
Measuring Impact in Intervention Programming for Peacebuilding in Conflict Context

Akinyoade, Victor Ademola, Peace and Conflict Studies Program, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan (Ibadan, Nigeria).

Abstract: *Measuring impact in intervention programming in conflict context, involves the interactions between stages of an intervention and every element of the conflict context. The paper presents twenty-four such potential interactions in a conceptual framework—Matrix of Potential Interactions. These inevitable interactions have implications, positive or negative for the conflict situation. The paper thus argues for measurement of impact in terms of the implications of these interactions on a given conflict situation. It suggests new perspectives in conceptualizing and theorizing impact measurement. It is an attempt to improve on earlier perspective by scholars like Kenneth Bush, Mary Anderson, Adam Barbolet et al., Jonathan Goodhand, etc. This perspective may inform a more robust Peace and Conflict Sensitive Intervention and pave way for a Peace and Conflict Sensitivity Theory for practice and scholarship in intervention programming.*

1 Introduction

This paper is essentially about the interactions of intervention and conflict context and the implications these have on the conflict situation. We therefore need to put intervention, conflict context and conflict situation in proper perspectives. Intervention in this discourse refers to a range of deliberate developmental, peacebuilding, or humanitarian initiatives or activities, which aim at positively influencing a conflict situation to forestall exacerbation of the conflict and bring about a reduction in violent conflict behaviors. Therefore, an intervention has the inherent goal of influencing a conflict situation positively, to build peace and deescalate violent conflict. Peacebuilding and conflict transformation (in its broadest sense) could be said to be critical goals of intervention in settings characterized by violent conflict (Akinyoade, 2011). Development intervention refers to ‘[l]ong-term efforts aimed at bringing improvements

in the economic, political, and social status, environmental stability and quality of life of the population especially the poor and disadvantaged.’ (The Resource Pack, 2004) Humanitarian assistance refers to ‘[a]ctivities designed to rapidly reduce human suffering in emergency situations, especially when local authorities are unable or unwilling to provide relief. Peacebuilding interventions are [m]easures designed to consolidate peaceful relations and strengthen viable political, socio-economic, and cultural institutions capable of mediating conflict, as well as strengthen other mechanisms that will either create or support the creation of necessary conditions for sustained peace. (The Resource Pack, 2004)

Intervention in the context of this discourse has three distinct stages—planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. These have traditional meanings, which are slightly different from their usage in peace and conflict sensitive intervention. In its traditional usage, planning means the process through which problems are identified, their causal linkages identified and analyzed, and effective solutions developed. It informs the development of a program with predefined objectives, activities, implementation process and verifiable indicators of progress. Traditional implementation refers to the ‘...process of realizing objectives by enacting the activities designed in the planning process...’ (The Resource Pack, 2004: 4) that is, the operationalisation of the proposed plans. It involves regular progress reviews to enable plans to be adjusted if necessary. Traditional monitoring examines a project’s actual outputs and impacts at the implementation stage. It provides project team with information to assess progress in meeting project objectives, and adjust implementation activities if need be. Data generated at monitoring stage can be useful during project evaluation. Traditionally, evaluation refers to a one-off assessment, which usually takes place at the end of a project, although it can be undertaken to review a project mid-way. It uses systematically applied objective criteria to assess an ongoing or completed project, its design, implementation and overall results in the light of its stated goals and objectives.

Conflict context on the other hand means the operating environment, i.e. geographical or social

environment where conflict exists. It ranges from the micro, meso and macro levels, that is, it could be community, district/province, region, country, or transnational. A given conflict context has of four elements—actors, causes, profile and dynamics (The Resource Pack, 2004). Actors in a conflict refer to individuals, groups, and institutions who contribute to the conflict, who are affected by the conflict (positively or negatively), and/or involved in dealing with the conflict. Interests, goals, positions, capacities and relationships with other actors differentiate actors from one another. Causes of conflict are factors that contribute to people's grievances. These may be structural, proximate or triggers. Structural factors are those pervasive factors that have been built into the policies, structures and fabric of a society and which may increase the likelihood of violence. Proximate factors are those that make for an atmosphere conducive for violent conflict or its escalation. While triggers are single acts, events, or their anticipation that sets off or escalate violent conflict; that is, factors that affect the timing of the onset of a violent conflict. This explains why the conflict started then, that it, the timing and not why it started. Conflict profile is a brief characterization of the context in which an intervention will be situated. Including its, political, economic, socio-cultural context, emergent issues, and history of conflict. Conflict dynamics refer to the interaction between conflict causes, actors and profile. It includes current conflict trends, windows of opportunity and scenarios that can be developed from the analyses of the causes, actors and profile of conflict (The Resource Pack, 2004).

Conflict situation refers to a particular set of prevalent circumstances existing in a particular place at a particular time as a result of two or more parties disagreeing and acting in pursuant of perceived incompatible goals in the distribution of material or symbolic resources. It is the prevalent conflict trend between/among parties to the conflict. It is from the perspective of the implications for conflict situation that the interactions of intervention and context become meaningful.

2. Programming Intervention for Peacebuilding in Conflict Context

Programming intervention in non-conflict context is not the same as in conflict context. Experts and professionals in the field of intervention programming in conflict context have identified the inevitable interactions between an intervention and such context. Intervention has the potential to either support peace or conflict in conflict context. However, the need to ensure that their intervention in conflict does not worsen the conflict situation calls for a better understanding of the dynamics involved in intervention-context interactions. This informed the development of theories, methodologies, frameworks or approaches to ensure that intervention does more good than harm in a conflict setting. There have been coining of terms and development of tools, methodologies and frameworks that emphasize the need to ensure that intervention programming is sensitive to the dynamics of peace and conflict in conflict settings. Beginning in the nineties, many scholars have focused their works on explaining the potential relationships between intervention and conflict context. They have directed efforts at showcasing these relationships and guide interveners in conflict to avoid contributing negatively to the situation but rather to maximize the positive contributions of their intervention. Notable methodologies include Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment, Conflict Sensitivity, Conflict Impact Assessment; Conflict Sensitive Programming; Peace and Conflict Development Analysis; Conflict Impact Assessment System; Conflict Sensitive Approaches; Local Capacities for

Peace (LCP) –“Do no Harm”; Conflict Assessment; Conflict Risk Analysis; Peace & Conflict Assessment Model (PCA); Strategic Conflict Assessment; and Conflict Development Analysis (Bush, 2005) Although “...all users and promoters of the various concepts and terminologies have their own opinions” and probably biases as well (Barbolet, Adams, Rachel Goldwyn, Hesta Groenewald, and Andrew Sheriff, 2005). The concerns and guiding principles expounded by these methodologies are essentially the same. The overarching objective is to program intervention for peacebuilding in conflict context. This is intervention programming that avoids exacerbating the conflict and builds upon, rather than weakens or destroys, the existing fragile peace in the conflict setting.

Such frameworks are hinged on the premise that interventions in conflict situations are never neutral; rather they have measurable impacts on the structures and processes of peace and conflict of the context. They also, assume, implicitly or otherwise, that the context impacts the intervention programming. Hence the impacts are mutual. Moreover, these mutual impacts can either be negative, conflict exacerbating impacts or positive, peacebuilding impacts. Consequently, programming intervention in conflict-prone setting needs to be sensitive to these things. This is peace and conflict sensitive intervention. Some of the most influential names in this endeavor include Kenneth Bush (Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment) and Mary Anderson (Do No Harm), Adams Barbolet (Conflict Sensitivity), and Jonathan Goodhand. DFID, USAID, the World Bank, Berghof Center for Conflict Management, International Alert are among the leading organizations that have made considerable contributions, in theory and practice, to the subfield of intervention programming for peacebuilding in conflict context.

For instance, Bush (1998; 1999; 2003; 2005) consistently argues that in conflict settings, intervention does not necessarily translate to peace. Supporting one of the claims above, he submits that by intervention support or oppose conflict or peace in the context by introducing new dynamics into the conflict environment. In the event that the dynamics support conflict, the consequence is to trigger, exacerbate, or escalate tension or conflict. This it does by

challenging traditional values or authority structures, to disrupt gender, or other socially determined roles, and raises the stakes of economic competition, creating “winners” and “losers.” The politics of project sitting, selection of beneficiaries and the whole process of project planning, implementation and monitoring have serious implications for peace and conflict dynamics in a community experiencing violent conflict says Bush. In other words, a well-conceived, innocently executed intervention can tilt the scale of events in favor of conflict in a given locale. The mild outcome of this could be the strengthening of feelings of hatred, suspicion, prejudice, marginalization, superiority, inferiority among groups. Violent or armed conflict may be a more serious outcome. However, interventions can have peace building impacts in an environment. This is possible when such initiatives diffuse inter group tension through encouraging positive behaviors among groups. For instance, initiatives may foster actions or projects that are inclusive of hostile groups. Intervention may also include actions that are exclusively building peace, that is, peacebuilding.

2.1 Conceptual Underbrush

Extant literature in impact measurement talks about the impact of an intervention on the context and the impact of the context on the intervention, separately. This has an implicit assumption that these impacts are independent of one another. However, the dynamics of intervention-context relationship show that these impacts are in continual relationship. This is why describing these relationships as ‘interactions’ rather than ‘impacts’ may be closer to reality. To do otherwise is to mis-conceptualize the reality of the bi-directional, multi-layered impact of intervention and context. This seemingly minor mis-conceptualization has serious implications for theorizing and practice of impact measurement. When properly conceptualized, the only impact we will talk about is the impact of these interactions on the conflict situation. That is, the implications of the intervention-context interaction on the conflict situation.

When we talked about these impacts separately, emphasis was laid on the potential impact an intervention could have on the context. While the potential impact of the

context on intervention was of far less importance. However, one could argue that once intervention comes into a conflict context, it will be hard to determine which impact will be salient in that particular situation. Previous conceptualization however, has biases for intervention's impact on the context. The danger in this is that intervention workers may be unduly primed for intervention's impact while whereas context's impact on the intervention may be salient in that particular situation. Also, previously, potential impacts were broadly categorized into two—conflict-creating impact and peacebuilding impact. The former being negative impacts while the latter is taken to be positive impacts. Conflict impact refers to those factors that increase the chances that conflict will be dealt with through the use of violence. While peacebuilding impact refers to those factors that strengthen the chances for peace and decrease the chances that violent conflict will break out, continue, or start again. (Bush, 1998; Bush and Opp, 1999; Bush, 2003) However, this conceptualizing may be problematic too. The first problem has to do with conceptualizing impact as “factors” (in the description of the conflict and peace impacts above). For instance, factors refer to things influencing or contributing to the outcome of something. Then going by the definition, conflict impact *refers to those things contributing to the chances that conflict will be dealt with through violence*. The question now is: are ‘those things’ prelude to violence or are they outcome or consequence themselves? While the former is suggested in the definitions of conflict and peace impacts above, the terms ‘conflict impact’ or ‘peace impact’ suggest the latter—outcome, consequence or result of conflict. Yet another possible area of possible confusion is the term “conflict impact”. The term could be taken to mean those impacts on conflict or impact that supports or creates conflict. Same reasoning applies to “peace impact.” If it refers to those impacts on conflict, then it could be positive or negative. While positive impact (e.g. de-escalation of violence) on conflict will be good, negative impact (e.g. escalation of violent behavior) will be bad. If conflict impact refers to impacts supporting or creating conflict (as the definition above refers to on the surface), then it will mean those things contributing to conflict exacerbation or undermining peace. This will be entirely negative, since both conflict

exacerbation and peace undermining are likely to increase the chances that conflict will be dealt with through violence. These are some of the problems of conceptualizing and theorizing impact in terms of the implication of intervention on its context and vice versa. Although Bush does a good job in practical demonstration of the “factors” in his field guides/notes (Bush, Hands-on PCIA (Part one): A Handbook of Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA). Author’s Version., 2003), however, precise conceptualization and theorizing of these impacts is required for a good concept-theory and theory-practice fits.

3. Intervention-Context Interaction (ICI) Perspective in Impact Measurement

To achieve a good concept-theory and theory-practice fits, we may need to conceptualize and theorize assessment or evaluation of impacts as an implication of the mutual interactions of intervention and context on a given conflict situation. Bush and others scholars’ previous conceptualization cum categorization of impacts are doubtless a good start. This proposed approach, that is, interaction perspective, conceptualizes impacts in terms of the implications (positive or negative) of the inevitable interactions between the stages of intervention and the elements of context for the conflict situation. It may achieve a better reality-conceptualization, concept-theory and theory-practice fits. Bush’s argument that intervention introduces new dynamics, which can either support or oppose conflict or peace into the conflict environment, is reflective of this interaction perspective. The ‘dynamics’ are the interactions of the intervention and its context, and has Bush rightly argued, they have implications for the conflict situation—either supporting conflict or peace.

Presenting the potential interactions of intervention and context in a matrix gives a visual that may aid our understanding. In the matrix, each stage of an intervention and each element of a context are represented with alphabets. P stands for planning, I for implementation, ME for monitoring and evaluation; A for actors, C for causes, Pr for profile and D for dynamics.

Figure 1. Matrix of Potential Intervention-Context Interactions

<i>Stages: Planning</i>	<i>Implementation</i>	<i>Monitoring & Evaluation</i>
PA—AP	IA—AI	MEA—AME
PC—CP	IC—CI	MEC—CME
PPr—PrP	IPr—PrI	MEP—PME
PD—DP	ID—DI	MED—DME

Source: (Akinyoade, Peace and Conflict Sensitive Programming, 2010)

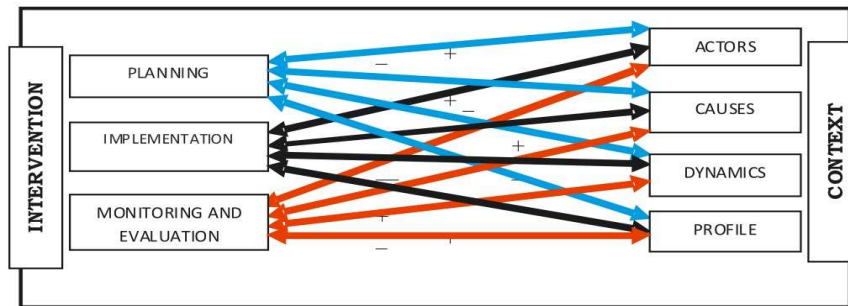
PA represents the impact of planning on actors, while AP stands for the impact of actors on planning. PA—AP, therefore, represents the interactions between one stage of an intervention, that is, planning with an element of the context—actors. PA may be positive or negative, same goes for AP. In essence, in planning—actors interactions, there are four potential impacts: positive planning—actors (+PA) impact; positive actors—planning (+AP) impact; negative planning—actors impact (-PA); and negative actors—planning (-AP) impact. +PA describes a situation where the planning of an intervention has a positive impact on the actors in a conflict, maybe through bringing erstwhile ‘enemies’ together in a constructive activity, e.g. project planning, inclusive of activities to improve communications and inter-group relationships among conflict parties. Positive AP (+AP) is when actors, through their contributions impact positively on the planning of an intervention. -PA and -AP are negative impact of planning on actors and of actors on planning respectively. For instance, planning may involve a party and neglect other(s) or give better treatment or special recognition to a party at the expense of the other(s). This may perpetuate old tensions or foment new ones among parties. Alternatively, actors’ conflict behaviors may disrupt planning or inform bad decisions.

From the matrix, the planning stage has *four potential impacts* with each of the four elements of the context. In all, it has *sixteen potential impacts* with all the elements of the context—actors, causes, profile and dynamics. These

potential impacts have equal number (eight each) of both positive and negative ‘charges.’ Similar cases can be made for other stages (implementation and monitoring and evaluation) as well. This brings the total number of *potential impacts* between intervention and contexts to forty-eight—twenty-four potential positive and twenty-four potential negative impacts. This implies that an ICI carries equal potential to contribute positively or negatively to a given conflict situation. This, however, does not make it neutral, as will be expected in mathematical equations. Similarly, unlike mathematical rules, two negative impacts do not result in a positive impact; rather it *may* be a ‘squared negative.’ Also, a negative and positive impact do not automatically become a negative impact (that is a little comforting), the outcome may be positive or negative.

As shown in the conceptual framework below (figure 2), each of the elements of the context can impact and be impacted, positively or negatively, by each stage of the intervention. These mutual, multi-layered bi-directional impacts of intervention and context constitute a loop of interactions. The loop represents interactions’ potential impact on the conflict situation. The loop comprises *forty-eight possible interactions* between intervention and conflict context. These interactions produce the dynamics that support peace or conflict in a conflict situation.

Figure 2. Intervention-Context Interactions



Source: (Akinyoade, Peace and Conflict Sensitive Programming, 2010)

Intervention programming in conflict context has three principal spheres—an intervention program, a context (a specific geographical, socio-cultural and political environment) and a conflict situation. Of these three spheres, the conflict situation is the most important. This is because the essence of any intervention in a conflict setting is not the intervention itself but to improve on the conflict situation. Similarly, what attracts an intervention to a context (of conflict) is not the physical, cultural or socio-political environment, but the conflict situation. If the conflict situation is the most important sphere, therefore, it may be logical to assess or measure impact using it as a reference point. Unlike previous conceptualizations and theorizing about intervention in conflict context, which attempted to measure impact in terms of either the intervention or the context the interaction perspective measures impact in terms of the conflict situation. Thus it talks about interaction's negative impacts and interaction's positive impacts on a given conflict situation. Negative impacts on a conflict situation include both *conflict exacerbating impacts* and *peace undermining/destroying impacts*. Examples of the former are increase in tension, suspicion, distrust/mistrust among conflicting groups, acts of violence, etc. Examples of the latter will be decrease in tranquility, trust, and mutual confidence amongst groups, weakening of the local fabrics, capacities and infrastructures

of peace, etc. On the other hand, interaction's positive impacts on peace will include *peacebuilding impacts* and *conflict reducing impacts*. Instances of the former include increase in tranquility, confidence building, consensus, cooperation/collaboration among conflict parties, empowerment in peacebuilding for parties, recognition, social justice, strengthening and building local capacities for peace. While examples of conflict-reducing impact will include decrease in tension, suspicion, distrust/mistrust among conflicting groups, acts of violence, empowerment in creative conflict transformation, etc., through such activities as conflict management workshops, consensus workshops, etc.

The conceptual frameworks above clarify concepts and dynamics of programming intervention in conflict context. The clarifications may aid the evolution of the much-needed theory in intervention programming, maybe a Peace and Conflict Sensitivity Theory.

4. Implications for Intervention Programming

The ICI perspective has implications for programming of intervention in conflict setting. The frameworks help the practitioners to disaggregate the potential interactions of intervention and context into manageable bits. She becomes aware, right from the outset, what interaction may occur between her intervention and the context. Also, it helps her to midwife and monitor the desired impact of each stage of the programming on each element of the context and vice versa. This may help her avoid the negative impacts and maximize the positive impacts, thereby increasing the overall positive contributions of the intervention to the conflict situation. For instance, it helps her to involve the actors in every stage of the programming, which arguably is very critical to peacebuilding in conflict situation.

In addition, the perspective helps underscore the critical role of intervenors as one of the three principal elements in determining what contributions an intervention will make to a conflict situation. The other two are what is

being done and how it is being done. I will call them the *who*, the *what* and the *how*. The *who* refers to the intervening agency and its staff, and to a lesser extent, its partners, the *what* refers to the actual intervention projects or initiatives, and the *how* to policies, operations and programming of the agencies and its partners. While I concur with Bush's (1999) argument that *how* an intervention is being done is far more important than *what* is being done in conflict setting, the interactions' perspective to impact measurement suggests that the *who* may be the most important factor in intervening in a conflict situation. *What* is being done is relatively of less importance. This is because, based on the understanding of the ICI, the peace and conflict sensitivity competence or capacity of the *who* will go to a great extent in determining both the *how* and the *what*. This competence is the capacity of an organization to understand the conflict context for which intervention is planned, its intervention, the ICI, and act upon this understanding to avoid negative impacts and maximize positive impacts (Barbolet, Adams, Rachel Goldwyn, Hesta Groenewald, and Andrew Sheriff, 2005). This competence significantly improves the likelihood that the *how* and the *what* will trigger positive impacts and thus contribute positively to the conflict situation. In addition, the perspective makes scholars and practitioners in the nexus of intervention, conflict and peace to consciously maintain the subtle distinction between conflict management (in its broadest terms) and peacebuilding in their works. It is particularly important to professionals in this field to be conscious that resolving or transforming a conflict does not necessarily lead to peacebuilding. Although in both theory and practice, conflict management and peacebuilding are quite distinct, scholars and practitioners in intervention-conflict interaction more often than not fail to maintain this distinction in their analyses and programming. The ICI perspective will help them achieve this.

Furthermore, the ICI perspective will help practitioners to mainstream peace and conflict sensitivity in every stage of intervention programming. This means moving from traditional programming to peace and conflict sensitive programming. That is, doing peace and conflict sensitive

planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation in a conflict setting, rather than the traditional planning, implementation, and monitoring and implementation. Traditional planning becomes a peace and conflict sensitive planning when it incorporates conflict analyses—causes, actors, profile, and dynamics. And traditional implementation becomes peace and conflict sensitive when its goal is to maximize positive and reducing negative impacts on the context. This can be achieved by closely scrutinizing the context through regular updating of the conflict analyses. Traditional monitoring becomes peace and conflict sensitive when it incorporates an understanding of the elements of conflict context into its processes and activities. The goal is to better understand the context and the intervention and the interactions between them with the intent of maximizing the positive and reducing the negative impacts of the intervention on the conflict dynamics. Peace and conflict sensitive monitoring may therefore inform changes or adjustments to intervention activities. A peace and conflict sensitive evaluation ‘...incorporates a detailed understanding of the operating context in terms of historical, actual or potential conflict into traditional evaluation activities and processes.’ It seeks ‘...to understand the overall impact a given intervention has had on this context, and the context on the intervention. These evaluations can then be used to adjust subsequent phases of an ongoing initiative, or gain lessons for future initiatives.’ (Introduction to the Resource Pact, 2004: 4). With such capacity, an agency intervening in conflict context will be better equipped to do more good and less harm with its intervention.

5. Conclusion

Scholars and practitioners have been concerned about the interactions of in intervention, conflict and peace in conflict settings. While recognizing the mutual impacts of intervention and its context, these works however, have emphasized the potential impact of an intervention on its context and implicitly played down the potential impacts of context on intervention. As such the realities of the relationship of intervention and context are not well

captured in their conceptualization and theorizing about intervention programming. Although these works are a good start, this paper has argued that this perspective may no longer be good enough for a proper concept-theory and theory-practice fits required for peace scholarship and practice. The paper argues that of the three spheres—intervention, context, and conflict situation—that constitute the environment of intervention programming, the conflict situation is the most important. It therefore proposes a perspective that measures impact in terms of the implications of the intervention-context interactions for conflict situation. The proposed perspective—intervention-context interaction (ICI) or interactions’ perspective for short—measures the mutual interactions of every stage of an intervention and every element of contexts and its implications for the conflict situation. It is a simultaneous measurement of joint impacts of intervention and context on each other and its implications for the conflict situation. The interactions’ perspective facilitates a finer distinction of and among the impacts leading to a better theoretical understanding of relationship between conflict, intervention and peacebuilding. This may inform programming that delivers more positive dividends on a given conflict situation. Also, it may contribute to the development of the much needed Peace and Conflict Sensitivity Theory in intervention programming for peacebuilding in conflict context.

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