

The Challenge of Mainstreaming Conflict Sensitivity: PCIA Methodologies and the Organizational Culture of NGOs

Jennifer Causton

BACKGROUND: THE NEED FOR CONFLICT SENSITIVITY

The prevalence and persistence of conflict in some of the world's poorest areas have both frustrated development efforts and inspired a desire to better understand the relationship between security and development. What materialized in the aftermath of the Cold War was not the expected peace dividend, but rather an explosion of violent conflicts, which reached its peak in 1995.¹ Although the world had experienced extraordinarily destructive wars before, these new conflicts "swept away decades of expert gospel,"² and their increased visibility on the global stage in the midst of the growing awareness of the interdependence between global economic and security concerns, made them the topic of intense interest and debate.³ As the line between combatants and civilians during intrastate conflicts became less easily defined so too did the lines between security and development. Development actors increasingly found themselves working in volatile environments and with the removal of the Cold War "geopolitical straightjacket"⁴ were confronted with new opportunities for interventions to address issues, such as security and governance, which were once deemed to be the sole responsibility of sovereign states.

Indeed numerous documents, including the 1992 United Nations *An Agenda for Peace* laid the

framework for a more holistic approach to peace and security. Former Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali identified the need for continued peacekeeping and peacemaking efforts, but also introduced the term peacebuilding which was defined as "actions to identify and support structures which tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict."⁵ In 1997 the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee's *The DAC Guidelines: Helping Prevent Violent Conflict* codified the long dormant first line of the UN Charter, "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war."⁶ It deemed conflict prevention a key development goal, and laid out the "rationale and conceptual framework for linking development and security."⁷ While some have argued that these new roles are a natural progression of the development enterprise, others such as Mark Duffield, have conceived of them as a radical break in both development thinking and practice.⁸ However, regardless of the perspective one takes, it is evident that the institutional fragility, social trauma, and political uncertainty of these situations have challenged both the wisdom of carrying on with 'development as usual' as well as the ability of development actors to do so.

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What became more apparent was that inadequate or inappropriate projects that were not reflective of the context in which they operated, were more likely to aggravate the existing structural, or root dimensions of tension, often exacerbating or at times causing conflict. No assistance programme is ever neutral, given that even the presence of development workers in a certain area can change power dynamics, so even seemingly benign projects, such

¹ International Peace Academy. (June 2005). *Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Conflict Contexts: Policy Brief*. New York: International Peace Academy, 2.

² Stedman, S.J. (1991). Conflict and Conflict Resolution in Africa: A conceptual framework. In F.M. Deng & I.W. Zartman (Eds.), *Conflict Resolution in Africa*. 367-399. Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 367.

³ Tschirgi, N. (December 2003). *Peacebuilding as the Link between Security and Development: Is the window of opportunity closing?* New York: International Peace Academy, 2.

⁴ De Waal, A. (1997). *Famine Crimes: Politics & the Disaster of Relief Industry in Africa*. London: Oxford University Press, 133.

⁵ Barakat, S. (2005). Chapter 1: Post-War Reconstruction and Developing: Coming of Age. In S. Barakat (Ed.), *After the Conflict: Reconstruction and Development in the Aftermath of War*. 8-32. London: I.B. Tauris, 27.

⁶ Charter of the United Nations. (1945). <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/>

⁷ Tschirgi. *Peacebuilding as the Link between Security and Development*, 4.

⁸ Duffield, M. (2001). *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security*. London: Zed Books.

as the development of educational systems, have the potential to contribute to existing factionalism by emphasizing ethnic or religious boundaries or by inadvertently privileging one language over another.⁹ The example that is perhaps most often cited, of development gone wrong, is that of the 1994 Rwandan genocide in which both development and relief agencies acted with only "limited understanding of the structures of Rwandese society [and] took very little account of the views of the beneficiaries in the design and implementation of programmes."¹⁰ A lack of understanding and appreciation for the structural causes of the conflict and dynamics of the society in this situation, resulted in programmes that overlooked those who were most vulnerable in the population, and so development efforts ended up reinforcing the authority of a privileged few.

However, the idea that development can contribute positively towards peace has been codified in numerous United Nations and international documents and reports, confirming that education systems do not have to reinforce factionalism and schools can provide an alternative to combatants and offer space for discussion and dialogue. It has become clear, though, that this new perspective will require that development organizations fill the existing gaps in theory and practice regarding both the nature of conflict as well as the ramifications of their involvement. The World Bank, for instance, has reassessed its role in 'post-conflict reconstruction,' while "a number of international and local NGOs [have] collaborated through the Local Capacities for Peace Project, also known as the Do No Harm Project (DNH) to learn more about how assistance that is give in conflict settings interacts with the conflicts."¹¹ So, while realization of the two-way relationship between conflict and development has come at the price of devastating

destruction and missed opportunities, it has also inspired a desire to minimize negative impacts and positively contribute towards peace by developing programmes and activities through a conflict sensitive lens.

CONFLICT SENSITIVITY DEFINED

Conflict sensitivity, much like gender sensitivity, was never intended to be just a checklist of appropriate activities, but rather, "an entire ethos as to how organizations could strategize, plan, implement and evaluate their work."¹² In order to be effective it must therefore, be mainstreamed throughout all policies and projects, so that development actors establish an intimate knowledge of the environment in which they are operating, are clearly aware of the potential effects of their actions and have a realistic understanding of the ability of the organization to act on that knowledge. Conflict sensitivity, according to the FEWER et al. *Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Peacebuilding – A Resource Pack* is the capacity of an organization to:

- Understand the context in which you operate
- Understand the interaction between your intervention and the context; and
- Act upon the understanding of this interaction, in order to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts¹³

Adopting such an approach has the potential to make development projects not only more realistic in their goals and appropriate in their interventions, but also capable of making a contribution towards ameliorating violent conflict and building peace. Nevertheless, the decision to mainstream conflict sensitivity is a "strategic choice"¹⁴ that the majority of organizations have not voted in favour of. Despite the growing awareness of the two way relationship between conflict and development and

⁹ The Forum for Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER), Saferworld, International Alert, the Centre for Conflict Resolution (CECORE), Africa Peace Forum (APFO) and the Consortium of Humanitarian Agencies (CHA). (2004). *Conflict-Sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Peacebuilding – A Resource Pack*. London, Chapter 4, Annex 1, 12.

¹⁰ Ibid., Chapter 1, 4.

¹¹ Collaborative Learning Project & Collaborative for Development Action Inc. (2004). *The Do No Harm Framework: The Framework for Analyzing the Impact of Assistance on Conflict*. Massachusetts: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 1.

¹² Barbolet, A., Goldwyn, R., Groenewald, H., & Sherriff, A. (2005). The utility and dilemmas of conflict sensitivity. In D. Bloomfield, M. Fischer, & B. Schmelzle (Eds.), *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*. Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management, 5.

¹³ The Forum for Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER) et al. *A Resource Pack*, Chapter 1, 1.

¹⁴ Lange, M. (2004). *Building Institutional Capacity for Conflict-Sensitive Practice: The case of international NGOs*. London: International Alert, 5.

the proclaimed 'culture of prevention,' few organizations are either rigorously analyzing conflict or effectively altering their programmes to reflect a sensitivity to conflict. The literature clearly implies that the most prevalent reason why conflict sensitivity has not been adopted is the lack of clear methodologies that would facilitate the mainstreaming of this perspective. Perhaps inspired by Kenneth Bush's claim that without such methodologies, development interventions can only really "list, assert, or guess at the positive or negative impacts of [their] actions,"¹⁵ much of the literature, going one step further, has focused on developing a single, universal methodology to translate theory into practice.

ASSUMPTION 1:

PCIA AS A UNIVERSAL METHODOLOGY

Underlying the search for a universal methodology, is the assumption that it is possible for one methodology to serve the interests of both the development, humanitarian and peacebuilding communities, as well as donors and civil society. As a result, peace and conflict impact assessment (PCIA) has gained widespread recognition in recent years for having the potential to translate diverse theories into universal practices. Proposed in the late 1990s by Kenneth Bush and Luc Reyhler, PCIA was initially intended to be a methodology that would allow developing countries to regain some control over their own development while at the same time, demonstrating the impact of foreign interventions.¹⁶ Bush and Reyhler's belief that there needs to "a means of evaluating (ex post facto) and anticipating (ex ante as far as possible) the impact of proposed and completed development projects"¹⁷ on structures which both build and inhibit peace, has become an increasingly popular idea. In addition to this, the growing number of actors involved in the development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding communities has amplified competition for scarce

resources, and the need to be able to show results and demonstrate success has led to PCIA receiving more attention than ever before. However, Bush

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and Reyhler did not "provide details on how to carry out conflict impact assessment"¹⁸ and the resulting confusion and frenzy caused Bush to observe recently that what has, in fact, evolved is a "mechanistic northern led quest for mainstreamable products..."¹⁹

To date then, the general purpose of this quest has been to narrow the search down to find one universally applicable methodology that would facilitate the mainstreaming of conflict sensitivity. Given that the foundation of any mainstreaming process is "agreement around basic concepts"²⁰ numerous approaches have been developed that have attempted to foster consensus in this context. For example, one attempt to create a widely applicable PCIA methodology has been developed by INTRAC for the UK Department of International Development (DFID). Their goal has been to "develop a smart planning and management tool that can assist policy makers and practitioners to mitigate conflict and promote peace in a more systematic manner."²¹ While this framework has encountered criticism, for, among other things, its emphasis on the strategic level,²² it does provide a useful framework to discuss some of the "different components of an overall conflict assessment methodology."²³ It has also facilitated a discussion focused on the challenges of building consensus

¹⁸ IDRC. (October 2002) *Conflict Sensitive Approaches to Development, Humanitarian Assistance and Peace-Building. Editorial: PCIA – A Perspective from IDRC*. 1(1), 2.

¹⁹ Gsanger, H. & Feyen, C. (April 2003). PCIA Methodology: A development practitioner's perspective. In D. Bloomfield, M. Fischer, & B. Schmelzle (Eds.), *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*. Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management, 68.

²⁰ Lange. *Building Institutional Capacity for Conflict-Sensitive Practice*, 10.

²¹ Hoffman. *PCIA Methodology*, 26.

²² Ibid., 26.

²³ Ibid., 28.

¹⁵ Hoffman, M. (April 2003). PCIA Methodology: Evolving art form or practical dead end? In D. Bloomfield, M. Fischer, & B. Schmelzle (Eds.), *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*. Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management, 19.

¹⁶ Leonhardt, M. (April 2003). Towards a Unified Methodology: Reframing PCIA. In D. Bloomfield, M. Fischer, & B. Schmelzle (Eds.), *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*. Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management, 54.

¹⁷ Hoffman. *PCIA Methodology*, 19.

around each of the three categories as outlined by INTRAC: 1) strategic conflict assessment (SCA); 2) conflict impact assessment (CIA); and 3) a peacebuilding framework.²⁴ However, as will be demonstrated, the diversity of approaches to each of these components of PCIA continues to reveal the difficulty of creating a universal PCIA methodology, even one as broad as the one proposed by INTRAC.

STRATEGIC CONFLICT ASSESEMENT (SCA)

The FEWER et al. *Resource Pack* lists 15 different methods for doing conflict analysis, one of which is the INTRAC strategic conflict assessment.²⁵ While these various methods may differ significantly in their approach or target audience, they share the common goal of attempting to analyze the conflict context. In development circles it is generally agreed upon that such conflict analysis is at the "core of conflict sensitivity"²⁶ because without an intimate knowledge of the context in which the conflict is occurring, it is virtually impossible to 'anticipate and evaluate' the impact of development projects, or even to know where to look for results. However, because there are many variables that produce stunningly different pictures of the same situation, it follows that based upon their definition of what constitutes conflict, their level of focus, and their perceived role in that context; different actors would analyze the same conflict very differently.

The problem of articulating a universal methodology for conflict analysis, therefore, starts with the challenge of coming up with a universal definition of the key concepts such as conflict, security, development, and peacebuilding. For example, the concept of conflict, which is both dynamic and complex, is commonly defined as the "perceived incompatibility of goals or aspirations,"²⁷ and yet there is little agreement about how it manifests itself or about its possible usefulness. So, for example, there is an ongoing tendency to equate

conflict with violence, even though violence is only one "potential form that conflict may take."²⁸ The resilience of this narrow definition is perhaps most apparent in the way it impedes the creation of a 'culture of prevention,' because the international community has demonstrated that it is unlikely to believe that conflict exists in an area until it becomes violent. Yet, Bernard Wood contends that it is the prevention of this escalation towards violence that should be the goal of development, rather than the prevention of all conflict,²⁹ which William Zartman sees as an "inevitable aspect of human interaction that cannot and perhaps, should not be avoided."³⁰ Wood's conviction, however, overlooks the fact that violence has at times been used to bring about what were seen as necessary changes, as for example in India's struggle for independence and South Africa's fight against apartheid.³¹ In addition, the continued emphasis on violence as the primary indicator of conflict also ignores the more subtle underlying tensions and structural forms of violence. In Rwanda, for instance, a more comprehensive understanding of conflict may have exposed the hostile tensions beneath The Arusha Peace Agreement which subsequently exploded in genocidal violence only a few months later, and in South Africa it might have shed a light on some of the structural and political forms of violence inherent in the system of apartheid. According to Bush, the danger of this disconnection, both conceptually and pragmatically, is that in failing to appreciate the existence of different forms of conflict, development efforts limit their response, in terms of both project design and evaluation, to the aspects of conflict that are more obvious.³² In contrast, the FEWER et al. *Resource Pack* has attempted to correct this narrow focus by using the word 'context' instead of conflict, arguing that an understanding of underlying tensions and more covert forms of violence is

²⁴ Hoffman. *PCIA Methodology*, 26.

²⁵ The Forum for Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER) et al. *A Resource Pack*, Chapter 2, 12.

²⁶ Lange. *Building Institutional Capacity for Conflict-Sensitive Practice*, 13.

²⁷ Samarasinghe, S., Donaldson, B., & McGinn, C. (1999). *Conflict Vulnerability Analysis*. Arlington, VW: Tulane Institute for International Development, 2.

²⁸ Stedman. *Conflict and Conflict Resolution in Africa*, 370.

²⁹ Wood, B. (June 2001). *Development dimensions of conflict prevention and peace-building*. An independent study prepared for the Emergency Response Division. New York: UNDP.

³⁰ Deng, F., & Zartman W. (Eds.), (1991). *Conflict Resolution in Africa*. Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 8.

³¹ Samarasinghe et al. *Conflict Vulnerability Analysis*, 2.

³² Bush, K.D. & Opp, R.J. (1999). Concept: Peace. Chapter 9: Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment. In D. Buckles (Ed.), *Cultivating Peace: Conflict and Collaboration in Natural Resource Management*. IDRC/World Bank. Online document.

crucial to an accurate analysis of the situation.³³ However, overwhelmed by the amount of information it takes to fully understand a particular context, many actors continue to focus their attention on only the more obvious, and seemingly more urgent issues.

The impact of this conceptual confusion however, which contributes, in large measure to the difficulty

of coming up with a universal methodology for analyzing conflict, extends beyond just these ideas of violence and conflict. Security, development, and peacebuilding are three terms that have also gained widespread currency, although, once again, there continues to be little

agreement on what they mean. Granted, all three are “broad and elusive concepts”³⁴ whose definitions have changed and evolved over time, but the lack of consensus that surrounds them leads to very real problems both on the ground and in generating meaningful discussions on related issues such as capacity. For instance, Adam Barbolet et al. note that depending on how PCIA is understood, one could answer the question, “Has the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development (DFID) developed its own PCIA capacity?”³⁵ very differently. While DFID has created a general PCIA framework, which is being used to outline this discussion, the degree to which it is actually being used as well as the degree to which it contributes to mutual learning, would lead some to conclude that DFID does not, in fact have a PCIA capacity.³⁶ Manuela Leonhardt gives another example from the Nairobi Peace Initiative (NPI), in which NPI defined peacebuilding as “qualitative, liberating and humanizing change”³⁷ while their donors thought of peacebuilding as the absence of

violence. Not only do these different definitions involve different evaluation criteria and times frames, but conceptual confusion and the application of “the same terminology [the interdependence between security and development] for distinct goals at different levels of policy intervention,”³⁸ have led to misunderstandings and oversights which have been an impediment to effective communication between academics and

practitioners, as well as among actors in the field.

Ryszard Kapuściński reminds us that this is much more than a theoretical issue, with his timely warning that, “‘development’ is no indifferent, abstract concept”³⁹ and that

the discrepancies and abstractions that impede effective communication also result in contradictions and risks that affect real people’s lives.

Different levels of analysis can also result in very different perceptions of the same situation. Donors, who are often geographically distant from the conflict, for instance, are generally more concerned with the big picture and often focus on the strategic or country level. Implementing agencies on the other hand, are usually more concerned with how the situation affects the day to day operations of their organization, and therefore tend to zero in at the local level. Affected communities and civil society, while they may have the same local focus, often see the conflict from only one side of the fence, making it difficult to understand the larger picture.⁴⁰ These strikingly different perspectives become apparent when one compares two approaches to conflict analysis that focus on different levels. The ‘Do No Harm’ (DNH) framework for instance, focuses on the local level, while the conflict vulnerability analysis (CVA)

³³ The Forum for Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER) et al. *A Resource Pack*.

³⁴ International Peace Academy (IPA). (February 2006). *The Security-Development Nexus: Research Findings and Policy Implications*. New York: International Peace Academy, 2.

³⁵ Barbolet et al. *The Utility and Dilemmas of Conflict Sensitivity*, 4.

³⁶ Ibid., 4.

³⁷ Leonhardt. *Towards a Unified Methodology*, 58.

³⁸ International Peace Academy (IPA). *The Security-Development Nexus: Research Findings and Policy Implications*, 2.

³⁹ Stedman. *Conflict and Conflict Resolution in Africa*, 370.

⁴⁰ Leonhardt. *Towards a Unified Methodology*, 56.

framework focuses on the national level.⁴¹ So, where DNH might see opportunity in conceptualizing the conflict in terms of “dividers and connectors,”⁴² identifying areas that might connect people and offering them potential avenues for reconciliation even in the worst conflicts, CVA, in focusing on the national and strategic level would be more likely to perceive and respond to whatever could be viewed as a threat. USAID which uses CVA, recognises the importance of having its projects support American foreign policy, which it defines as a desire to “create a more secure, prosperous, and democratic world for the benefit of the American people.”⁴³ Therefore, instead of seeing local opportunity in conflict, USAID might be more likely to see threats to the United States and its goals.

It is clear then that there are numerous ways to analyze conflict. The FEWER et al. *Resource Pack* outlines 15 different approaches, and certainly more exist, or are in the process of being developed.⁴⁴ Attempting to create a universal PCIA methodology, let alone a framework to analyze conflict, overlooks the degree to which each approach has so far been tailored specifically to the interests and needs of a particular organization. However, these various approaches to conflict are more than a reflection of a particular mandate, they are also a reflection of deep-seated “theories about how the world works,”⁴⁵ and while these vary significantly from organization to organization, they often vary even more dramatically between actors who may be either internal or external to a conflict. Coming up with a universal methodology that accommodates different definitions and perspectives on analysis will be extremely difficult; coming up with a universal world view might be impossible.

⁴¹ The Forum for Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER) et al. *A Resource Pack*, Chapter 2, 12.

⁴² Lange. *Building Institutional Capacity for Conflict-Sensitive Practice*, 13.

⁴³ The Payson Centre for International Development and Technology Transfer. (2000). *Conflict Vulnerability Analysis: Annex B: Conflict Vulnerability Assessment*, 2.

⁴⁴ The Forum for Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER) et al. *A Resource Pack*.

⁴⁵ Ross, M.H. (April 2003). PCIA as a Peacebuilding Tool. In D. Bloomfield, M. Fischer, & B. Schmelzle (Eds.), *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation*. Berghof Research Centre for Constructive Conflict Management, 77.

CONFLICT IMPACT ASSESSMENT (CIA)

The second component of the INTRAC framework and a key part of any PCIA methodology is conflict impact assessment (CIA), which is also a difficult and demanding task, especially in “fluid emergency settings.”⁴⁶ The purpose of CIA is to identify where conflict can be mitigated and peace can be built, as well as to anticipate and evaluate both the intended and unintended positive and negative impacts the project might have on those areas.⁴⁷ It relies on conflict analysis both in helping to identify areas where actors believe they will have an influence, as well as in selecting indicators to measure their impact.

Given that “the particular analysis of any problem is tied directly to an understanding of the nature of solutions,”⁴⁸ Leonhardt has observed that based on an analysis of the context, “stakeholders hold specific views on how they can bring about change to the conflict situation.”⁴⁹ She refers to these views as ‘theories of action’ and argues that although they are often implicit rather than explicit, they manifest themselves in both the design and implementation of projects, in the selection of indicators, as well as in the definition of success. Leonhardt goes on to discuss different theories of action and demonstrates how the analysis of the causes of conflict directly informs the identification of a solution and the subsequent action that is taken. The ‘root causes approach,’ for instance, assumes that conflict erupts due to political and material grievances. Therefore, solutions focus on the disbursement of developmental and political aid. On the other hand, the ‘individuals and attitudes and relations approach’ assumes violence erupts when “when relationships have been disturbed by prejudice, past experience and lack of communication”⁵⁰ and solutions therefore focus on confidence building measures as well as public participation and dialogue. The significance of this is that the indicators used to assess the impact of a

⁴⁶ Barnett, M. (2005). Humanitarianism Transformed. 723-740. *Perspectives on Politics*. 3(4), 730.

⁴⁷ Hoffman. *PCIA Methodology*, 26.

⁴⁸ Bush & Opp. *Concept: Peace. Chapter 9: Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment*, online document.

⁴⁹ Leonhardt. *Towards a Unified Methodology*, 58.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 59.

particular development project will be profoundly influenced by the choice of approach used to analyze the causes of the conflict in which the project is being carried out.

Attempting to find a universal set of indicators, the basis for measuring impact, is even more challenging. One of the key focuses on developing a universal PCIA methodology has been to try and conceive of what the KOFF Centre for Peacebuilding calls, a “good mix”⁵¹ of local and universal indicators, although what constitutes a ‘good mix’ has proven difficult to agree on. This is in large part due to the fact that where one chooses to look for impact, the indicators that are selected, and what those indicators actually indicate, are neither obvious nor objective, but are a reflection of the values, theories and perspectives that have so far been discussed.

As an alternative, therefore, Bush, among others, have attempted to identify broad, yet universal areas where impact can be assessed using locally determined indicators. Bush’s list includes: “institutional capacity to manage/resolve violent conflict and to promote tolerance and build peace; military and human security; political structures and processes; economic structures and processes; social reconstruction and empowerment.”⁵² The weakness of this approach is that he fails to identify the links between sectors, and therefore one of the dangers is to isolate the different areas.⁵³ For instance, an actor who believes that conflict is caused by problems in the political economy, would likely only look for impact within economic structures and processes. In reality, the types of distinctions among sectors which Bush and others have made, do not exist, and conceptualizing of them as such, may actually be detrimental.

Indicators are incredibly powerful. While they have the ability to indicate both success and failure, even the same indicator can be read dramatically differently by various actors. As will be discussed later, what indicates success in peacebuilding can

often be read as failure for development and vice versa. Similarly, an organization who equates conflict with violence is likely to view a decrease in fatality rates (a measure used by USAID/CVA) as a positive indicator of the de-escalation of violence. On the other hand, an organization who focuses on structural and violent forms of conflict, might interpret this as simply a sign of exhaustion rather than a sign of peace.

PEACEBUILDING FRAMEWORK

The third component of the INTRAC methodology is the peacebuilding framework “used to assess, monitor and evaluate projects with an explicit and dedicated focus on peacebuilding.”⁵⁴ The idea that actors should not simply seek to avoid doing harm, but should actively contribute towards building peace has been a defining feature of PCIA that has set it apart from previous frameworks. However, monitoring and evaluation, especially in the context of peacebuilding, have their own challenges. Different and often competing interests in the evaluation process and the information it produces have been further complicated by the resistance from the development community to adopting the peacebuilding agenda.

Leonhardt makes the point that different stakeholders have different interests in evaluation and that this has an effect on their selection of indicators, as well as on their dedication to an effective and objective evaluation process. The functions of evaluation, Leonhardt notes, range from marketing to institutional learning.⁵⁵ Because evaluation has the ability to demonstrate either success or failure, it often involves a strategic consideration that can negate the opportunity for evaluation to lead to learning and growth.

Many authors have commented that the question of ownership is in fact, at the heart of the confusion over PCIA and the process of mainstreaming conflict sensitivity.⁵⁶ Kenneth Bush initially promoted PCIA as an “emancipatory tool,”⁵⁷ allowing individuals in developing countries to take

⁵¹ Jakob, L. (Ed.), (May 2004). *Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment: Info Sheet*. KOFF Centre for Peacebuilding, 5.

⁵² Hoffman. *PCIA Methodology*, 23.

⁵³ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁴ Hoffman. *PCIA Methodology*, 26.

⁵⁵ Leonhardt. *Towards a Unified Methodology*, 56.

⁵⁶ Leonhardt. *Towards a Unified Methodology*, 53.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 56.

back some of the control over their livelihood, a process that he concludes "was subsequently appropriated by donors and their entourage of NGOs hoping to gain money and reputation by taking up a promising idea."⁵⁸ It is certainly true that the information that evaluation produces and the opportunity it creates for increasing learning and effectiveness, are lost when it becomes just another marketing tool of Western organizations. At the root of ongoing problems regarding identification of the causes of conflict, as well as the selection of indicators, may be the more challenging question of who should be in charge of PCIA methodologies and the information they produce. As new development orthodoxy claims to focus on grassroots and local participation, such questions of ownership of tools and the information they generate will become even more important.

Finally, the "overwhelming tide favouring the engagement of development agencies in peacebuilding work"⁵⁹ has been met with considerable resistance that has prevented the integration, both conceptually and practically, of these two important areas. When Kofi Annan made the distinction in the 2001 *Report on the Prevention of Armed Conflict* between peacebuilding which he described as "a new generation of development projects specifically focused on conflict prevention"⁶⁰ and other development projects, he may have done so with the intent of keeping peacebuilding from becoming a large, amorphous term. However, what has happened is that rather than seeing conflict sensitivity as something that should be part of the organizations ethos, they have simply hired one or two specialists or created separate peacebuilding units or offices, in effect "ghettoizing"⁶¹ the peacebuilding agenda. Because peacebuilding, by its very nature is assumed to be conflict sensitive, the creation of an office or the hiring of a specialist has been seen to be sufficient

to make the whole organization conflict sensitive.⁶² Indeed many organizations, such as CARE noted strong resistance among its workers against the rolling out of yet another idea and found that creating a separate entity avoided the issue of having to make any fundamental organizational changes.⁶³ The result has been that 'normal' development has remained fundamentally uncommitted to issues of conflict, the most obvious example being the Millennium Development Goals, which established a "narrowly cast development agenda irrespective of security conditions."⁶⁴

There are indeed challenges to integrating peacebuilding and development, and because peacebuilding is often equated with conflict sensitive practices, it is an important issue and challenge to overcome. The development community, for instance, fearing the loss of crucial humanitarian principles such as neutrality, is often ambivalent about engaging in what it perceives to be explicitly political activity. Furthermore, because peacebuilding often involves a closer engagement with the military, development actors often try to avoid this association. Complicating this picture is the way in which

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peacebuilding has been marginalized at the organizational level, making the tensions and tradeoffs seem like a competition in which "positive development outcomes thus might produce negative peacebuilding outcomes."⁶⁵ Bush gives the example of "an education project that fails to achieve its targets in terms of numbers of students passing exams, yet succeeds in reducing inter-group/communal tensions. In narrow terms, such a programme would be

⁵⁸ Ibid., 55.

⁵⁹ Uvin, P. (2002). The Development/Peacebuilding Nexus: A typology and history of changing paradigms. *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*. 1(1), 6.

⁶⁰ Prevention of Armed Conflict: Report of the Secretary-General. (7 June 2001). UN Doc A/55/985-S/2001/574.

⁶¹ Bush, K. (1998). A Measure of Peace. Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA) of Development Projects in Conflict Zones. Working Paper No. 1. The Peacebuilding and Reconstruction Programme Initiative & Evaluation Unit. Available online, 1.

⁶² Lange. *Building Institutional Capacity for Conflict-Sensitive Practice*, 12.

⁶³ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁴ International Peace Academy (IPA). *The Security-Development Nexus*, 3.

⁶⁵ Hoffman. *PCIA Methodology*, 20.

deemed a failure; but in wider peacebuilding terms, it would be a 'success.'⁶⁶ Because peacebuilding and development have been conceived of as being fundamentally different, a perspective that is reinforced by the creation of a competing office, the shared ground where education can be a success both in terms of development and in building peace is lost.

DISCUSSION

The current literature supports the belief that the lack of a universal methodology is the primary reason that conflict sensitivity has not been mainstreamed. However, as the discussion thus far has demonstrated, a universal methodology is unlikely to ever be created given the number of stakeholders involved and the various perspectives they bring to the table. The diversity of opinions over the meaning key concepts such as conflict and its causes, which influence the goals and types of activities actors are involved in produce very different results which are then evaluated against unique definitions of success. Far from being simply differences of opinion, these beliefs reflect particular world views and are deeply ingrained in the individual and organizational minds of those involved. It is perhaps no wonder then, that PCIA methodologies, as Hoffman observed, "are slowly grinding themselves into the ground,"⁶⁷ as they attempt to find the perfect mix of indicators and actors. The continued focus on detailed frameworks and narrow methodologies, such as the step by step procedure offered by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation lack flexibility and adaptability and are unlikely to facilitate greater mainstreaming of conflict sensitivity amongst various actors. On the other hand, broad frameworks such as the one offered by the FEWER et al. *Resource Pack*, which attempt to address the needs of those involved at all levels of humanitarian, development and peacebuilding intervention make everything important and therefore nothing practical. Their attempt to use a language and a terminology that all actors can agree on leaves them unable to offer sufficient detail to be considered a

useful toolkit to any of the actors they have targeted.

Perhaps it is time to consider that the problem has been diagnosed incorrectly. Perhaps the reason why conflict sensitivity has not been mainstreamed is not simply a lack of appropriate tools. Indeed conflict sensitivity, as defined earlier by the FEWER et al. *Resource Pack*, demands not only an understanding of context and the interaction between intervention and context, but the ability to act upon this understanding.⁶⁸ The focus thus far has been on developing the proper methodologies to do so. However, in this process 'methodology' has been conceived in purely technical terms, an unfortunate hallmark of Western thought, with the result that issues of theory and questions of principles and operating skills, the very elements that Vijay Padaki argues make methodologies functional, have been left out of the equation.⁶⁹ Understanding and appreciating the challenges of mainstreaming conflict sensitivity throughout development so that it not only avoids doing harm, but is able to contribute towards building peace, will require a move away from an emphasis on tools and methodologies, to questions that strike at the very heart of the development enterprise.

Perhaps the problem is that the development community, with non-governmental organizations (NGO) at the forefront, lacks the fundamental capacity to be able to work effectively in conflict and mainstream an ethos of conflict sensitivity. While the discourse has focused on the development of PCIA methodologies and the challenge the external conflict environment poses, the question of whether NGOs have the appropriate organizational culture to operationalize such frameworks and actually give them purpose and meaning within the organizations has remained largely absent from the discussion. Before turning to the internal organizational environment, which Goodhand calls a critical "blind spot,"⁷⁰ we must

⁶⁸ The Forum for Early Warning and Early Response (FEWER) et al. *A Resource Pack*, Chapter 1, 1.

⁶⁹ Padaki, V. (2007). The Human Organization: Challenges in NGOs and development programmes. 65-77. *Development in Practice*. 17(1), 66.

⁷⁰ Goodhand, J. (2006). *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 6.

⁶⁶ Hoffman. *PCLA Methodology*, 20.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 33..

first look at the role and nature of development NGOs.

ASSUMPTION 2: THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE OF NGOS

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have grown exponentially in the past decade, both in number and in the scope of their activities. When the sanctity of state borders diminished with the end of the Cold War, NGOs were presented with new opportunities for interventions. New discourses of both security and development challenged the state-centric approaches that had prevailed during the Cold War and focused on the importance of civil society and ideas of participation and empowerment. NGOs quickly became the driving force on the "other path"⁷¹ to development, and as the links grew between security and development, NGOs took on a larger role in the areas of peace and conflict. In 1992, former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali emphasized in the *Agenda for Peace*, that "peace required not only the dedication of governments, but that 'non-governmental organizations, academic institutions, parliamentarians, business and professional communities, the media and the public at large must all be involved.'"⁷² As of 2002, according to the UNDP, NGOs controlled approximately 30% of the total Overseas Development Aid (ODA) budget.⁷³

In this new context, many of the qualities that were seen to make NGOs perfectly suited for development work also made them attractive to address issues of security and because they have the reputation of being "everything that governments are not,"⁷⁴

"Indeed conflict sensitivity demands not only an understanding of context and the interaction between intervention and context, but the ability to act upon this understanding."

NGOs have been hailed as the embodiment of "disinterested humanitarianism"⁷⁵ with the added benefit of having a superior "internationalist, moral position."⁷⁶ Unlike governments, it is assumed that NGO's are free from cumbersome bureaucracies and therefore able to do more with less money, as well as having the freedom to engage with various other actors as "facilitators, brokers and translators,"⁷⁷ without worrying about diplomatic pressures. Despite their prevalence, however, it is debatable whether NGOs "live up to these supposed comparative advantages"⁷⁸ with some people claiming that they do not deserve the title 'non-governmental' while others argue that as alternative organizations stacked with idealistic hippies, they cannot live up to their "democratic, grassroots rhetoric."⁷⁹ The literature now generally recognises that NGOs are not the magic bullet they were envisioned to be for development, but there is still little agreement on whether or not they can overcome all the challenges that they face.

The sheer number of NGOs, many of them differing dramatically in their origins and mandates, make it difficult to talk about NGOs in general terms. Goodhand makes the point however, that one area of common ground is that NGO practice is about making decisions, and given that decisions are never made in a vacuum, it is possible to talk about the various "filters that shape the decision-making process, which span the macro, meso and micro levels: these are the political context, the organizational environment, and individual values and preferences."⁸⁰ To look at all three is beyond the scope of this paper, and therefore the focus will be on the

⁷¹ Feldman, S. (1997). NGOs and Civil Society: (Un)stated Contradictions. 46-65. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 554, 50.

⁷² Watson, A. (2006). Saving More Than the Children: The role of child-focused NGOs in the creation of Southern security norms. 227-237. *Third World Quarterly*. 27(2), 228.

⁷³ Walsh, E. & Lenihan, H. (2006). Accountability and effectiveness of NGOs: adapting business tools successfully. 412-423. *Development in Practice*. 16(5), 412.

⁷⁴ Goodhand. *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*, 2.

⁷⁵ Sirrat, R. L. & Henkel, H. (1997). The Development Gift: The problem of reciprocity in the NGO world. 66-80. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Vol. 554, 70.

⁷⁶ Van Tongeren, P., Brenk, M., Hellema, M., Verhoeven, J. (Eds.), (2005). *People Building Peace II: Successful Stories of Civil Society*. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 513.

⁷⁷ Goodhand. *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*, 167.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁹ Petras, J. (1999). NGOs: In the service of imperialism. 429-440. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. 29(4), 433.

⁸⁰ Goodhand. *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*, 5.

organizational environment and specifically the component of organizational culture, because of the crucial effect the culture has on the learning process within NGOs which, in turn, determines the capacity of NGOs to operationalize conflict sensitivity.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

According to Goodhand, "How problems are framed and responded to is influenced by a range of organizational factors that are independent of the problem itself."⁸¹ The factors that make up an organization's environment include its goals, composition, structure and culture, all of which have the ability to both influence and constrain the choices and actions of practitioners. Therefore, as Lange argues, the prerequisites for an organization to develop the capacity to make conflict sensitive choices are that it not only has the relevant tools and policy frameworks, but also a conducive internal environment.⁸² This requires a proper mix of what Goodhand calls "heart and mind,"⁸³ which in this case means the combination of a normative foundation and values conducive to learning about and integrating conflict sensitivity, as well as 'organizational intelligence' and the capacity to act. However, Michael Edwards argues that although all NGOs strive to be "learning organizations,"⁸⁴ numerous factors within their organizational environment combine to create a culture with "a powerful mix of learning disabilities that produce the direct opposite of what those who sustain and enforce the systems hope to achieve."⁸⁵ Since learning is defined as not only the acquisition of information, but also as the "modification of behavior through practice, training or experience,"⁸⁶ without an ability to learn, the third component of conflict sensitivity, which is to act upon the

information that is gathered through conflict analysis and impact assessment in a responsible way, is difficult if not impossible. In addition to this, the purpose of PCIA, which is "to learn from the experience and to use the lessons to design better projects,"⁸⁷ is lost.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Organizational culture is just one aspect of the organizational environment, but it is fundamental to how the organization views "both itself and its environment."⁸⁸ If as Lange argues, the organizational culture provides the "lens" through which an organization sees the world,⁸⁹ then any attempt to make NGOs adopt a lens that is conflict sensitive must involve a discussion of organizational culture, which can be defined as "the way of life in an organization"⁹⁰ and refers to "shared values and practices that evolve within organizations."⁹¹ An organization's culture emerges from the founding principles, remembered history and values within the organization, all of which are then reinforced and further maintained by the external environment, making the culture of any organization difficult and slow to change.⁹² While the heterogeneity of NGOs makes them difficult to talk about as a single entity, three different aspects of NGO culture that they all tend to have in common will be examined, with an emphasis on how they each affect the learning process. This is important because the ability to learn from experience as well as theory is crucial to the integration of new information in any organization. The three aspects of NGO culture that can interfere with learning are a value-oriented culture, a risk averse culture, and an activist culture.

VALUE ORIENTED CULTURE

Shared values are a defining feature of the culture of any organization, but they are of central importance

⁸¹ Goodhand. *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*, 7.

⁸² Lange. *Building Institutional Capacity for Conflict-Sensitive Practice*.

⁸³ Goodhand. *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*, 155.

⁸⁴ Edwards, M. (1997). Organizational learning in non-governmental organizations: What have we learned? 235-250. *Public Administration and Development*. Vol. 17, 235.

⁸⁵ Smillie, I. (1999). At Sea in a Sieve? Trends and issues in the relationship between Northern NGOs and Northern governments. In I. Smillie & H. Helmich (Eds.), *Stakeholders: Government-NGO Partnerships for International Development*. 7-35. London: Earthscan Publications Ltd., 27.

⁸⁶ learning. (n.d.). *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)*. Dictionary.com website.

⁸⁷ Reyhler, L. (2001). Chapter 1: From Conflict to Sustainable Peacebuilding - Concepts and Analytical Tools. In L. Reyhler & T. Paffenholz (Eds.), *Peace-building: A Field Guide*. 3-20. London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 11.

⁸⁸ Lange. *Building Institutional Capacity for Conflict-Sensitive Practice*, 21.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁹⁰ Hatch, M.J. (1997). *Organization Theory: Modern, Symbolic, and Postmodern Perspectives*. New York: Oxford University Press, 204.

⁹¹ Ibid., 204.

⁹² Lange. *Building Institutional Capacity for Conflict-Sensitive Practice*, 21.

in NGOs. Patrick Kilby observes the prevalence of the language of values within the NGO literature as well as its centrality in the definition of NGOs themselves, as "self-governing independent bodies, voluntary in nature, [that] tend to engage both their supporters and constituency on the basis of values..."⁹³ Indeed many NGOs, especially those that are religiously inspired, are built on a foundation of explicitly stated and shared values. While some may argue that this gives NGOs a humanity that distinguishes them from big business whose only value is profit, NGOs' claim to moral high ground has insulated them from much of the criticism and demands for accountability and consistency that fall upon other types of organizations.

Given therefore, that values are often the *raison d'être* of NGOs, it is perhaps not surprising, going back to Goodhand's analogy, that they are often willing to sacrifice the 'mind' for the sake of the 'heart.' Lange observes that all bureaucracies struggle to deal with contradictory and challenging information.⁹⁴ However, where this may, in many cases, test institutional objectives or operations causing an organization to rethink its objectives and values, in NGOs information that challenges their fundamental values and beliefs is all too often ignored and discounted in an effort to preserve the status quo. Indeed, Edwards observes that 'selective' and 'superficial' learning that "excludes information that challenges an agency's 'sacred cows,'"⁹⁵ is common among NGOs. Good intentions and "an underlying conviction in the rightness of the cause"⁹⁶ are claimed to adequately substitute for accountability and learning. Given that NGOs are generally staffed by "people who have strong beliefs, values and commitments to the work they are doing...they may therefore be driven more by what they believe in than what they learn."⁹⁷ Furthermore, their beliefs may prevent them partaking in new opportunities to learn. For

instance, even though it could be beneficial to some NGOs working in conflict areas to cooperate and share information with the military, the belief that the military holds values that are at complete odds with those of development NGOs often prevents them from even engaging in a dialogue. If it is indeed people and not institutions that learn, as Edwards claims, then NGOs, staffed by value driven individuals have a particular challenge to overcome.⁹⁸

RISK ADVERSE CULTURE

Despite claiming to help the disadvantaged and at risk populations of the world, NGOs themselves also tend to have risk adverse cultures. Mark Walkup claims that this emerges as the result of psychological coping strategies of individuals who work in uncertain and risky situations. "A myth of proficiency and success is often fabricated"⁹⁹ he goes on to say, to deal with the magnitude of the danger of failure in such situations. These methods of individual self-preservation however, are eventually institutionalized in organizations and all too often become the way that NGOs justify their existence and actions to the public.¹⁰⁰ As Goodhand observes, humanitarian and development organizations often have a strong culture of self-justification,¹⁰¹ which is then reinforced and maintained by their insecure position between governments and international institutions, as well as by their dependency on donors for survival. According to Kim Riemann, dependency on official sources of aid has reinforced the risk adverse nature of NGOs, not only as an individual coping strategy, but as an organizational coping strategy.¹⁰² In their struggle to win one of a limited number of contracts, NGOs have become "politically muzzled and have shied away from any meaningful 'empowerment' activities that could lead to real change for the poor they seek to serve."¹⁰³ The

⁹⁸ Ibid., 238.

⁹⁹ Walkup, M. (1997). Policy Dysfunction in Humanitarian Organizations: The role of coping strategies, institutions, and organizational culture. 37-60. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. 10(1), 47.

¹⁰⁰ Walkup. *Policy Dysfunction in Humanitarian Organizations*, 48.

¹⁰¹ Goodhand. *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*, 155.

¹⁰² Reimann, K. (2005). Chapter 3: Up to no good? Recent critics and critiques of NGOs. In O. Richmond & H. Carey (Eds.), *Subcontracting Peace: The Challenges of the NGO Peacebuilding*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 43.

⁹³ Kilby, P. (2006). Accountability for Empowerment: Dilemmas facing non-governmental organizations. 951-963. *World Development*. 34(6), 952.

⁹⁴ Lange. *Building Institutional Capacity for Conflict-Sensitive Practice*, 22.

⁹⁵ Edwards. *Organizational learning in non-governmental organizations*, 237.

⁹⁶ Smillie. *At Sea in a Sieve? Trends and issues in the relationship between Northern NGOs and Northern governments*, 31.

⁹⁷ Edwards. *Organizational learning in non-governmental organizations*, 238.

tendency to avoid evaluation and analysis is a symptom of the fear of failure and the 'defense' that Walkup identifies as an individual coping strategy,¹⁰⁴ but it is also a symptom of the organization's fear of demonstrating negative results to donors.

The disincentives to learning that the risk adverse culture of NGOs presents not only reinforce their subjective "preoccupation with appraising performance rather than enhancing it,"¹⁰⁵ but they also raise fundamental questions about the ability of NGOs to work effectively in conflict settings. If, as John Paul Lederach argues "violence is known; peace is the mystery," then by its very nature, "peacebuilding requires a journey guided by the imagination of risk."¹⁰⁶ If, NGOs are incapable of and/or unwilling to take that risk, should they even have a role in building peace? Is it possible that organizations such as the military, which are more comfortable coping with and managing risk, will increasingly take on development tasks as Provincial Reconstruction Teams have in Afghanistan? These are important and timely questions that a larger discussion of the risk adverse nature of NGOs and its effect on conflict sensitivity needs to address.

ACTIVIST CULTURE

Finally, it is the activist culture of NGOs that attracts many impassioned and dedicated individuals, who just want to 'get the job done.' At the same time however, Edwards observes that "activist cultures often see learning as a luxury, separate from and secondary to 'real work.'"¹⁰⁷ Sacrificing 'understanding' for 'doing' is believed to be "warranted by an underlying conviction in the

rightness of the cause,"¹⁰⁸ whereby the strength of the value-oriented culture in NGOs reinforces and legitimizes a tendency towards activism and away from learning. Furthermore, investing in the organizational capacity to strengthen its learning process is often seen as a misappropriation of funds that are intended to be directed towards the people the programmes are created to assist.¹⁰⁹ With this perspective and with donors often using low overhead, or as Padaki clarifies "the ratio of what is spent on ourselves to what reaches the people for whom we exist and work,"¹¹⁰ as an indicator of success, a culture that does not value learning and innovation is essentially celebrated and reinforced.

What is valued in this scenario is the 'real work' those NGOs engage in, which is often focused on the active delivery of services. Powell notes that a 2005 *Newsweek* article which referred to NGOs as a "billion dollar industry," accredited their growth to the general expansion of the service economy, given that "most NGOs are after all, service providers, delivering things like health care and education."¹¹¹ Envisioning health or education as services to be provided is difficult both ethically and practically, but envisioning peace as a service or commodity which NGOs have the audacity to believe they can actually 'deliver' is incredibly problematic. When "know-how is more important than know what,"¹¹² a type of learning quite unique to NGOs develops in which learning is done by doing, or by trial and error.¹¹³ To go back to Ryszard Kapuściński's warning, this type of learning may be low on overhead, but it can be costly in lives, especially in sensitive conflict situations. This is not

"NGOs act as service industries, rather than knowledge industries, and in the process adopting the structures and tools that reflect and reinforce 'the linear processes of the service industry.'"

¹⁰⁴ Walkup. *Policy Dysfunction in Humanitarian Organizations*.

¹⁰⁵ Padaki. *The Human Organization: Challenges in NGOs and development programmes*, 68.

¹⁰⁶ Lederach, J.P. (2005). *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*. New York: Oxford University Press, 39.

¹⁰⁷ Edwards. *Organizational learning in non-governmental organizations*, 238.

¹⁰⁸ Smillie. *At Sea in a Sieve? Trends and issues in the relationship between Northern NGOs and Northern governments*, 31.

¹⁰⁹ Walsh & Lenihan. *Accountability and effectiveness of NGOs*, 414.

¹¹⁰ Padaki. *The Human Organization: Challenges in NGOs and development programmes*, 71.

¹¹¹ Powell, M. (2006). Which knowledge? Whose reality? An overview of knowledge used in the development sector. *Development in Practice*. 16(6), 519.

¹¹² Edwards. *Organizational learning in non-governmental organizations*, 237.

¹¹³ Carey, H. (2005). Chapter 22: Conclusion. In O. Richmond & H. Carey (Eds.), *Subcontracting Peace: The Challenges of the NGO Peacebuilding*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 238.

to imply that any organization has a sure-fire solution, but NGOs' tendency to learn by doing, yet not incorporate what has been learned into ongoing planning and management, is a critical problem.

What appears to be the prevailing trend then, is for NGOs to act as service industries, rather than knowledge industries, and in the process adopting the structures and tools that reflect and reinforce "the linear processes of the service industry."¹¹⁴ Indeed, Goodhand and others have noted that in recent years, many NGOs have adopted "rational planning tools"¹¹⁵ such as the Logical Framework Approach (LFA), or Logframe, which is a project planning and management methodology with widespread usage among NGOs. Hoffman notes that there are several benefits to adopting such an approach. For example, Logframes help to "clarify and to set the project objectives and the assumptions underpinning specific interventions."¹¹⁶ However, Logframes also have multiple drawbacks and limitations. For instance, their "tendency to reinforce linear causal relationship between inputs, activities and outcomes"¹¹⁷ Goodhand argues, limits flexibility and innovation, leading to what he calls a "'mismatch' between the complexity and dynamism of the operating environment and the planning methods employed by NGOs."¹¹⁸ Logframes, he asserts, tend to reduce conflict to "being located as a risk – often a killer assumption that poses a serious threat to a project."¹¹⁹ In organizations that are risk averse, the use of such methodologies only reinforces beliefs that are then culturally and structurally institutionalized. Goodhand further notes, that the tendency for Logframes to give the "illusion, which Logframes tend to support, that everything can be controlled,"¹²⁰ makes conflict a risky externality that on the surface may appear to be controlled, without there being any real leaning going on about how to understand or effectively cope with it.

DISCUSSION

It is clear that the 'other path' to development will not necessarily be the one of least resistance. Despite their growth in numbers, the scope of their activities and the financial resources behind them, development NGOs have faced persistent challenges. In keeping with the development discourse, which is sorely missing a counter narrative, the tendency has been to look to external factors and occurrences to account for the challenges NGOs face. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that the internal organizational environment and the profound influence it has on the way problems are recognised, defined and responded to by NGOs, has remained largely overlooked.

The learning process in NGOs has been likened "to an iceberg, with a huge underwater mass representing all the learning that goes on in the field, and a small tip emerging above the surface representing the formalization of lessons learned in policy statements, good practice manuals etc..."¹²¹ While often rich in information or raw materials, NGOs tend to lack knowledge, which is information that has been processed and analyzed, and according to Edwards they are also devoid of wisdom, which he defines as "the ability to utilize knowledge and experience in action."¹²² There are many reasons why lessons learned in NGOs are not translated into practical wisdom, but one crucial factor is revealed in a journey into the inner workings of NGOs which exposes an organizational culture that is unique, powerful and incredibly important to how NGOs learn, or rather fail to learn. This begs the question that Edwards poses of whether there is actually a need for more information before NGOs can mainstream conflict sensitivity or whether what is, in fact required, is simply an ability on the part of NGOs to use the information that they already have more effectively.¹²³

However, the culture in any organization is slow and difficult to change, and in the case of NGOs,

¹¹⁴ Powell. *Which knowledge? Whose reality? An overview of knowledge used in the development sector*, 526.

¹¹⁵ Goodhand. *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*, 161.

¹¹⁶ Hoffman. *PCLA Methodology*, 6.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁸ Goodhand. *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*, 164.

¹¹⁹ Hoffman. *PCLA Methodology*, 6.

¹²⁰ Goodhand. *Aiding Peace? The Role of NGOs in Armed Conflict*, 163.

¹²¹ Edwards. *Organizational learning in non-governmental organizations*, 240.

¹²² Edwards. *Organizational learning in non-governmental organizations*, 237.

¹²³ Ibid., 242.

various aspects of their culture reinforce each other and are supported and maintained by internal structures as well as external relationships. Three different aspects of development NGO culture that are frequently mentioned in the literature have been discussed with a focus on how they impede the learning process that essentially transforms information into wisdom and makes conflict sensitivity an ethos that guides and informs operations, rather than just a checklist of activities. The strength of values in the culture of NGOs has led to selective and halfhearted learning that protects the moral foundation on which many NGOs are built. At the same time, the risk adverse culture of NGOs has traditionally led them to work *around conflict*, while the changing global scene, combined with the activist culture has led increasingly to work *in or on conflict*.¹²⁴ However, the tendency to sacrifice 'learning' for 'doing' has led to a sizeable knowledge gap. To go back to Edwards, this does not necessarily need to be filled with the acquisition of more information but rather requires a change in the way NGOs operate and value the processes of both learning and thinking.

Wood goes on to argue that "to listen and to learn" must be fundamental principles of the development community.¹²⁵ Principles are important and it was the development and humanitarian communities that were the first to develop codes of conduct and principles after their tragic involvement in Rwanda. But having our 'hearts' in the right place is of no use without our minds. Principles can provide the ethical foundation for behavior, but as De Waal has noted, principles tend to go out the window when actors in the field are being shot at, witnessing tragic suffering or are under incredible stress.¹²⁶ Unless the ability to listen and to learn is "carefully structured"¹²⁷ in non-governmental organizations, it will become just another idea that sounds great, but is never actually put into practice.

"Lack of consensus makes it difficult for various actors to cooperate or coordinate in developing cohesive conflict sensitive approaches."

assumptions: first that a universal methodology is possible, and second, that the lack of such a

CONCLUSION

The need for conflict sensitive approaches to development is perhaps, greater than ever. Not only did the World Bank's *Voices of the Poor* report find that the desire for security was the number one priority over other basic needs,¹²⁸ but "of the 34 poor countries farthest from reaching the Millennium Development Goals, 22 are in, or emerging from conflict."¹²⁹ With an unprecedented amount of financial support and with the potential positive contributions development can make codified in numerous international documents, the development community has an opportunity to respond where the need is greatest. But given that where the need is greatest is often where there also is conflict, the development community is under pressure to fill the knowledge gap that exists in development theory regarding issues of security and peace and adopts a conflict sensitive approach to its projects. Given the rapidly changing security norms in a post-9/11 world as well as the nature of contemporary conflict, the development community faces a difficult challenge.

The focus of much of the development literature has been to try to develop the proper methodologies to "translate terms such as conflict sensitivity, avoiding negative impact and promoting positive peace into agencies' strategies and practice."¹³⁰ Underlying this focus are two

methodology is the primary, if not sole impediment to mainstreaming conflict sensitivity. In response to these assumptions, this paper has put forth two arguments: first, that the development of a universal methodology is not possible, given the way it is currently conceived and second, that the lack of a

¹²⁴ Tschirgi. *Peacebuilding as the Link between Security and Development*, 8.

¹²⁵ Wood. *Development dimensions of conflict prevention and peace-building*, 54.

¹²⁶ De Waal. *Famine Crimes: Politics & the Disaster of Relief Industry in Africa*.

¹²⁷ Edwards. *Organizational learning in non-governmental organizations*, 234.

¹²⁸ Fitz-Gerald, A.M. (2004). Addressing the Security-Development Nexus: Implications for joined-up government. 2-24. *Policy Matters*. 5(5), 3.

¹²⁹ UN Millennium Project. (2005). Available at <www.unmillenniumproject.org>

¹³⁰ Leonhardt. *Towards a Unified Methodology*, 58.

universal framework is, not in fact, the main obstacle to mainstreaming conflict sensitivity.

The first section focused on the search for a universal PCIA methodology and revealed a diversity of opinions about the meaning of key concepts such as conflict and its causes which in turn influence both the goals and types of activities that actors are involved in. In this scenario, development projects can produce very different results which are then evaluated against unique and often subjective definitions of success and/or failure, with the potential for each actor to understand the interaction between their intervention and the context they are working in quite differently. This lack of consensus makes it difficult for various actors to cooperate or coordinate in developing cohesive conflict sensitive approaches. This is an important challenge for development in the world today, given the complexity of interventions in conflict areas and the number of different actors involved. While some sort of general methodology is needed, we may need to accept that the diversity of opinions, beliefs and objectives, which it can be argued accurately represent the complexities of the real world, will never be subsumed under one universal methodology. If, in fact, this diversity emerges from a critical and informed engagement with complex issues and not a naïve or superficial understanding of conflict and development, then rather than being a problem to be done away with, it may have the potential to present new ideas and opportunities for how to engage with conflict.

However, in our "quest for mainstreamable products"¹³¹ we seem to have put the cart before the horse, in attempting to come up with the appropriate tools and frameworks without understanding or developing the internal environment and knowledge base to support them. 'Methodology' has been conceived in purely technical terms, an unfortunate hallmark of Western thought, with the result that issues of theory and questions of principles and operating skills, have been overlooked. Therefore, the second discussion attempted to look at the internal environment of development NGOs. An examination of the value-oriented, risk averse and activist aspects of NGOs

revealed an organizational culture unfavourable to learning, a 'disability' which impedes the capacity of NGOs to operationalize methodologies and to effectively use the information they gather to plan and implement more conflict sensitive projects, instead of relegating conflict sensitivity to a back office or making it the job of a token specialist. Organizational culture is indeed slow and difficult to change and emerges from specific histories and beliefs. What is perhaps more realistic therefore, rather than trying to change the organizational culture of NGOs, is for the development community to be aware of and realistic about what they are capable of achieving and what they might have to sacrifice and change in the pursuit of more ambitious goals. For instance, if the development community is unwilling to take risks, then perhaps they need to re-think their role in conflict situations.

This discussion has demonstrated that the obstacles within the development community itself may be even harder to overcome than the challenges the current global situation poses. Fundamental questions regarding ownership and responsibility, motivations and goals, and values and beliefs are yet to be answered. If the development community is unwilling to critically and honestly look at these issues, then perhaps the question that really needs to be asked is whether it can evolve to meet the current challenges, or whether it is time to retire.

¹³¹ Gsanger & Feyen. *PCIA Methodology*, 68.