PCIA as a Peacebuilding Tool

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Kenneth Bush's goal of assessing the peace and conflict impact of development interventions is an important one. He puts front and center the issue of governance and in so doing also problematizes the relationship among multiple goals in development interventions. My reactions to the dialogue on PICA focuses on three issues: the need for more explicit concern with theory in the planning, organization and evaluation of interventions; the difficulties that many projects will have in making sense of the long lists and "shoulds" that characterize PICA; and the question of goals, goal revision and indicators of success in any project. Our discussion provides an opportunity to ponder ways in which working towards one set of goals can, at the same time, promote other highly valued ones. However, it also forces us to consider how, at times, the pursuit of development and social justice goals can be at odds with the goals one might articulate from a peace and conflict perspective. Lastly, I emphasize the importance of integrating evaluation into development and peacebuilding projects as practitioners take responsibility for altering, refining, and redesigning programs to make them more effective.

While both Bush and Hoffman talk about the role of theory, neither gives it a sufficiently central role in their discussion of PICA. Theory, as I am using the term, refers to both local (what some anthropologists call *folk theories*) and academic knowledge about the world. While outsiders can use theory as secret knowledge to control projects, there is no reason why this has to be the case. In fact, most of our theories of social action are remarkably simple and can readily articulated in local terms and can be compared with local theories to clarify similarities and differences to bridge gaps between them.

Theory is crucial to practice in at least two ways. First we should recognize that all people have theories about how the world works. It is often critical that interventions understand the theories people in a community have concerning their social, political, and economic worlds since successful project implementation can depend upon interveners' awareness of how local beliefs intersect with a project's activities and goals. Second, theory matters because it makes explicit how a project's specific activities are expected to affect behaviors and attitudes of those people directly involved in a project,

and their expected wider impact on others living in the community and region (Ross and Rothman 1999). Both effects matter because most NGO interventions (and many governmental ones as well) are relatively small scale. If interventions are to make a difference, there needs to be transfer of knowledge, attitude change and resources to people beyond those directly participating in a project (Kelman 1995). Yet, despite the fact that how transfer is to be achieved, it is often left unarticulated and frequently rests on naïve assumptions such as good intentions.

Theory can play a crucial role in priority setting and resource allocation when it identifies sequences, points of maximum impact, and connections among domains (Ross 2000b). Each of the areas of potential peace and conflict impacts Bush identifies contains an implicit theory of practice and these should be made explicit to better understand how it is hypothesized that specific goals might be achieved. Theories, of course, are often partial and produce disagreements. However, their articulation forces practitioners to specify indicators to decide if, and how, an activity is successful. When used in this way, theories can be empowering because they help stakeholders better understand why something is being done and they can assist in deciding which actions taken are effective. Theories at odds with one another can help practitioners run natural field experiments that can help interveners and communities decide what produces the best results. In short, by integrating theory into practice, projects can empower stakeholders on the frontlines, building commitment that translates into more effective action.

II. PCIA's Potential Relevance to Individual Projects

Let me offer a hypothesis for which I have no evidence. It is that the PICA approach is not yet sufficiently user friendly. When I look at Bush's framework from the point of view of projects in the field, my sense is that the large list of goals and their generality is overwhelming and will induce a profound sense of inadequacy among people who might, in fact, be able to apply it if they better understood its particular relevance to their project. One reaction to feeling intimidated can be bureaucratic efforts to comply without internalization any of PICA's deeper goals. The scheme, and Bush's discussion in his response to Hoffman, is comprehensive in that it lists political, social, cultural and economic goals and emphasizes the importance of the political context in which a project is working. But a practitioner wants to know where does one begin? How does one prioritize? How does one know what parts of the PICA scheme are not relevant to their work? How can projects decide what not to do at any point in time? These questions aren't addressed sufficiently and yet they are central to any project's use of PICA. By

suggesting to projects that everything matters and that all domains are interconnected, PICA, as Bush presents it, can be disempowering and produce frustration.

Some of these difficulties would be lessened if Bush distinguished more clearly among evaluations at different levels as Hoffman encourages; and if we recognize that the comprehensive coordination of many projects (even in a relatively small region) is not likely to be terribly successful. In fact, this realization is fully consistent with many of Bush's own goals, which emphasize local autonomy, invention, and control.

If stakeholders would spell out their specific goals and indicators of success at various stages of their work, many projects would be significantly improved through the goal redefinition and in-course corrections this would generate. Contextually defined goals will, however, sometimes be at odds with those of other projects in the same region. One reason is because different projects will develop divergent ideas and priorities. Another is because of politics. Local actors often strive to maintain their own autonomy and control and have trouble giving these up. A common solution to this problem is to limit local autonomy and control putting it in the hands of higher level experts, often outsiders, who supposedly don't have self-serving motives. Yet comprehensive planning underplans and a few very smart (even well-intentioned) project planners will consistently oversimplify and lose the complexity and richness of local needs and understandings (Scott 1998). But that is, of course, what Bush wants to avoid.

As Mary Anderson (1999) argues so effectively, outside funded projects introduce new actors and resources into a region whose actions affect the fortunes of local players. Bush acknowledges her injunction to "do no harm," but fails to draw additional relevant conclusions from her analysis. One is that projects shouldn't be expected to get everything right the way Bush implies they would if they just apply PICA properly. Instead we should be emphasizing that there are a number of things projects might do which are "good-enough," not a single standard of perfection against which they are to be evaluated (Ross 2000a). Good-enough projects make significant differences in peoples' lives although they may fail to address many of the items on Bush's lists. If Bush is serious about harnessing local knowledge and local standards of success, he must loosen up some of the injunctions he offers (often implicitly) about what goals effective projects will achieve. There is a real paradox here and the solution isn't simply better and more indicators and more contextualization. Tradeoffs among goals are a real part of development and peace work and good outcomes are often far from ideal ones.

Bush resists imposing a set of contest-free indicators on projects. For the most part this is appropriate, although not trouble-free. Doing this does not avoid the issue of accountability and deciding when, and to what degree, a project is successful. Funders, project administrators and those living in a community in which a project operates may have different priorities, if a not outright disagreement, about what constitutes success. These differences often are simply seen as a problem. However, they also offer an opportunity to bring various stakeholders together to consider their differences and set new joint project goals (and not just those which represent a least common denominator).

Goals are not the same as specific indicators and it is important to recognize that while Bush has no desire to impose specific indicators on particular projects, he has little problem in offering a large number of general goals projects should be working towards. There is however some inconsistency here. If people working in specific contexts should develop appropriate local indicators of success, why shouldn't they also be involved in goal setting? Why are the goals he lists under the five areas of potential peace and conflict impact the right ones for all communities and why are these five areas those of highest priority? Is the functional distinction among these areas particularly useful in all settings? Perhaps not. Bush clearly has an implicit theory of change linking each of these elements. As noted above, making it explicit would be helping in deciding how useful this general approach to goal setting is.

In contrast, Rothman's approach to goal and indicator setting directly involves stakeholders in the process and explicitly recognizes that in many projects goals shift over time (Ross 2001; Rothman 1998). Rather than starting with a list such as Bush provides and asking a project to it adapt it to their situation, Rothman draws on Lederach's (1995) elicitive approach and has stakeholders generate goals which he then seeks to group into more general categories. This approach permits participants to make connections among elements they see as important and set their own priorities at the same time.

A source of tension underlying this dialogue is between a desire to articulate a general set of evaluation standards for the field that is relevant across a wide range of interventions and the recognition of the need for locally grounded and articulated indicators of success. Of course this sounds like Lederach's distinction between directive and elicitive approaches but there is a something additional going on in Bush's proposal and Rothman's (1998) ARIA project. Implicit in both, I

believe, is the idea that diverse, contextually defined, local indicators can somehow be successfully linked to more general peace and conflict impact goals. In Bush's case, he begins with five areas of potential impact to guide the development of local indicators, while Rothman begins with locally articulated indications but has expressed the clear expectation that replicating his process across projects can yield general goals for the field. As Hoffman suggests, in neither case is it clear how the cross-level connections are to be made. How they might be linked is not clear to me either. In fact, I think that any connection between the specific and general is conceptual and not organic.

Finally, while Bush and Hoffman raise the issue of potential conflict among the diverse goals in any project (and the likelihood of this increasing when there are multiple projects working in a region) more needs to be said about this question. For example, Bush talks about tensions between the goals of raising educational achievement and lowering intergroup tension in education projects. There are often tensions between the development of local capacity building and meeting immediate human needs and service delivery. On a more general level, tensions between peacebuilding and human rights priorities occur when projects have very different priorities. Projects not only need to be able to mediate among these differences, but they also should be able to articulate as clearly as possible the potential consequences of pursuing one course rather than another.

IV. Integration of Evaluation into Practice

I am delighted to have had an opportunity to participate in this discussion. Let me end with the thought that the more explicit integration of evaluation into practice is crucial to the successes of peacebuilding efforts. It is fully consistent with Campbell's (1988) idea that we consider policy as hypothesis and evaluate practices as quasi-experiments (Campbell 1969). When practice doesn't work, there is an all-too-common tendency to variously blame people in local communities, implementers, or governments. But sometimes, practices fail because of incorrect assumptions about the effects that their actions would have. These learnings should not be explained away or excused; rather, they ought to be the basis of change and innovation. Only when people feel sufficiently secure with the knowledge that failure is not an end but a new beginning will practitioners embrace evaluation as a tool rather than a seeing it as a problem to be overcome.