

Session 4.

Evaluative lessons: Improving the conduct and use of evaluations of conflict prevention and peacebuilding activities

The Case of Haiti

**Raymond Gervais
Senior Consultant
Groupe-Conseil Baastel**

1) Introduction: The 2008-2010 evaluation of the Norwegian portfolio of peacebuilding projects included all non-humanitarian projects. It was based on a thorough analysis of documentation and meetings with informants in Oslo and in the field. The monitoring strategy and reporting had limited the types of analysis which could be adopted so that qualitative approaches were found to be more appropriate.

2) Use of Conflict analysis:

The ambivalent nature of events internally (in Haiti) and externally (relations with its own diaspora and with Dominican Republic) did not encourage stakeholders, including Norway, to produce or update a conflict analysis, either common or specific to each partner. So at the outset Norway's involvement in Hispaniola was not developed following any conflict analysis by MFA or, to the team's knowledge, by any other partner/donor. Therefore, the concepts of conflict and peace, relevant to Haiti were not clarified with staff, policy makers, managers and stakeholders. Before discovering the US-produced conflict analysis late in the evaluation process, the team had built its own indicative analysis (Annex 2). This simplified exercise yielded many lessons:

- It could be done quickly with good human local resources;
- It helped shed light on elements of the portfolio; offering explanations when decision processes were unclear;
- The comparison with an earlier US produced conflict analysis validated in part its robustness;
- The comparison further confirmed the need to put together a "living" conflict analysis, updated as frequently as requested by circumstances. In this the attitude should be similar to the one we now have toward the logframe.

During the evaluation the team was presented with the results of a long term research on conflict by the Norwegian research institute PRIO and its local partners. The study shed very important light on conflict and conflict resolution in Haiti. Nevertheless the timeframe for its production made it impossible to use it at the outset, and then its dissemination strategy and the expected appropriation by stakeholders would need to materialize so its results could appear in policy building and decision making.

3) Two issues:

- Conflict sensitivity assessment of interventions: Although in this specific case the organization (MFA) built on prior experiences elsewhere to deploy conflict sensitivity interventions, the lack of a knowledge base specific to Hispaniola rendered the approach very pragmatic. The link with IPA and later through the funding of a research project

(PRIO) slowly built up conflict sensitivity capacities. The Guidance in its completed form should encourage stakeholders to create a very reactive link between the conflict analysis tool and every one of their conflict sensitivity based planning exercises with efforts made to consolidate a coordinated body of knowledge and learning.

- Conflict sensitivity of the evaluation team: The level of conflict sensitivity of evaluation teams derives from the timeliness and transparency of their access to the body of knowledge and lessons on conflicts, specific to the country. As for other evaluations a good portion of this information must be transferred through the terms of reference and other documents analyzed by the team in the inception report. Indeed one could make the case that the investment in preparing the evaluation mandate is far more important and essential to the success than in other types of evaluation for “normal” conditions. The Haiti case was made more complicated by the dichotomy of Norwegian stakeholders (differences of perspectives) and the fragmentation of the portfolio (differing levels of conflict sensitivity of interventions). The Guidance may wish to underline the need for (1). The consolidation of a body of knowledge from interventions; (2). The creation of a consensus among national stakeholders on the evaluation’s objectives; (3). The transfer to the evaluation team of a common set of conflict sensitive information to be appropriated and used in analyses by the team.

4) Evaluation criteria: Important adaptations are required to be able to use evaluation criteria in a context of conflict prevention. This lesson must be internalized by both evaluation managers and evaluation teams. Two striking examples:

- Efficiency: the notion is made very relative by the other real and pragmatic notion of “the cost of making business”, although there is a very fine line between this cost and the unacceptable contribution to warlords/patrimonial managers personal gains. The evaluation would then have to assess the more multidimensional difference between efficient expenditures in a normal context and what is required to achieve results.
- Effectiveness: It is more and more accepted that in a context of a downward spiral of negative and life-threatening conditions, activities, projects or programmes which have stabilized or slow down the downward trend can be evaluated as positive results. This is a major divergence from normal procedures.

It would be stimulating and useful to examine all the criteria and assess the required flexibility needed to adapt them to non-normal conditions.

4) The Programme theory and theory of change: By its sheer absence at the outset of Norwegian interventions in Haiti which resulted in negative effects such as lack of direction in the building of the portfolio and the weak attention given to monitoring and evaluation early in the period underlines *a contrario* how crucial work invested in creating a programme theory and theory of change can be for the success of interventions and further down the time line to an evaluation. The challenge in trying to put together this programme theory in this sector is trying to achieve a balance between political/diplomatic and development objectives. Coordination and consensus building under dire emergency or conflict conditions are never easy to achieve, nevertheless stakeholders should look for ways to design such a theory, even if only in draft and rudimentary. Its existence would allow a trial-and-error phase with corrections brought quickly after the deployment. Just as a weak conflict analysis done quickly may serve its purpose as a stepping-stone to a better tool, an incomplete draft program theory is much better than none. The guidance could enhance its presentation by isolating generic elements found in a programme theory or theory of change and offer advice on how causal relationships are affected by unstable, violent, and corrupt environments.