them in areas where they had no expertise and also require that they measure what are essentially immeasurable outcomes.

IV.2 Patterns as Valid Evidence

These concerns abated once the LCPP process was able to identify clear, repeated and prevalent patterns in the interaction between aid and conflict. The cumulative evidence, for example, of 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 direct measure of the impact of food aid on nutritional status. The specificity and precision of this cumulative experience provided empirical data that was seen by aid workers to be accurate and valid.

IV.3 Differences in Assessing Negative and Positive Impacts

LCPP found that it is far easier to trace the elimination of aid's negative impacts than it is to accurately assess its positive impacts on conflict. When an NGO identifies a way in which its aid is feeding into conflict, it can then take steps to abate these mechanisms. Identifying such a specific negative effect also makes it possible to know when that problem has been solved.

For example, one agency working in a West African country found that it had inadvertently hired its entire local staff from only one of the ethnic groups in the conflict area. The result was a one-sided program, which favored villages, and individuals who happened to also be from that ethnic group and, as a consequence, fed inter-group tensions. Once the agency staff had identified the problem of single-ethnicity, and once they had analyzed how their hiring procedures led to this outcome, they were able to broaden their recruiting to other groups and thus alter their impact on inter-group tensions. In another area, an aid agency found that each time it trained mechanics to maintain its fleet of delivery trucks, these individuals were then conscripted by the local militias to maintain the military vehicles at the front lines of the war. Once they recognized how their training was supporting the military, this agency decided instead to recruit and train women as mechanics. Women were not subject to the draft.

IV.4 Using Dividers and Connectors as Indicators

LCPP also found that dividers and connectors can provide specific indicators of the impacts of aid on conflict. Indeed, the advantage of understanding conflict in terms of dividers and connectors is that these illustrate and represent observable aspects of relationships, as well as of inter-group histories, the intricacies of political disagreements and accommodations, and, even, the complications of personalities and motivations.

When aid staff have properly identified and analyzed inter-group divisions, they are then able to observe whether these are in fact worsening or abating. For example, if one dividing factor is the inequality of housing access, it is possible to observe whether such access is (at least, in the eyes of the relevant groups) improving or worsening (or perceived to be worsening). Furthermore, divisions between people will become evident with the rise and fall of inter-group tension, and this is also observable in people's behavior. Are roads considered safe and are they in use or are they rather viewed as dangerous and are they therefore avoided? Do people move freely across boundaries or do they stay within the confines of their own groups?

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

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

IV.5 Dynamic Assessment

Through LCPP, it became clear that because conflicts are dynamic, impact assessment must also become a dynamic process. A positive impact in one period may have negative implications later and under different circumstances. And so as aid agencies analyze dividers and connectors to ensure that their impacts are indeed supporting the reduction of conflict, they need to continually revisit and update their analysis. Under the changing circumstances of inter-group conflict, a divider in one period can easily become a connector in another. For example, war divides people but, under some circumstances, the experience of warfare can actually create a link among civilian groups (and vice versa).

The difficulty of tracing the impact of aid on conflict is exacerbated by the fact that political and social relations (the essence of conflict) are multifaceted and only develop over time. Within LCPP, for example, aid agencies have supported linkages among warring communities within Southern Sudan (and thus helped reduce inter-group violence at this level), while at the same time recognizing that one result of a more unified South might be a more concerted war against the North. The question that this kind of issue poses is this: can one develop an aid strategy that takes both immediate relationships and those at other levels and locations into account?

IV.6 Attribution

In some cases, it becomes very clear that a single aid program indeed caused a very specific outcome. Our stories about hiring illustrate such cases. However, in most situations, so many things are occurring simultaneously that it is difficult to be sure just how one programmatic effort has affected overall outcomes.

Nonetheless, in LCPP's work, it became clear that often people in conflict situations do attribute outcomes to specific actions. They "know" whether an aid agency's programs fuel the fires of suspicion and competition, or are rather seen as fair, even-handed and inclusive. And 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 the best source of attribution available to aid agencies. Knowing what people are saying about a program's impacts is an exceedingly important measure of its real effect. This is true even if the impact is only visible through the opinions of local people because, if opinions shape observable behaviors, they will then become reality. That is to say that they will reinforce further engagement in or increasing disengagement from conflict. Of course, opinions may vary widely with regard to impacts, and resultant behaviors may also differ Some opinions may not easily translate into any observable action. Attribution through public opinion is, therefore, only partially reliable. But observation of actual behavior, coupled with gathering a broad base of opinion, can be instructive to any agency seeking to understand just how effective it has been in achieving its intended outcomes.

V. Relevance of LCPP Lessons Learned to Agencies Working on Conflict

Is it possible to generalize from the LCPP experience in tracing the impacts of aid programs on conflict? Can these concrete lessons provide more general guidance to agencies working directly to reduce conflict and support peace? The following five lessons from LCPP seem to have relevance here:

1. Impacts are not abstract: they are observable. One of the problems encountered in any attempt to generalize is the issue of distance from reality. LCPP experience has shown that, on site, it was often not difficult to determine, without ambiguity, the immediate, local impact of a program activity. One could easily see that male mechanics were being drafted, but female ones were not. The specific identification of a problem facilitated the specific identification of the solution. Divider/connector analysis provided this specificity for LCPP precisely because programmatic impacts on peace and conflict are observable in these elements of inter-group relationships.

2. Numbers matter. In LCPP, the accumulation of patterns, representing the experience of many people in many settings, provided convincing evidence of the impact of aid on conflict. If a particular outcome is observable again and again, and if many actors close to the situation under review consistently agree with a causal assessment, the sheer numbers of examples and breadth of agreement will support the credibility of the findings.

3. Disaggregation of goals helps. Through LCPP, it became clear that assessment of how a program eliminates a harmful consequence is often easier than knowing with certainty just how a program promotes a positive effect on conflict. That is, it is less difficult to assess one's effectiveness in "doing no harm" than in bringing about

the ultimate goal of reconciliation and peace. The more immediate and specific the goal, the easier it is to know when it has been effectively attained. 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 in the Conclusion below.)

4. People "know". LCPP found that those closely involved with a situation in which programs are carried out invariably have (often valid) opinions about impacts and causation. They attribute outcomes to particular events, and thus can serve as a critical source of information and confirmation of impacts.

5. Impacts are as dynamic and changing as the surrounding events. LCPP found that, because circumstances change rapidly and constantly in the contexts of conflict and any attempt to trace program impacts in these contexts must recognize that they too are dynamic. In particular, it is important to follow impacts over time to determine whether and how they are changing. Impact assessment cannot be carried out on a one-shot basis. (For example, the decision to train women as mechanics might also have resulted in a shift in conscription policies, so that women too were drafted.)

VI. Conclusion

All The lessons learned through LCPP about tracing and evaluating outcomes have taken us some way in the effort to demystify the practice of impact assessment. On site, if one has specific goals in mind and is properly attentive to the opinions and modes of behavior of local players, it should be possible to discern what has happened as a result of aid work and also to evaluate the impact of this work on the immediate manifestations of conflict (inter-group relations). It is also true, however, that as the goals of international efforts become more lofty and far-reaching, the difficulties in tracing and evaluating impacts will increase.

For agencies that define their goal as the reduction or management of conflict between specific groups in a limited area, impact assessment may be relatively straightforward. When agencies define goals in terms of transformation of conflict within societies, evaluating the precise results of their work (especially in relation to all other forces at play) becomes more difficult. For agencies that define their goal as the promotion of peace, knowing when their work has indeed been effective may be nearly impossible.

Disaggregating a larger goal into small, immediate, and specific steps can make it possible to define indicators toward progress. However, in its initial work, the RPP project is currently struggling with the degree to which a focus on small and immediate steps may, in fact, reduce an agency's overall impact. It unfortunately seems possible that, under some circumstances, a limited focus may in the end only be a way of excusing failure to achieve more significant goals or of justifying "feel good, do nothing" activities.

Drawing on the LCPP experience, this possibility suggests that the more accurate the diagnosis of the elements of a conflict and the specification of a strategy to address these elements with precision, the more likely will a step-by-step approach to programming be truly linked to conflict resolution and peace promotion. Within LCPP, aid agencies found that understanding the elements of conflict as they occurred in their space through dividers and connectors provided a useful framework for analysis from which they could assess their own immediate and longer-term impacts. Perhaps some equivalent clarity will be achieved by the efforts of agencies working on conflict in a more general sense, helping them to compare and analyze their experiences in many settings.

Aid agencies working within conflict may find that many of the forces within the society are beyond their purview. Their mandates to alleviate suffering and to support systemic development will help define the focus of their roles and give them a perspective from which hey then may have some influence on key aspects of conflict in that society.

The situation is very different for international agencies working on conflict. Because their intent is to help promote peace directly, none of the elements of society's conflict can be, ipso facto, "off limits". They may choose to work (if opportunities exist) at any of a number of multiple levels, with any (or all) of many groups, using any or many approaches.

These agencies working directly on conflict can learn some useful lessons from the experiences of aid agencies working in conflict. In addition, they need to push further in their collective analysis of the range of roles which they can play in relation to conflicts and, as they do so, remain attentive to the patterns that emerge across contexts in order to learn in which of these roles, and under what circumstances, they are able to have the most significant positive impacts. All things are surely not equal in peacemaking. A constant and sincere effort to trace impacts is an essential responsibility of any agency audacious enough to engage in efforts to reduce, manage, or transform conflict, and to support and promote lasting peace.

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