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Measuring Unintended Effects in Peacebuilding: Innovative Approaches Shaped by Complex Contexts

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Abstract

Capturing unintended impacts has been a persistent struggle in all fields in international development, and the field of peacebuilding is no exception. However, because peacebuilding focuses on relationships in complex contexts, the field of peacebuilding has, by necessity, made efforts towards finding practical ways to reflect upon both the intended and unintended effects of this work. To explore what lessons can be learned from the peacebuilding field, this study examines the evaluations of Search for Common Ground, a peacebuilding organization working in over 35 countries across the world. Analysis focuses on evaluations completed between 2013 and 2016 across Africa, Asia, and the MENA regions that found unintended effects. Programs focusing on women, youth, and radio were most effective at identifying and explaining unintended effects, likely because project design guided broader lines of questioning from the beginning. The paper argues that OECD-DAC guidelines are not enough on their own to guide evaluators into exploration of unintended effects, and teams instead need to work together to decide where, when and how they will look for them. Different approaches were also used to capture positive and negative outcomes, suggesting that evaluators need to decide at what level they are evaluating and how to tie effects back to the project contribution. This study explores evaluation techniques and approaches used to understand impact in complex contexts in the peacebuilding field draw lessons learned for other fields dealing with similar complexities in international development and cooperation among actors.

Key words: evaluation, peacebuilding, unintended effects, media, women, youth, conflict

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Introduction

Capturing unintended impacts has been a persistent struggle in all fields in international development, and the field of peacebuilding is no exception. It has been a challenge for many reasons. First, monitoring, evaluation, and research activities are often conducted with a clear bias towards tracking and evaluating whether intended effects were realized because tools are designed in such a way to focus on what was originally promised or expected in linear patterns, as well as how success is most often defined more broadly speaking.

However, because peacebuilding supports healthy cooperation among actors at both local and international levels, concentrating on relationships in complex contexts, the field of peacebuilding has, by necessity, made efforts towards finding practical ways to reflect upon both the intended and unintended effects of this work. Overall, 25% of SFCG evaluations completed between 2013 and 2016 across Africa, Asia and the MENA region found either positive or negative unintended effects. Evaluations of programs focusing on women, youth, and media were the most effective at identifying and explaining unintended effects using innovative research methodologies. In the hopes of moving towards more systematic understanding of unintended effects, this study explores evaluation techniques and approaches used to understand impact in complex contexts in the peacebuilding field to draw lessons learned for other fields dealing with similar complexities in international development and cooperation.

Defining Unintended Effects Through the Practitioner's Perspective

Development practitioners tend to have a broad understanding of the term 'unintended effect'. In this study, project team members and evaluation staff rendered an unintended effect¹ *unintended* based on its relation to the relevant project's Theory of Change (ToC), logical framework, goal, specific objectives and results measured by their respective indicators. In other words, unintended effects were defined under the umbrella of *any effect going against the direction of the original ToC*. Differing schools of thought both support and contest this conceptualization. For example, Merton understands unintended effects as the result of a lack of contextual knowledge of the program designer/implementer. However, others give more complex definitions that highlight the breadth and full dimension of unintended effects (Koch and Schulpen, 2016)². Morell argues that 'reality is so inherently complex that unintended effects are bound to

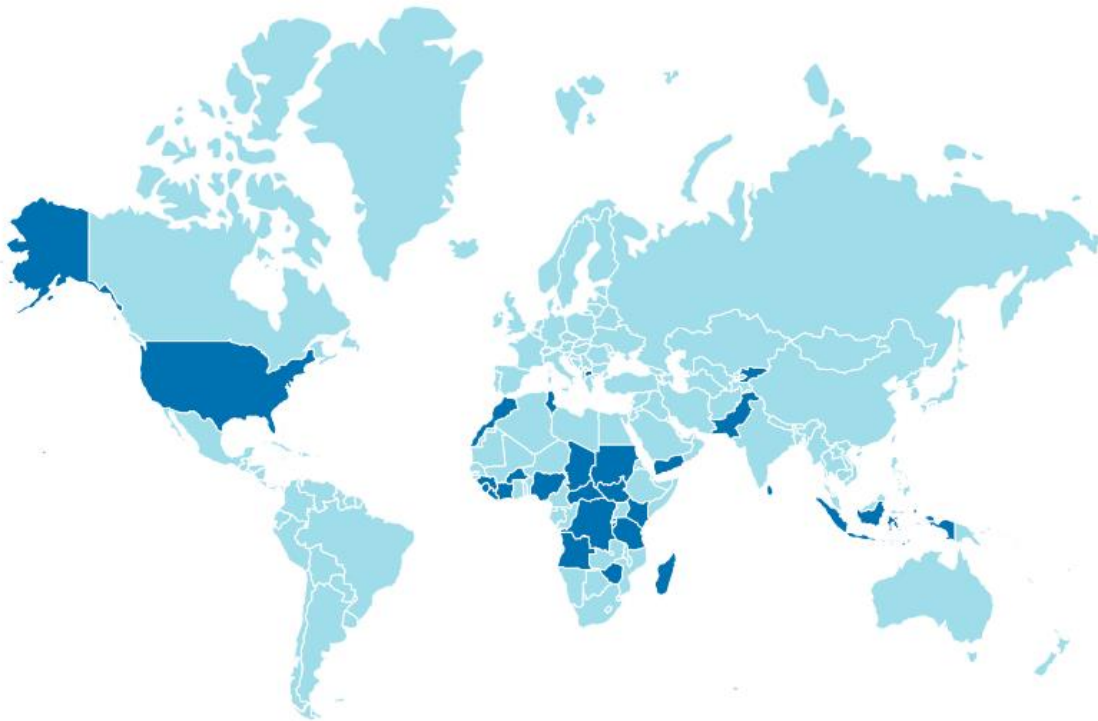
¹ Throughout the research for this paper, the term unintended 'effect' was used interchangeably with unintended 'impact', 'outcome' or 'consequence' by participants. Participants also made no distinction between *anticipated* unintended effect and *unanticipated* unintended effect. They seemed to assume that all unintended effects were neither intended, nor anticipated.

² As highlighted in the literature review, Portes argues that unintended effects are not only negative, and proposes they can be categorised into six categories: really unintended; anticipated; positive; spill over effects; unavoidable; bigger than and relevant to the initial effect.

occur’; in other words, they are inevitable in programming regardless of how well the context is understood by the designers and implementers. Despite their seeming incongruity, this research employs these two definitions together, highlighting the fact that while unintended effects are in many ways inevitable for programs operating in complex environments, they can result from a lack of systematic analysis and contextual knowledge, and this reality must be reflected in evaluative approaches.

Methodology

The analysis for this review drew upon 96 internal and external mid-term and final evaluations completed by Search for Common Ground (SFCG) between 2013 and 2016. The evaluations analysed covered 24 countries in which SFCG operates across Africa, Asia and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions³ (see map below).



Map 1. Analysis of SFCG evaluations between 2013-2016 per country

³ Countries included were: Angola, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guinea, Indonesia, Jerusalem, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Liberia, Macedonia, Madagascar, Morocco, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Timor Leste, Tunisia, United States of America, Yemen, and Zimbabwe.

Overall, twenty-four of the evaluations analysed (25%) captured and discussed unintended effects. This included sixteen in Africa (Burundi, DRC, Guinea, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania) eight in Asia (Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Sri Lanka, Timor Leste) and two in the MENA region (Lebanon, Yemen). A primary document review of the evaluations and their terms of reference (ToR) was conducted to uncover patterns in methodologies, approaches, themes explored, and how the topic of unintended effects was portrayed (positive, negative or otherwise).

To delve deeper into the thinking behind these evaluation designs, twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with SFCG staff (7), national and international, as well as external consultants who conducted evaluations for SFCG (5). Seven interviewees were female and five were male. All participated in the design, data collection and/or report writing phases of an evaluation that captured unintended effects.

While these evaluations and interviews provided rich examples of the types of unintended effects experienced in peacebuilding and details on how the peacebuilding field has developed its exploration of unintended effects in recent years, not all evaluation tools and methodologies were fully available, and not everyone involved in the evaluation design process could be reached. This paper, therefore, focuses on data highlighting the *processes* of reflection around unintended effects and the factors that shaped approaches taken.

Capturing Unintended Effects: Evaluation in Peacebuilding

Much debate in the monitoring and evaluation field originates from the inability of evaluations to capture unplanned change while still complying with donor accountability requirements as defined in the project logic. While some fields, such as health, have consolidated indicators over the years to develop common measures of progress, this is a newer process in peacebuilding and there is much debate about whether finding common indicators is even the right approach. The definition of peace itself⁴ is ever changing and is conceptualized differently by donors and local practitioners (Galtung, 1969); the literature presents a wide range of goals for peacebuilding and ‘sustainable’ peace (Lund, 2016).

As the field grows, the debates themselves have highlighted the need to better examine unintended consequences resulting from peacebuilding and development work, and have underscored the importance of how relationships shift with international intervention. In particular, peacebuilding has highlighted two important elements surrounding international cooperation and its unintended effects: 1) international actors acting out of sync with each other and with local institutions and community members can have important effects on dynamics, and 2) work that impacts behaviours and relationships is designed *to have*

⁴ The definition of positive and negative peace represents an initial step towards orientating appropriate peacebuilding strategies.

effects that go beyond the project, and these need to be reflected upon and considered as part of the work itself. Neither of these is completely novel on its own, but peacebuilders operating at the heart of these issues have responded to them together and incorporated these concepts directly into monitoring and evaluation.

Peacebuilding and development practitioners often use the OECD-DAC guidelines (OECD-DAC, 2012) for *Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility* in conjunction with the five OECD-DAC criteria for evaluating development assistance which are: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and impact. Logical frameworks (logframes) that outline a project's intended design and achievements are often used in evaluation as a way to assess program quality. The OECD-DAC guidelines remain the standard for evaluation; however, this approach does not sufficiently emphasize unintended effects. While the guidelines suggest that an assessment “should cover both the desired changes the intervention aimed to achieve and any unintended (or unexpected) positive or negative results”⁵, sample evaluation questions and guidelines do not support full implementation of this recommendation.

Logframes themselves tend to describe “intended routes for achieving intended outcomes” (Grove and Zwi, 2008) and can restrict the creative potential of evaluators who often have what Des Gasper calls a “tunnel vision”, leading the evaluation to focus exclusively on what the project aimed to achieve.

To correct for this tunnel vision, other frameworks have been developed to help research and evaluations pay more attention towards the ways in which the program interacts with other factors and interventions. While relationships between projects and their impacts (intended and unintended) are not fully justified in these evaluations by *causality or attribution*, unable to account for a number of external factors, this study will speak of contribution. These approaches fit broadly within the scope of *adaptive management*, which is described as a “programming approach that combines appropriate analysis, structured flexibility, and iterative improvements in the face of contextual and causal complexity” reducing the likelihood of negative unintended effects (Mercy Corps et al., 2016). In other words, this suggests inviting funders, implementers and evaluators to endorse the idea of greater flexibility, adaptability and learning whilst reducing the need for procedures and rigid practices and tools. Some examples of tools and approaches developed include: risk matrices, conflict sensitivity and *Do No Harm* guides, longer inception phases and ethnographic methods, stakeholders and network analyses, , and outcome mapping/harvesting. Anderson's *Do No Harm* framework (1999) was designed as a result of the humanitarian failure and reflection following the Rwandan genocide of 1994. It “enables us to identify programming option when things are going badly. [...] *Do No Harm* is useful precisely because it gives us a tool to find better ways –

⁵ Often questions like the following are asked: What are the primary and secondary, direct and indirect, positive and negative, intended and unintended, immediate and long-term, short-term and lasting effects of the activity or policy in question? Does it exert a significant effect on key factors for conflict or peace?

programming options – to provide assistance” (Anderson, 2000). *Do No Harm* strategies outline the risks associated with international development interventions (for example, how financial support can exacerbate existing conflicts and strengthen - or create – inequalities). It is now considered a prerequisite for programming in organizations across many sectors (Grove and Zwi, 2008).

Because unintended effects have traditionally been “reduced to undesired effects (Baert, 1991) and negative effects relate to harm and risk mitigation, the majority of monitoring and evaluation activities too often concentrate on responding to this primary concern, disregarding the potential for capturing positive unintended effects. For this reason, outcome mapping and harvesting was developed to challenge this approach and focus on behavioural outcomes to support flexibility and adaptability in programming, and to allow projects to look at both positive and negative unintended effects of their work.

The literature on unintended effects in addition to interest from practitioners, academics, and policy-makers is slowly growing, but gaps in existing research leave several questions unanswered. Do interventions cooperating with actors at the national and international levels have unintended effects particular to them? Is the larger representation of negative unintended effects a bias? What types of unintended effects have been more or less actively researched (Baert, 1991)? USAID and NORAD’s efforts to research what and how aid evaluations identify unintended effects provide a first step towards answering this question (Wiig and Holm-Hansen, 2014). The discussion below adds to what currently exists by examining contributions from the field of peacebuilding, given the ways in which complex conflict dynamics (both local and international) have pushed the field to find new ways of speaking to the results of their work.

Findings

Due to the complexity of the settings in which peacebuilding operates, peacebuilders are often forced to design programs (and re-design them) in response to shifting contexts and dynamics. The peacebuilding field also faces challenges identifying clear causal links between their intervention and the outcomes they observe. While well-established and evidenced theories exist for how to prevent conflicts and build peace, new theories about the causal relationships between these mechanisms and their intended outcomes are constantly being developed while older theories are torn down. The peacebuilding field has had to adapt, out of necessity, to identify practical and effective ways to ensure that, as some theories are challenged and others developed a new, 1) no harm is caused by program implementation and 2) opportunities to reinforce positive effects (whether they form part of an existing theory or not) are not missed simply because they are not understood.

This section assesses some of the ways that Search for Common Ground evaluators have incorporated this reality into their own evaluation processes. SFCG is a peacebuilding organization operating across 35 countries for more than 34 years. Their global mission is to transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches, toward cooperative solutions. To respond to the most relevant conflicts in different geographies, SFCG has employed strategies around media inclusion and communication, creating opportunities for dialogue, and providing safe spaces to explore a sense of community and commonality. Thus, the organization's mission and methods often lend themselves to unintended effects, and their evaluations have increasingly evolved to account for them: in 2013 and 2014, approximately 18% of evaluations found unintended effects, contrasted with 25% of evaluations in 2015 and 46% to date in 2016.

SFCG took steps during this period to improve the quality and creativity of monitoring and evaluation in order to better engage program staff. This period is not marked by any one policy or approach that feeds into this, but instead an overall shift in the culture of monitoring and evaluation in the organization. First, evaluation templates and standards were redefined, and M&E planning was reformatted to include a general discussion of the *changes* that could be achieved in a project (defined by the project team without reference to the logframe). This meant that project monitoring and evidence gathering were reoriented in recent years to include more rigorous collection of data both during and after the project that extended beyond project design.

Second, the organization began implementing different types of preliminary research beyond the baseline, setting up evaluations to respond to a broader range of identified needs. Conducting a barrier analysis at the beginning of the project on the barriers to women's political participation forced the Burundi team to question its assumptions and design the project around these needs from the beginning, and then evaluate based on those identified barriers in addition to the logframe. Several types of research allowed for broader evaluation: youth-led research, barrier analysis, and conflict analysis/conflict scans. Conflict scans are a conflict monitoring methodology developed by Search (finalized in 2014) that track perceptions related to quickly changing and dynamic environments. Creative and participatory methodologies that allowed participants and community members to express what was important to them unrelated to project objectives naturally guided evaluations towards better examination of unintended effects.

The findings begin with an overview of patterns identified across SFCG evaluations relating to unintended effects. Following, is an examination of how the unit of analysis of an evaluation can affect the ability to identify and understand unintended effects. Last, the findings explore how positive and negative unintended effects are captured differently using diverse methods.

Overview

Amongst the 96 internal and external mid-term and final evaluations completed by SFCG for Common Ground between 2013 and 2016, 24 evaluations captured unintended effects. Sixteen had specific evaluation design questions related to unexpected/unintended results or a dedicated section focusing on this, while the remaining ten evaluations found unintended effects without specifying this separately in the design. Additionally, there were five evaluations designed to look for unintended effects (including specific evaluation design questions, etc.), but did not find any. This means that of the 20 evaluations that included questions or a section on unintended effects, 75% were able to identify them, compared to 9% of evaluations that did not include a specific line of questioning around this. The pattern here suggests that adding a section or set of evaluation questions to look at unintended effects does bring them out better than evaluating a project without doing so, emphasizing the rigidity of using OECD-DAC guidelines without more creative approaches to support broader enquiry. Importantly, there was no correlation between the donor and the ability or likelihood to capture unintended effects, suggesting that the most important factors were program, monitoring, and evaluation design.

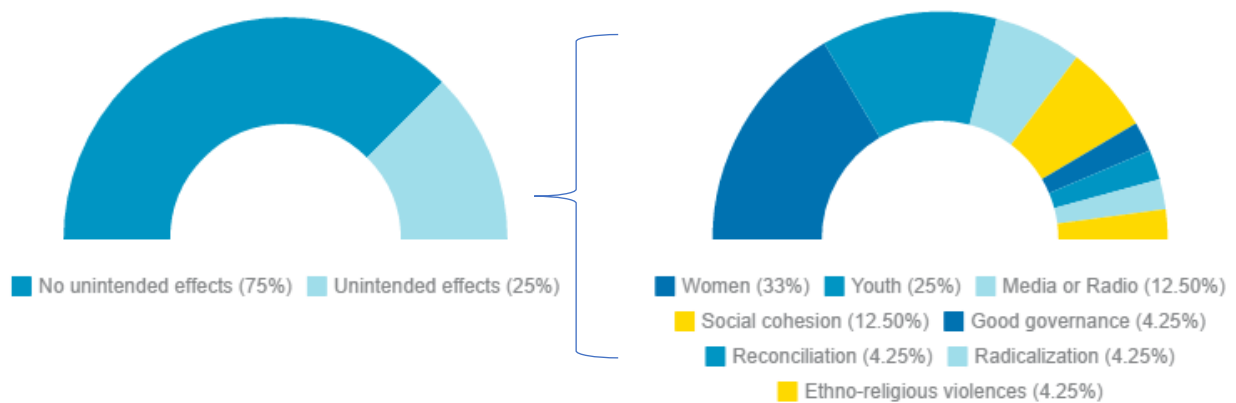
Out of the evaluations that identified unintended effects, eleven found both positive and negative unintended effects; while thirteen were exclusively either positive (7) or negative (6). Interestingly, using broader enquiry in many cases allowed SFCG to capture positive outcomes, while unintended effects are often associated with negative outcomes. As will be discussed later in the paper, these different types of project consequences were best captured with different methods. Outcome mapping/harvesting methodology was specifically praised by three interviewees for its ability to capture unintended effects by looking for *any* type of outcome and then tracing them back to the project to establish the contribution. One practitioner explained, “It is practically impossible not to capture unintended effects when using the approach”.

Thematically, evaluations of programs focusing on women, youth, and media programming were the most effective at identifying and explaining unintended effects using innovative research methodologies.⁶ While it is possible this is related to the high number of youth, women and media programs at SFCG, it was also found that youth and women programming complied with stronger ethical frameworks, demanding program staff and evaluators to be more attentive to unintended effects. Similarly, programs for women and youth often have built-in monitoring and programming mechanisms that link them more directly to unintended effects. Despite being less often used overall in the evaluations analysed, methodologies

⁶ Evaluations that captured unintended effects were on projects on: Women (8); Youth (6); Media or Radio (3); Social cohesion (3); Good governance (1); Reconciliation (1); Radicalization (1); Ethno-Religious Violence (1).

including participatory approaches for project design and project implementation or evaluation were described by research participants as more effective to observe and pre-empt unintended effects – SFCG has several guidelines and tools for engaging women and youth⁷ through participatory methods that have supported broader lines of inquiry in evaluations as a result.

Approaches like youth-led research and barrier analyses target specific vulnerable groups to ensure inclusion and participation from the beginning of a project. Thus, several of the evaluations that focused on gender and youth programming compared to baseline data and monitoring data that was developed in a highly participatory way, directing these evaluations towards questions outside the scope of the logframe, such as, “Are there changes in the ways women see themselves as actors in political space? How did the project engage men and respond to broader community barriers identified in the barrier analysis? Were there barriers or challenges affecting the decisions of women to vote and run as candidates in 2015?”⁸ These questions address larger obstacles and the ways that women respond to them, rather than examining women’s participation only through the scope of the project itself. This line of questioning allowed this particular evaluation, for example, to explore both unintended positive and negative consequences of the project’s interaction with international and national dynamics during an election cycle.



Figures 1 and 2: Proportion of SFCG evaluations with and without unintended effects, and by project theme

Approaches and methods used to identify unintended effects

Below are the identified approaches that supported exploration of unintended effects in programming across SFCG evaluations. Patterns emphasize that monitoring is a heavy component of capturing

⁷ <https://www.sfcg.org/tag/children-youth-toolkits/>

⁸ Comes from the final evaluation of *Supporting Women’s Participation and Effective Leadership in Democratic Institutions in a Pre-Election Environment*, conducted in May 2016.

unintended effects, as is the program design and information captured from the beginning of the project. While it is possible to identify unintended effects at the end of a project, and many have done so, best practice shows that incorporating research and monitoring into project design and implementation allowed for unintended effects to be captured more effectively and early in the process to allow for swift reaction.

Conflict Sensitivity

A conflict sensitive approach is omnipresent in peacebuilding project implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The concept of conflict sensitivity refers to the “ability of an organization to: understand the context of operation, understand the interaction between the context and the intervention, consider the interaction between the intervention and the context in order to avoid negative impacts (*Do No Harm*) and maximize positive impacts” (Anderson, 1999). In many ways, taking a conflict sensitive approach to programming will, if done right, necessarily result in the identification of negative unintended effects to be avoided and positive unintended effects to be reinforced and replicated.

Participants in this study noted that the level of conflict was positively correlated with the quantity of unintended effects and the ways in which we capture unintended effects. In other words, in countries where conflicts are latent and interventions are focusing on prevention and social cohesion, there should usually be less unintended effects observed. From this perspective, more frequent conflict analysis can provide a clearer picture of the evolution of conflicts while simultaneously providing insight on the kinds and volume of unintended effects to expect in either fragile and conflict states or more stable places. Several participants cited conflict monitoring mechanisms that allowed them to extend beyond the line of questioning related to the project itself. The SFCG team in the Democratic Republic of the Congo employed regular conflict monitoring that was referenced in evaluations for additional learning and reflection on Do No Harm mechanisms and risk analyses.

However, despite the perceptions of the participants, the evaluations themselves revealed that the level of conflict is not actually correlated with finding unintended effects. There is a false sense that certain types of conflicts are ‘more complex’ or ‘more predictable’, but the evaluations revealed that both negative and positive unintended can be found across all types of settings, particularly when complex actors are involved. For example, 14 of the 24 projects where evaluators found unintended effects supported access of marginalized groups in governance (or linking of these actors to government actors). These were all implemented in relatively stable environments in terms of violent conflict, but the highly complex relational environments and constraints actually supported many unintended outcomes. Project evaluations found that changing these relationships was sometimes volatile in affecting other relationships in

communities – even with people who never had a perceived access to government. They also found that community members who cultivated positive relationships with government actors successfully were able to achieve their own goals and initiatives that went well beyond the scope of the project. In Rwanda, network building between women’s associations and local leaders allowed them to address much deeper issues in the community, such as rates of school attendance.

The 3Rs Framework

Out of the three media or radio programs that identified unintended effects, two employed the 3Rs framework. The 3Rs approach developed by SFCG is a guiding framework used to evaluate the three main dimensions of SFCG’s media projects: ***reach, resonance, and response***. A fourth R, ***relevance***, was later added to differentiate between the relevance of program topics and the ways in which media approaches addressing these topics resonate with target audiences. Reach and relevance focus on monitoring the audience and whether messages are relevant. The other two dimensions, resonance and response, focus on how people engage with programming, shifting their attitudes and behaviors as a result of media programs. The framework builds at each step to assess the effects, both unintended and intended, of media activities.

SFCG staff members and external consultants who used the framework explained that it provides a foundation for evaluating media programs outside of the intended project design. However, this did not automatically mean that it was efficient in capturing unintended effects. The tools and guidelines were considered useful in shifting thinking beyond the logframe, but many media projects did not capture these unintended effects despite using the 3Rs framework. Resonance and response have been more difficult for teams to identify, in particular. It was concluded that its use should be coupled with specific lines of enquiry targeting unintended effects. The evaluation of the Team, a media program in Tanzania is an example where evaluators combined both an outcome mapping and harvesting approach and the 3Rs framework. In total, six unintended results linked to the outcomes and one unintended result linked to proto-outcomes (change in awareness, understanding or attitude) were captured that were outside the scope of the Theory of Change or the project objectives.

Outcome Mapping and Harvesting

Outcome mapping is a monitoring and evaluation method facilitating ‘learning and understanding of the system in which the program occurs, and how change is (or is not) brought about within its immediate sphere of influence’ (Corlazzoli and White, 2013). It is recommended to use outcome mapping during the monitoring and documenting stages of the project. However, if outcome mapping cannot be used from the

start of the project, teams can also use outcome harvesting, “a related technique in which the evaluator works backward to determine contribution to outcomes by collecting data from reports, interviews, and other sources” (Corlazzoli and White, 2013).

While there were not many evaluations that used this method in SF CG (only one used an outcome harvesting approach explicitly), interviewees underlined its importance and several incorporated lessons learned from outcome mapping/harvesting into their evaluation approaches. For example, in one case an external consultant recalled going back to a community two years following a project closeout to find unintended effects resulting from training and capacity development activities of the project. Efforts and advocacy to adapt local buses for wheelchair access could be traced back to these activities, and lines of questioning were guided by the outcome harvesting approach.

Participatory Approaches and Robust Monitoring

SF CG has incorporated lessons learned from participatory methodologies, most often in project design and monitoring, which have supported the exploration of unintended outcomes. As described above, participatory methodologies and approaches operated as a confounding factor in the relationship between found unintended effects and programming on youth/women. Through participant interviews it became clear that it was not the programming itself that made it uniquely amenable to finding unintended effects, but more that projects focused on youth and women used guidelines on gender sensitivity and youth inclusion that reinforced the use of participatory methodologies. The project design was therefore built to include broader themes defined by participants themselves, and evaluations then reflected on these broader lessons learned at the end of the project, setting them up to better capture outcomes that extended beyond the scope of intended change.

Monitoring and documenting changes throughout the project implementation represented the most practical methodology to capture and act upon unintended effects. This was particularly important in order to reorient activities or human resources. For example, a project in Lebanon targeting Lebanese, Palestinian and Syrian youth through art-based activities to improve social cohesion produced a mid-term shedding the light on several unintended negative impacts. It revealed that favouritism towards Syrian youth was prevalent in specific areas, therefore hindering the quality of relationships between participants; and that the rigidity of certain artists insisting on quality of end-products rather than encouraging group work and friendship did not fully comply with the overall goal of the project. The project was able to track this because of monitoring and use of mid-term evaluation that compiled this evidence to look for patterns.

Effective approaches used to identify unintended effects during the monitoring period differ considerably from those used during an evaluation. Recognition of weak or misinformed assumptions (that can lead to unintended effects) during the implementation of activities was found to be most practical during the monitoring stage, in preparation for a final evaluation. For example, a project addressing social cohesion in Bali initially identified racism and religion as the critical areas of discontent in the community, which became key components of the project design. It was only through monitoring that the team realized that mental illness represented a real issue and that individuals affected were greatly stigmatized. Neglecting the mental illness dimension of the community would have impeded the full realization potential of the intervention since the relevance of the project would be half met. As a result, a component including mental illness marginalization was added to the project. Without monitoring, this misinformed assumption would not necessarily have been captured and the adjustment of the Theory of Change halfway through the project might not have taken place. This suggests that using the Theory of Change as an evolving tool to be verified or invalidated and therefore updated at the course or end of a project would help shed the light on unintended effects.

Of course, monitoring and evaluation were found to play different roles in identifying unintended effects. In the evaluation of a project in Indonesia, it was identified that one of the activities, delivering grants to youths to support the development of peacebuilding initiatives and increasing social cohesion amongst youth, had the positive unintended impact of also providing them with coordination, management and proposal writing skills. This example illustrates that while misinformed assumptions tend to often be identified through monitoring, unintended effects related to impact are more easily captured during a final evaluation.

Level of Analysis

This section examines how the level/unit of analysis shapes the way practitioners understand and capture unintended effects. Interviews suggested that the ways they analysed programs significantly shaped reflection on intended and unintended consequences of projects. Intended outcomes were analysed at the following levels with varying degrees of success and different advantages and disadvantages: the participants themselves, the activities, the project as a whole, and the program (overall vision that guides the approaches taken across multiple projects).

Program Participants

As seen before, the nature of activities and their implementation strategies both have an influence on the likelihood and the acknowledgment of unintended effects; however, being attentive to the target group and

the audiences range (mass audience vs. specific group of individuals) will also impact the methodology to adopt to most effectively capture unintended effects. According to participants in this study, the type of activities was described to be as important as the beneficiaries involved since they tend to be closely linked. Evaluations of youth programming in low-intensity conflict zones were more likely to capture unintended effects easily than those involving vulnerable women in gender-based violence in an active conflict zone. The level of sensitivity and complexity of the intervention is closely linked with the context and the background of beneficiaries and will vary from one type of activity and beneficiaries to another.

Beyond the target group, one external consultant explained the importance of taking into account secondary audiences- particularly when looking at unintended effects, saying, “Talk to people on the community that weren’t direct beneficiaries [...] those are the unintended impact that you didn’t know you were even capturing.” Several evaluators interviewed supported this sentiment. However, evaluations rarely targeted indirect participants, and only three evaluations intentionally targeted indirect participants in focus groups and interviews to capture qualitative changes. This was described as a consequence of limitations on funding and scope for projects commissioned by funders primarily concerned about the impact as designed in the Theory of Change. Because Theories of Change very infrequently involve secondary beneficiaries, evaluators felt limited in their ability to work beyond projects’ direct beneficiaries in evaluations. Instead they focused on when they found key opportunities to do so, but did not implement this systematically across M&E.

Type of activities

SFCG’s projects are designed according to local contexts and conflicts dynamics; they are multifaceted programs with diverse activities ranging from media (radio, TV, comic books, video games, social media) to training, art-based approaches, mobile cinema, participatory theatre and community meetings (town halls, multi-stakeholder meetings). This multidimensional model makes the analysis of unintended effects by project challenging.

It is important to note that the difficulty evaluating programs with less evidence-base correlates with the difficulty of capturing unintended effects. For example, media activities involving communication and covering a larger target zone tend to be more prone to unintended consequences. One external consultant described media as a specific challenge in evaluation, saying, “Media is almost the major element of overseas aid funding that is the most difficult to pin down in terms of effect in the first place. Both dangers and possibilities of the effect of the media are huge”. These unintended effects are more difficult to capture than a contained activity such as training for example, both in relation to the space and to beneficiaries. Based on this experience, the difficulty in measuring the impact of media programs has

brought SFCG to develop the 3Rs framework to guide the evaluation of media. The extent to which this framework supports the identification of unintended effects will be covered later on.

In Indonesia, arts-based programming was also anticipated to be complex to evaluate. Its objective was to improve relationships and collaboration between local communities and civil society organizations (CSOs) by addressing issues ranging from land and resources, gender and social inclusion. At the beginning of the project, monitoring was conducted with quantitative methods such as surveys. However, this methodology did not provide enough insight to address challenges in the field and to report on the participants' experiences. Very early in the process, the implementing team shifted towards qualitative methods favouring case studies allowing for more in-depth analysis. This anecdote illustrates the importance of acknowledging the type of activity conducted and being open to tailoring monitoring approaches to the activity itself.

Monitoring for activities was not only useful in the peacebuilding field – it has supported programming across all types of sectors. In the case of a project supporting the fight against Ebola in Guinea, SFCG supported the state with communication strategies, following a failed attempt by the state to send national doctors to promote health practices in local areas where they had never worked- and as a result were being rejected by local communities perpetuating the spread of the disease and even creating unexpected conflicts between doctors and community members. In hindsight, the potential seemed predictable, but health workers at the time responding to the crisis did not expect the levels of rejection and suspicion experienced in communities. The evaluation reviewed the consequences of the original project (where unintended outcomes were captured), and then SFCG's support in response. SFCG identified networks of traditional communicators including religious leaders and civil society youth members and trained them in peaceful conflict resolution and peacebuilding so that they had the skills to solve conflicts related to the Ebola crisis in their local areas. While the health project had good intentions, its implementation strategy generated negative unintended effects that were identified through monitoring and addressed with support from SFCG.

Project Design: Time, Reach and Scope

Recognizing the project as a whole – the vision of the project as it is designed and what can be achieved compared to the needs and realities of the community – can also inspire questions that support identifying unintended outcomes. One external evaluator mentioned, “Lots of unintended consequences can be about the scope of the project covering a large territory and population and large variety of demographic, women youth, men. They are variable in themselves”. As discussed in the media examples above, the reach of the project appears to be correlated with the likelihood and the magnitude of potential unintended effects.

Indeed, a project that is aiming at covering a large territory will tend to impact a more diverse population, varied demographically with different needs and responses to activities. The example of a TV show originally broadcasted in three different countries in the MENA region, but also available to watch from other countries not targeted in the project design, led to unexpected audiences in spaces where the program's reach was accidental.⁹ This was primarily generated by the unplanned air coverage of the broadcast. In the same project, evaluators documented that additional activities with youth had a ripple affect as they shared with their family members and peers, who were outside the scope for more targeted behaviour change. 85% of youth participants documented that their family members became more accepting of other groups as youth shared their experiences in trainings. Both of these examples demonstrate that beneficiaries are variables themselves. Hence, unintended effects based on the scope and reach of an intervention is closely correlated with understanding of beneficiaries and inter/intragroup diversity.

The scope and design of a project or programmatic approach also affected how communities received it. An external evaluator explained, "One criteria to understand the impact of the project, the way we promote it is local ownership. We integrate with other activities; there is a need for a lens of local ownership." Insufficient design thinking can make a difference between an intervention perceived as an outsider project being imposed upon people and a project in which local and international actors collaborate to achieve a shared goal. The scope and vision of a project can be analysed to explore these dynamics and whether international cooperation strategies are functioning as intended or need to be shifted. For example, a media project in the MENA region was perceived by communities in rural areas as "from the West and the US" for the reason that neither they, nor the implementing team were fully aware of the project dynamics and funding. While the show received very positive feedback for quality and content (and was thus evaluated positively according to the project design and logframe), the communities shared with the evaluator that they could not support a Western show and would therefore never take full ownership of it, limiting impact in a way that was unforeseen. This illustrates the limitations of top-down approaches and when implementing partners' involvement is not optimized. It also emphasized that success of a program can be conceptualized in different ways, and that it is important to be aware of a project's relationship to the others in its sector. Collective negative perception and impact of western media and influence was something that could not be overcome by creating a show that was relevant and thematically successful. While this could also be considered project failure, the fact that the unintended outcome (or failure) of lack of ownership could not be controlled by quality of the programming and was

⁹ The relative positive or negative effects could not be defined specifically, as the evaluators did not have access to these areas.

affected by a broader scope of programming by other international actors highlights the different how logframe and project design are often too narrow to understand the impact and potential sustainability of a project.

Due to the nature of the international development and peacebuilding fields, budgets for monitoring and evaluation tend to run out at the same time as project's activities. However, evaluations can identify unintended effects better in multi-year projects where the level of impact is likely to be greater, and in evaluations that look beyond the scope of one project itself. For example, a project may focus on knowledge-level change or attitudinal-level change, but those changes can result in actions taken by participants in the project later on that were outside of the intended scope. An SFCG staff member summarized this idea by saying, "The more time spent in the community, the more ways to capture unintended consequences".

There are two particular approaches identified by SFCG's evaluations to take the timing of a project into account. First, multi-year projects were often those used to develop lines of questioning on unintended effects and look beyond the scope and reach of the project. Second, several countries and regions took a larger programmatic approach, combining funds from several projects to conduct evaluations on 'media programming', 'land programming' or 'youth engagement strategy'. This allowed projects to examine the results of work without trying to isolate one project from its many interactions with other international and local factors (including other projects being implemented by the country team). Some projects with multiple iterations were able to examine not only the results of the latest phase of the project, but also longer-term trends of programming with relation to larger impacts that are outside the scope of any one project on its own. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, where they are implementing their fourth phase of the Lobi Mokolo Ya Sika project (supporting security sector reform), the most recent midterm evaluation allowed the team to reflect on longer-term trends identified throughout almost a decade of programming, none of which were in the scope of any individual project.

Differing approaches to capturing positive and negative unintended effects

Unintended effects tend to carry a negative connotation with them. However, experience has demonstrated that interventions can have a wide range of neutral or positive unintended effects. Earlier, unintended effects were defined as "*any effect going against the direction of the original ToC*", meaning there can be both negative and positive unintended effects. This section will investigate the differences and similarities of approaches employed successfully to identify positive and negative unintended effects.

No real consensus

It was noted that both positive and negative unintended effects were difficult to capture because there is no specific methodology allowing for unintended effects to be systematically identified. “Positive unintended effects can be easier to capture in some contexts while negative unintended effects harder in other contexts” illustrates the inconsistency shaping the way we recognize unintended effects in peacebuilding programs. However, there was no consensus amongst the participants on which type of unintended effect was more or less challenging to capture. One evaluator simply said, “There is no difference [...] evaluation reports mention a mix of negative and positive unintended effects.”

The analysis showed that conceptualization of unintended effects may differ depending on the evaluator’s expertise and experience with the context and methodology. Negative unintended effects were mostly regarded as more challenging to capture by evaluators. The inherent inhibition of participants during the data collection stage would be directly linked to this statement. However, evaluators also discussed the challenges of capturing positive unintended effects, as it can be difficult to get evaluation participants to think beyond the intended project outcomes while still gathering enough evidence to link unintended positive effects back to the project activities. The next sections highlight some of the characteristics linked to connecting both positive and negative unintended effects¹⁰.

Positive unintended effects

Positive unintended effects “*most easily come up in a reverse engineering process*¹¹” meaning that most participants will not necessarily have the knowledge about the project design and its Theory of Change, but will be more likely to have a better understanding of the activities and their impact on their local community. From this perspective, the evaluator is better placed to take an outcome based approach, search for what has improved and link it back to the project design to look for unintended effects. An SFCG staff member who worked specifically on outcome-based approaches explained that “sometimes positive unintended effects are not visible easily. They only show up during the conversation as something [the participants] talk about that wasn’t planned in the project design.” In short, it is important to ask first about what is happening in a community more broadly, and then work backwards to understand the contributing and causal factors.

¹⁰ Neutral unintended impacts were not mentioned during the data collection stage

¹¹ Interview with SFCG staff.

An interesting example from a project involving religious leaders in conflict transformation in Burundi makes the case for this approach. The original goal of the project was to support local communities to reduce the risk of conflict escalation leading up to, during, and following the election period in Burundi. However, the trainings conducted amongst religious leaders not only equipped them with mediation and peaceful conflict resolution skills, but also led to a rapprochement between several religious leaders at both intra and inter-faith levels. For the first time, religious leaders from different faiths began collaborating. This unexpected collaborative effort had an unintentional consequence on their respective congregations, allowing believers to attend services from other religious sites affiliated with opposing political parties that they would not have been able to attend in the past. The process of understanding this positive unintended impact was relatively organic and would not have been identified without an open discussion that focused on communities and processes rather than project logic and activities.

Positive unintended effects were perceived as more easily captured when collecting data with groups (focus group discussion or workshops), particularly among homogeneous groups, whereas negative unintended impact would tend to be more easily identified in one-to-one narrowed interviews as participants will be less likely to speak out in front of a group and be intimidated.

Negative unintended effects

As mentioned earlier, there is a natural tendency for informants to be reluctant to talk about negative impacts to external sources (partners, project staff or evaluators). Beyond the inhibition and response bias of project participants to share negative impact of projects in the presence of evaluators or project staff, another layer of difficulty coming into the equation is the one of interpreting negative effects. This implies carefully differentiating between “*things not working and things happening that the project hasn’t planned for*”¹².

While there seems to be no crystal-clear methodology to capture negative unintended effects, participants in this research agreed that the process was generally more direct and deliberate by asking participants for recommendations, what they would change in the project and what they did not like. “It’s always harder to capture negative rather than positive ones,” said one consultant, which affects the way they are approached. Practitioners described using open-ended questions very late in the interview process so that a comfort zone has been created throughout the discussion.

¹² Interview with external consultant that conducted an evaluation for SFCG gathering unintended outcomes.

An example of a hard-to-catch negative unintended effect during a youth project was that of a leader selected to be a speaker for religious tolerance was in fact justifying violence against people building houses of prayers without permission. Youth groups were caught up buying on certain religion only and as a result, some felt misrepresented in the group and withdrew from the project. This unintended effect originated from a less scrutinized group dynamic leading participants to dropout. However, had the youth carried on participating in the activities, negative unintended effects may have been greater than they were.

It can also sometimes be a challenge to discern positive unintended effect from the negatives ones. In Burundi, a difference of interpretation between the lead researcher of a final evaluation and local staff highlighted that there is often disagreement between locals and internationals about what is actually positive or negative – in this case, a practice defending the fighting against polygamy was perceived differently by the two. Following a documentary shown to the community coupled with a strong local policy against polygamy, women in the community felt empowered to address issues around polygamy and protect wives who were replaced by second wives; they did so, however, by focusing on getting the second wife to leave the house by force. This unintended effect perceived as negative by the lead researcher was synonym of progress for the community who saw a shift in their priorities towards protecting women who are victimized by polygamy (albeit, with little thought about the second wife). This was a case of a positive unintended effect (the level of empowerment of the women and their ability to identify issues and pursue their own solutions in communities) that had potential negative effects (the disempowerment of other women through targeted community-led justice). Therefore, it was important to identify unintended effects as complex and deep processes. Several staff and evaluators supported this line of thinking around negative unintended effects, saying that it is important to ‘dig deep’ and get under the layers. The way they are phrased and communicated within both the implementation and evaluation teams largely influence the manner in which they are identified, reported and documented.

Conclusion

Tools, approaches and methods drawn from the peacebuilding field have the merits to provide a new basis for the analysis of unintended effects. While there is no one-size-fits-all approach and every intervention is unique, there are important ways to facilitate the process of recognizing unintended effects early in the programmatic and evaluation stages – ideally before it is too late – when one is able to adjust the program to capitalize on positive effects and reduce negative effects.

Analysis of SFCG's evaluations showed that robust monitoring through qualitative methodologies and an accurate conflict and context analysis supports a broader line of questioning in evaluations themselves, as projects are oriented from the beginning to explore beyond the logframe. In particular, practitioners' intentional consideration of different levels at which cooperation exists is important: the diversity of the audience affected by programs, the activities, the project combining activities, and the programmatic approach combining multiple projects. Designing questions and using frameworks with these different levels in mind can allow for enhanced ability to capture unintended effects and improve reflection upon them. While very few of SFCG's programs was able to do all of these things at once, each project can work within constraints and opportunities to design a line of questioning most appropriate for that project, and evaluators acknowledged this process of prioritization.

Analysis also revealed some misconceptions on the part of evaluators: first, while positive and negative effects require different approaches to capture them, neither appears to be more difficult to capture – and evaluators actually contradict each other on which is more difficult based on their experience and their relation to local contexts. Second, funding and donors, while important, actually do not correlate to the ability to find unintended effects (though they do shape *how* evaluators engage in this effort). Third the use of frameworks and methods developed in peacebuilding are helpful and useful – but still require an eye towards the unintended. Use of the 3R framework and methodologies developed to build project design and reflection into programming guide practitioners towards broader questions, but do not guarantee unintended effects will be found on their own, nor is it their primary purpose. Use of these frameworks and support to improve their utility in capturing broader effects at the organization level could support improvements in this regard.

Last, there is a misconception that the most complex contexts are those with the most active conflicts, and this is not necessarily the case. What is most important is that programmers and evaluators work together to include community perspectives early on and capture the potential for change outside of the project

logframe. Using tools and methods that shape enquiry beyond the logframe are key, as OECD-DAC guidelines do not do this automatically. As seen in Guinea during the Ebola crisis or in Kenya and Tanzania in governance programming, there does not need to be a violent conflict for international cooperation efforts to shape important and complex dynamics. Furthermore, contexts without active conflicts can be just as likely to result in unintended consequences from programming as they shift important relationships, access to services, etc. In particular, SFCG found that its projects focused on women and youth were most effective in capturing unintended outcomes – not because of active conflicts taking place, but because of the wide range of tools available (and utilized) to think creatively about participatory approaches to project design and research for these groups. Lessons from these methods can be applied to other areas, as well, and applied across a variety of contexts and issues. Practitioners working at the nexus of internationally identified goals for development and locally identified community needs can all incorporate research and analysis that supports capturing of unintended effects in program design in addition to OECD-DAC guidelines, which do not push this broader enquiry on their own.

Unintended effects of international cooperation and work in dynamic environments that include both local and international actors can be clearly supported by these lessons learned. Most importantly, research during project design leads us to better ask the right questions early on to identify potential negative perceptions of international actors (as was the case in MENA television programming), or to dig deeper into our understanding of what is a positive and negative effect (as seen in Burundi). Not only is it important to build these approaches into our line of questioning from the beginning of a project, but international cooperation also requires us to question our assumptions about negative and positive effects. To weigh the complexity of effects fully, practitioners must support these discussions throughout the life of projects and programming to better define and identify how communities experience international cooperation efforts.

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