MEDRC

Stabilization Mechanism Project

Best Practices and New Initiatives in Monitoring and Evaluation

In Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Programs

RESEARCH BRIEF

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For peace process practitioners transboundary environmental issues such as water, climate change and desertification present a broad array of potential peace initiatives, from international declarations to guiding principles to treaties to shared management and diplomatic contact.

The Stabilization Mechanism Research Brief Series contributes more widely to the overall field of knowledge for environmental cooperation in the service of peace.

Best Practices and New Initiatives in Monitoring and Evaluation in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Programs

Although monitoring and evaluation need to be regarded as separate processes with varying purposes in environmental peacebuilding, it is crucial that they complement one another. Aimed at understanding performance, outputs and accountability around programs, monitoring and evaluation are often used in tandem. That being said, there are important differences between them that should be recognized and factored in when designing, implementing and developing environmental peacebuilding programs. This brief regards new initiatives and best practices that have emerged in monitoring and evaluation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding programs.

M&E in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding Programs

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to effective monitoring and evaluation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding programming. As a growing area of practice, environmental peacebuilding looks at how environment, conflict, and peace are related. The complexities that exist in conflict and peace programming make monitoring and evaluation of environmental peacebuilding work challenging.

It is important to apply different approaches that are proportionate to team capacity and resources. Although different programs may monitor and evaluate environmental peacebuilding program impacts differently, there are common challenges shared [1]. There is a demand for a stronger knowledge and resource pool to be developed on monitoring, evaluation and learning in peacebuilding as a whole. This brief considers some of the approaches and practices used to monitor and evaluate environmental peacebuilding programming.

Monitoring

Concerned with the continuous collection and analysis of data on specified indicators, monitoring aims to inform how programs are managed. How program indicators are determined and shaped significantly impacts the extent to which monitoring takes place.

Evaluation

Focused on determining the relevance of programs through systematic and objective assessment of an ongoing or completed program, evaluation looks at dimensions such as program effectiveness, sustainability and impact.

Program Design

The way in which institutional processes are designed deeply informs the degree to which monitoring and evaluation processes can complement each other. Adopting design frameworks that are holistic, systematic, adaptable and resilient is particularly important in programs that are within the environmental peacebuilding space.

Common Approaches to Program Design

A theory of change is commonly used to guide programs in environmental peacebuilding. The form that a theory of change adopts is informed by the institutional setting in which it is designed and developed. Depending on how an organization has been established, what diplomatic track of engagement in peacebuilding it engages in and what level of engagement program implementers have with funders bears influence on how a theory of change is shaped. Consider, for instance how accountability and reporting in programming vary based on the relationships that different organizations rely on.

	For organizations engaged at Track 1	For organizations engaged at Track 2
Upward Accountability Accountability from program implementers to their funders.	Relevant	Highly relevant
Downward Accountability Accountability that showcases good governance and transparency to all relevant beneficiaries.	Somewhat relevant	Highly relevant
Horizontal Accountability Accountability between organizations working in tandem on meeting shared outcomes.	Least relevant	Relevant
Inward Accountability Accountability within the organization towards its mission and objectives.	Highly relevant	Relevant

A theory of change extends from the wider context in which an environmental peacebuilding program takes place and seeks to show how change is intended to take place through the environmental peacebuilding program.

In order to gain a holistic understanding of the wider context in which an environmental peacebuilding program is being designed and developed, conflict sensitivity analysis is needed. Conflict sensitivity analysis continuously regards how and why an environmental peacebuilding program may aggregately affect a conflict and either advance positive or negative forms of peacebuilding [2]. In conducting conflict analysis, the factors driving conflict in the context where the environmental peacebuilding program is being designed, developed and implemented need to be thoroughly understood. This includes understanding the actors involved, their interests, and opportunities for positive conflict transformation. Even though conflict sensitivity analysis can be conducted at the regional, national or local levels, it is advised to do a comprehensive analysis that includes understanding the linkages between these levels.

Clearly articulating a theory of change deeply informs how relevant an environmental peacebuilding program will be. Without a well-designed theory of change, informed by conflict sensitivity, programs risk not being realistic and not aligning with higher-level policy or strategic objectives. Although a theory of change is valuable in revealing and understanding assumptions and ensuring alignment at all levels of program and activity design, it is poor in areas of monitoring the more micro and direct impacts of activities. A common approach to directing more micro-level program activities that support the theory of change would be the use of a logical framework.

Logical frameworks in environmental peacebuilding programs are not ideal as they are typically linear in how program activities are informed. Within environmental peacebuilding programs, there is growing consensus among practitioners that a systems approach to directing the meso and micro levels of program activities is better suited to environmental peacebuilding monitoring and evaluation.

A Shift Toward a Systems Approach

A systems approach to program activities enables qualitative, open-ended and experimental designs to be applied and monitored. There remain limited resources when it comes to practical experiences to refer to for insights into designing systemic monitoring and evaluation processes in the peacebuilding field.

Forms of good monitoring practice within a systems approach include developing indicators that consider both intended and unintended impact. This is where conflict sensitivity programming also stands to contribute constructively.

What has also emerged as useful in developing indicators for a systems approach that remains results-driven and adaptive is to have an institutional framework that supports the following:

- Clear norms of practice that are informed by and continuously updated in line with the wider context but aligned with organizational capacity and mandates of engagement.

- Funding resilience embedded in the program design that allows for adaptive program management operationally.

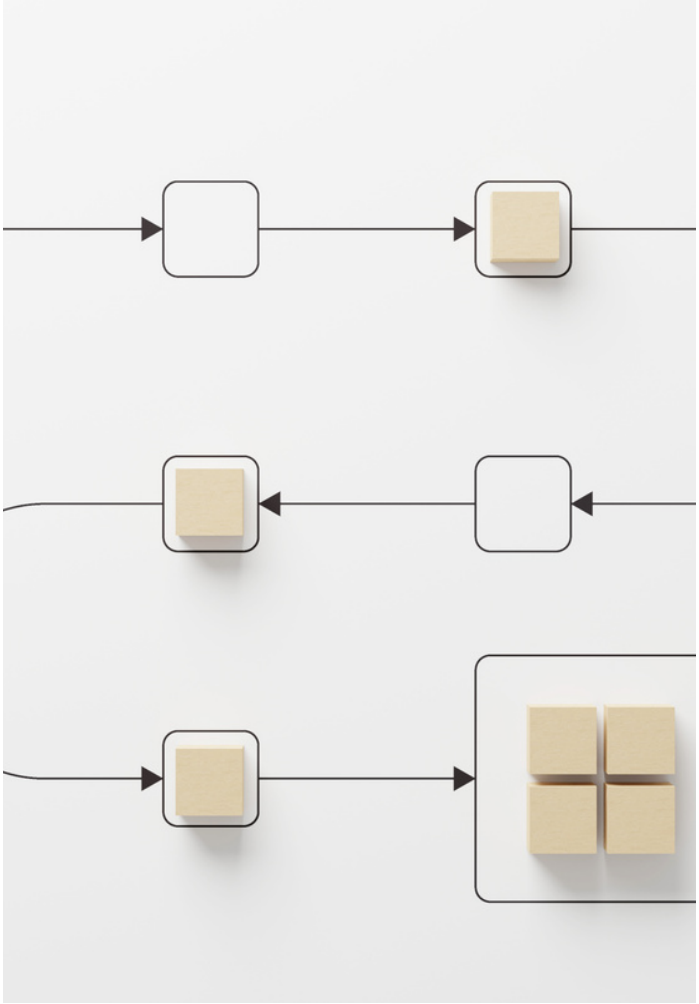
- Feedback mechanisms that enable indicators being used to monitor program activities that in turn inform the program design, direction and deliverables. Ensuring and sustaining feedback mechanisms like this also enforces a systemic analysis of program assumptions and allows for assumptions to also be questioned if they show to hold little to no impact in evaluation.

Outcome Harvesting

As an evaluative approach that collects evidence on what has been achieved and works backwards, outcome harvesting is a strong practical tool that complements systems approaches by moving away from linear models. The parameters of evaluation used in outcome harvesting support an overall institutional shift from quantitative monitoring toward qualitative monitoring. In adopting an outcome harvesting approach, it is important to focus on how a program contributes towards positive transformation instead of looking at how it attributes to conflict transformation. This is particularly welcomed in environmental peacebuilding programming as it allows for both bottom-up and top-down approaches to be evaluated. This supports the development of a more informed understanding of the various ways that environmental issues affect and is affected by peace and conflict. Arguably, outcome harvesting as an evaluation approach allows for a deep understanding of programs, strategically informs long-term programming and supports various forms of accountability. To effectively do this in evaluation, however, there is a substantial institutional capacity required. The challenges of outcome harvesting as an approach, therefore include that it is costly, time-intensive and retrospective.

Peer Review as a Tool

As a tool that helps to generate constructively critical yet trusted discussion, peer reviewing is not a formal evaluation mechanism. Instead, it promotes critical reflection on complex programs. Peer reviews help to generate time and space for reflection and learning. In how it is structured to function, peer review demands that decision-making is suspended and time is taken to reflect. If done proactively and productively, peer review as a tool can facilitate a learning and reflective space where higher-quality professional judgments can be generated. Peer review evaluation in this form is notably beneficial to placing checks and balances on institutional and program-related assumptions that risk being made in complex program spaces. Becoming a part of the institutional process and eventual memory also enables faster adaptation of programs in conflict resolution and peacebuilding programs.



Recommendations to Practitioners

More practical insights are needed to advance monitoring and evaluation in environmental peacebuilding programming. By no means is this discussion extensive or exhaustive. Nevertheless, a few established and emerging good practices should be considered, particularly in non-linear monitoring and evaluation processes and approaches to environmental peacebuilding.

- Monitoring and evaluation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding programming requires teams to move beyond traditional approaches to MEL and implement flexible and adapted methods in complex and often volatile environments [3].
- A systems approach to designing processes of monitoring and evaluation has been helpful in advancing adaptive management in non-linear programming spaces.
- In some instances, outcome harvesting has been helpful in designing cross-organizational monitoring and evaluation processes that recognize and account for unexpected changes, unforeseeable actors and varying factors.
- Processes of reflection, retrospective analysis and cross-organizational learning are important and should feedback on the broader applied approaches and processes.
- Decentralized approaches to monitoring and evaluation are helpful to adaptive management across programs but require that all program teams are familiar with and trained in the relevant approaches and processes.
- There is benefit to using peer-review methods to evaluate program impact.
- The issue of reverse engineering files in an attempt to meet donor requirements is a real risk that needs to be mitigated.

References

[1] Lemon, A., Pinet, M. (2018). 'Measuring unintended effects in peacebuilding: What the field of international cooperation can learn from innovative approaches shaped by complex contexts,' *Evaluation and Program Planning* (68).

[2] Löhr, K., Morales-Muñoz, H., Rodriguez, T., Lozano, C., Del Rio, M., Hachmann, S., Bonatti, M., Pazmino, J., Castro-Nuñez, A. & Sieber, S., (2022). 'Integrating the concept of peacebuilding in sustainability impact assessment', *Environmental Impact Assessment Review* (95).

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