Chapter 7

Everyday Peace Indicators: Renegotiating Rigor for Peacebuilding Evidence

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Peacebuilding evaluation plays a critical role in the context of international conflict response. Serious efforts to monitor and evaluate programs and policies provide the opportunity not only to utilize evidence for more sustainable peacebuilding praxis but also to advocate for and demonstrate the importance of peacebuilding endeavors in conflict-affected contexts. This is particularly important especially in localities where the consequences of a reliance on empirically unsubstantiated assertions about peacebuilding effectiveness are magnified by the fragility of these violent societies. In these contexts, where situations are often extreme, complex, and fast-moving, poorly designed programs can amplify the destructive impacts with detrimental results that can be "corrosive, explosive and lethal" (Bush and Duggan 2015, 20). Additionally, the challenge of demonstrating peacebuilding effectiveness to donors hampers the sector's ability to raise funds. Effective evaluations can, therefore, also be used as

persuasive advocacy tools for donors and governments to redirect funding to the peacebuilding sector that might otherwise go to security- and military-related programs. Therefore, in the current climate of the reappraisal of international efforts toward peacebuilding (UN 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Mac Ginty 2011; Richmond and Mitchell 2011; Richmond 2016), policymakers and practitioners have been called to reevaluate some of the peacebuilding community's unquestioned assumptions against a rubric of solid evidence.

Yet there is no consensus pertaining to what constitutes solid peacebuilding evidence and how to most effectively evaluate a program with mercurial and multidimensional goals such as peace or reconciliation. Impact evaluations, those that seek to understand the effects of an intervention, vary significantly across agencies, with some requiring scientific randomized control trials or experimental evaluation designs and others open to more interpretive, qualitative methods that provide context-specific detail or participatory approaches such as participatory impact assessments (Bamberger, Rugh, and Mabry 2011, 17; Catley et al. 2007). Although evaluations in peacebuilding are infrequently impact evaluations, they also vary significantly depending on the funding or implementing agencies commissioning the evaluations. Selecting evaluation approaches is a complex process that involves taking into consideration a variety of factors such as cost, time, available information, accessibility, and the priorities of the various stakeholders involved. Therefore, many evaluation approaches in peacebuilding attend to learning and inclusiveness (Rogers 2012), but few of these are concerned with the rigor and evidence-based results currently called for by the international community. Both elements are necessary to gather comprehensive evidence of peacebuilding effectiveness.

This chapter responds to these lacunae by discussing how the Everyday Peace Indicators (EPIs) approach addresses the complexity of power dynamics and rigor in peacebuilding evaluation at the local level.[1] We argue that mainstreaming "everyday" measures of peacefulness defined by local communities facilitates a renegotiation of what constitutes rigorous, robust,

local-level peacebuilding evidence. This renegotiation process of enabling communities most affected by violence to set the agenda for what gets measured is a concrete way to include localities in a circulation of power among constituents at the elite, state, regional, and international level in peacebuilding programs (Mac Ginty and Richmond 2016). By collecting community-generated indicators to produce participatory statistics that can be used in various evaluation designs, including experimental ones, many different approaches to monitoring and evaluation in peacebuilding can be attuned to the needs and welfare of the communities experiencing violence and has the potential to dramatically improve everyday lives.[2]

We now proceed to briefly discuss the reasons for developing community-generated indicators as well as provide some background of the EPI project. We then give a very brief overview of the steps involved in generating the indicators and continue by expanding on the challenges of rigor and power in evaluation.

CAPTURING THE "BEGUILINGLY SIMPLE"

There is growing recognition in the policy and practitioner communities that there are limitations to the existing suite of "top-down" or "off-the-shelf" indicators for a wide range of concepts related to recovery from conflict and disasters (Holt 2013). The following are only some of the limitations of orthodox indicators that the EPI approach addresses. First, the complex and multidimensional nature of peace and conflict means attempts to measure these constructs often rely on proxy indicators, where a proxy indicator is an observed outcome coupled with an assumption (Corlazzoli and White 2013). A classic example of this is Thomas Friedman's "Golden Arches Theory of Conflict Prevention." Extending Kant's Democratic Peace Theory to that of a Capitalist Peace Theory, Friedman argues that the prevalence of McDonald's fast-food chains in two countries is an indicator that those countries will not go to war with each other, where the cosmopolitan assumption is that global commerce is incompatible with

interstate conflict (Friedman 1999, 248–275). What make the everyday indicators more accurate than many top-down indicators at capturing concepts such as peace are that attendant assumptions originate from within the communities as opposed to being created by external peacebuilding experts. Second, many peacebuilding indicators are limited to specific project or program evaluations, which may tell us little about the wider dynamics of the transition society. While EPIs can be used to inform program design and gauge policy priority alignment, communities generate their own indicators of success that are mostly unrelated to any one project and offer a better means of understanding change over time for a particular locality. Third, indicators traditionally associated with peace indices like the Global Peace Index, the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, the Uppsala Conflict Data Program, or various country-specific reconciliation barometers have issues with scale, focusing on national-level statistics, and may be too broad to adequately reflect the subtle differences within and between communities (Firchow 2018). The everyday indicators provide a more focused view of local-level perceptions of peace. Fourth, issues of power arise as current indicator exercises are often top-down and originate from the Global North, with outside actors initiating, organizing, and designing surveys. The surveys developed through the EPI process include questions that are identified, refined, and articulated by community members. Finally, the marginalized position of community members may be reinforced by the ways indicators are represented and disseminated, for example, the statistical rendering of data may not be the lens through which communities see themselves. By focusing on everyday peace, communities can "confront the dominant narratives that associate peacebuilding expertise with outsiders and essentializes 'locals' as insular and passive" (Mac Ginty 2014, 551).

The EPI approach is an attempt at creating a methodological tool to capture familiar phenomena that seem within reach, but often escape apprehension. It attempts to capture the beguilingly simple nature of everyday social constructs related to sustainable peace and systematically collect them for analysis to make claims about peacebuilding effectiveness

(Mac Ginty 2014, 550). The framework is an approach to understanding and tracking changes in hard-to-measure concepts like peace, reconciliation, governance, and violent extremism. Instead of indicators of success being identified by experts and scholars, communities themselves are asked to identify their own everyday indicators, which are then measured longitudinally to assess changes in community views of peace. This approach is guided by the premise that communities affected by violence know best what peace means to them and should therefore be the principal source of information on the efficacy of peacebuilding interventions (Firchow 2018). Emerging from a long history of critical scholarship in international relations (Said 1978; Cox 1981; Scott 1990; Bhabha 1994), sustainable development (Chambers 1983, 1987, 2017; Miller 2005), and critical peace research (Duffield 2001, 2007; Pugh 2005; Richmond 2010; Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013; Chandler 2015), the EPI framework is sympathetic to bottom-up, participatory approaches. As such, it is a tool to assist communities, practitioners, and policymakers in questioning the assumptions that undergird the existing peacebuilding measurement systems that may promote an overdependence on hegemonic orthodoxies.

Because "major policy assumptions and decisions are based on indicator systems that give a partial, rather than full, picture of the reality on the ground" (Firchow and Mac Ginty 2017b, 22), "it is possible that flawed evaluation methods lead us to set and pursue the wrong goals and targets" (Firchow 2018, 35). This ultimately undermines peacebuilding efforts by failing to meet the needs and expectations of the very people transitioning from violent contexts. However, there are also limitations with using strictly bottom-up indicators, including issues with access, credibility, and comparability. Since, "conflicts as phenomena are necessarily complex and unlikely to be rendered accurately through a single methodological, ontological, and epistemological lens" (Firchow and Mac Ginty 2017b, 23), EPI addresses the limitations of orthodox, as well as purely bottom-up indicators, by offering a hybrid approach to measuring social change.

Therefore, EPIs seek to complement, not replace, orthodox or top-down indicators as community-level approaches are "negotiated and harmonized with macro-approaches in order to more effectively measure peace" (Firchow 2018, 22). Part of this hybridization is ontological in that EPI addresses the impasse between different worldviews by maintaining that perceptions and social understandings are important in determining whose reality counts. By systematically reconstructing those perceptions and identifying tangible changes, as articulated by community members in everyday terms, the everyday indicators are able to quantitatively communicate the various understandings of social change. Ultimately, by systematizing a process for having community-sourced indicators to guide the development and evaluation of programs and policies, the EPI framework fosters learning for both outsiders and locals that moves toward more emancipatory peacebuilding for realizing sustainable peace.

A VERY BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE EVERYDAY PEACE INDICATORS PROCESS

We will now proceed to provide the readers with an overview of the basic four-step EPI process, which has already been employed in ten countries on three continents including Uganda, Colombia, and Afghanistan, to measure the changes in social constructs based on peacebuilding programmatic needs.[3] *Stage one* consists of the development of everyday indicators. Local partners conduct representative focus group discussions with community members and generate a long list of indicators that people are already using in their daily lives to measure their own peacefulness; examples could be participating in a local festival or seeing antennas on rooftops. The *second stage* consists of a two-step verification process where participants first refine the original lists by adding or subtracting indicators, then rank the indicators by voting with additional community members to identify the most representative indicators of the community. *Stage three* convenes local partners and program managers to use the everyday indicators as an

analysis and potential diagnostic tool to understand community priorities and design projects and programs in a grounding process to meet the needs of the communities to foster greater ownership and sustainability. In *stage four*, local fieldworkers survey the community using mobile phone applications with the refined list of indicators. Surveys are then administered to be able to track changes in people's perceptions of peace and safety in their communities (Firchow and Mac Ginty 2017a).

The EPI process has undergone a series of iterations from initial conceptualization, to pilot projects, to various implementations and is adaptable based on the needs of the community, evaluation design, and partner organizations in various sectors such as research, design, monitoring, evaluation, or even peacebuilding interventions themselves. Most important in the indicator collection process is the probing for detail. Detailed indicators can tell us much more about the specifics of how individuals in a community are navigating their lives, what their priorities are, and what assistance might be necessary to improve their lives. In order to do this, we ask questions about the signs people use in their everyday lives to determine whether or not they are at peace. These are unrelated to any project or program evaluation and depend entirely on the technical knowledge that we use in our everyday lives in order to make decisions about our well-being. Indicators can be circumstantial, such as "seeing large groups of men gathering at my corner store," or aspirational, such as "being attended in a timely fashion by a local doctor when I am sick," or contextual, such as "seeing the boda-boda drivers travel to different areas." The indicators themselves can tell us a lot about what is happening in a community. However, the everyday indicators themselves can be complex since many issues arise concurrently. Therefore, the careful coding and categorizing of the indicators into factors or categories help in giving a broader overview of the areas people prioritize. For example, the boda-boda driver indicator might be coded into the daily security category or the participating in local festivals indicator into the social category. Once all the indicators are coded into different categories, this can give us an idea of the priorities of community members. In addition, looking at the ranking and

number of votes each indicator has received also allows us to identify trends in communities.

HOW ARE EVERYDAY PEACE INDICATORS RIGOROUS?

Before discussing rigor for peacebuilding evaluation, it should be noted that the drive for evidential rigor emerges from the "technocratic turn" of the peacebuilding sector that privileges a bureaucratic imperative through a process of professionalization and standardization and lays claim to neutrality and efficiency (Mac Ginty 2012). This turn toward technocracy and the attendant results and evidence agenda are part of the broader "new public management" paradigm patterned after corporate sector practices intended to "maximize shareholder profit and [eschew] any explicit ideological commitment" (Eyben et al. 2015, 35). However, as Centeno contends, technocracy can be viewed as an "ideology of method" which is "a belief in the ability to arrive at the optimal answer to any discussion through the application of particular practices" (1993, 312). Given this, deciding what factors specifically constitute "rigor" depends largely on what research paradigm, tacit values, and approach an evaluation subscribes to. Therefore, referring to multiple perspectives can assist us in constructing a general view of rigor for research and evaluation, which can provide the following: the means by which integrity and competence are confirmed (Tobin and Begley 2004). The way to demonstrate legitimacy or soundness of research processes (Coryn 2007), the strength of the underlying research design and the confidence with which conclusions can be drawn (Braverman and Arnold 2008), and a measure of technical proficiency intended to instill confidence about the factual validity of the claims being advanced (Walt 2013). These considerations relate to a myriad of specific elements of evaluations, including design, conceptualization of outcomes, measurement strategies, and approaches to analysis among others (Braverman and Arnold 2008, 73–74) and are weighted against factors like

budget, time, funder requirements, organizational culture, evaluator expertise, burden on participants, and standards in the field (Braverman and Arnold 2008, 75–79), like the OECD-DAC Criteria (2012), or principles of conflict sensitivity (Anderson 1999; Handschin, Abitbol, and Alluri 2016).

In light of these factors, rigor can be viewed as a continuum ranging from pragmatic to scientific, with research leaning more toward the scientific and evaluation leaning more toward the pragmatic (Rogers 2012, 28). Rigor for evaluation produces conclusions that are reasonable, justifiable, plausible, warranted, and useful, where the gold standard for most rigorous evaluations is methodological appropriateness and relevance (Patton 2011). As such, judgments about rigor are not absolute and need to be conceptualized in shades of gray rather than black and white as they are relative to purpose and intended use of evaluations (Patton 2008). It is important to remember that the level of rigor attained in research is typically not possible in evaluation (see also d'Estrée, chapter 1, this volume). Among other considerations, budgets and time limitations restrict the level of rigor possible in evaluations, factors that are less likely to restrict scholarly research. Accordingly, the EPI framework "recognizes that conflict-affected societies do not constitute a laboratory and thus we cannot expect scientific purism" (Mac Ginty and Firchow 2014, 34). Such expectations can lead to indicators being "precisely wrong" by having methodological rigor, while being inaccurate or meaningless to those experiencing conflict. The distinction between methodologically sound and statistically strong evaluations is important to keep in mind here (Bamberger, Rugh, and Mabry 2011, 231). Often statistically strong designs can miss the forest for the trees because of their focus on addressing statistical threats rather than other methodological concerns. The EPI approach reconciles the desire to capture local voices, while meeting the demands of rigor expected by donors and the peacebuilding community by attending as much as possible to generally accepted standards of quality for social science research. Drawing on Lincoln and Guba's "Trustworthiness" framework for evaluating research (1985) to guide our discussion, what

follows is a brief overview of the different standards that comprise rigor in evaluations and how the EPIs address them.[4]

Validity/Credibility: What is referred to as validity in quantitative, or credibility in qualitative, research is a measure of accuracy for representing phenomena being described, explained, or theorized (Hammersley 1987, 69). It includes considerations about the appropriateness of tools, processes, and data deployed in arriving at those descriptions or inferences (Leung 2015). The EPI framework aligns the representation of the dimensions of peace to a particular community and culture through inductive methods instead of being crafted only through a culmination of aggregated secondary data, desk-based literature reviews, and the opinions and assumptions of external experts. In this, the EPI framework derives credibility through the process of helping to identify "experience-near" (Geertz 1974) indicators for local communities, which are understood to be "tangible things that people use in their daily lives to make decisions or determinations about a certain concept" (Firchow 2018, 59).

Generalizability/Transferability: Commonly referred to as external validity, these standards relate to the methods deployed which enable the ability to extrapolate conclusions gleaned from a sample to a larger population, or from one peacebuilding context to another (Rogers 2012, 28) and how convincing those broader conclusions are for stakeholders when based on multiple cases (Grävingholt and Leininger 2013, 157). The EPI approach employs two-level theory (Goertz 2006) through content analysis and process tracing to code and categorize everyday indicators representing different phenomena into similar, emergent dimensions of peace that can be used to identify trends and address the issue of incomparability of community indicators across different contexts (Firchow 2018; Bush and Duggan 2015, 19–20; Kitto, Chesters, and Grbich 2008). This coding process attends to aspects of interpretive rigor by triangulating the interpretation of concepts through inter-rater reliability tests with local and international partners, and respondent validation.

Reliability/Dependability: Traditionally conceived as the "extent to which a measurement or observation yields the same answer or results

however and whenever it is carried out" (Coryn 2007, 27), more appropriate conceptualizations of reliability in the context of EPIs would relate to replicability, repeatability, and consistency of processes and methods (Golafshani 2003; Shadish, Cook, and Campbell 2002). In this, reliability and dependability in the case of EPIs draw close to the conception of procedural rigor, which is concerned with "transparency or 'explicitness' of the research description of the way research [is] conducted" (Kitto, Chesters, and Grbich 2008, 244). To this end, EPI uses tools such as randomization, Likert scales, verification focus groups, and enumerator training and support to ensure methodological reliability, while also allowing indicators to be adaptable and reflexive to the changing dynamics of conflicts since indicators are not stagnant and change over time (Firchow and Mac Ginty 2017a).

Accuracy/Authenticity: Related to validity, accuracy in data collection for quantitative approaches deals with the level of precision the research or evaluation demands. Data are considered precise if there is an adequate level of detail to do justice to that which is being studied and enable decision-making (USAID 2009, 6). In qualitative approaches, accuracy relates to authenticity, where all realities are represented to give meaning to findings (Billups 2014, 4). The question of "whose reality counts" grounds efforts to seek authentic representation to avoid outsider interpretations dominating those of local peacebuilding participants (Chambers 1997; Mac Ginty 2013; Broegaard, Bull, and Kovsted 2013; see also Neufeldt, this volume). While the degree of precision in data may vary between peace research versus peacebuilding program management and evaluation, for EPI, considerations of precision focus on granularity and relevance to the victims of violent conflict. By using indicators identified by communities in their own words, EPIs can reveal "hidden transcripts" or the nonobvious (Scott 1990; Mac Ginty 2013) and substate variations in data and "more accurately reflect the on-the-ground situation in a textured way that is meaningful to local communities" (Mac Ginty 2013, 56), therefore rendering the data more authentic. An additional consideration for accuracy and authenticity of data is timeliness. With the EPI approach, surveys are

repeated over time and can be administered as frequently as the dynamics of the conflict dictate and based on the management needs of peacebuilding programs (Firchow 2018).

Objectivity/Confirmability: Objectivity in social science is traditionally understood as being free from bias, distortion, or systematic error (Trochim 2006). Broadly speaking, bias is concerned with perspectives and factors that may obscure more than they reveal (Hammersley and Gomm 1997). However, with the decline of positivist notions of pure impartiality in favor of post-positivist understandings, some suggest that bias in data should not be questioned, but rather ask "whose interests are served by the bias" (Gitlin, Siegel, and Boru 1989, 245). To this, EPI responds by seeking to craft indicators that are representative of the whole community, especially those on the margins of power, as opposed to the opinions of community elites or local nongovernmental organization staff in attempts to mitigate potential "elite capture" (Peltzman 1976; Laffont and Tirole 1991; Debiel et al. 2009; Paffenholz 2015) that is often associated with program implementation (Firchow 2018). Although the involvement of all actors is important, it is community members in general who are the least consulted and included in the decision-making process about what constitutes their peace processes. With regard to confirmability, EPI encourages the use of audit trails and for those who apply the approach to strive for reflexive rigor in recognizing positionality in evaluation and research—that is, the "influence that the relationships among the researchers, the research topic, and subjects may have on the results" (Kitto, Chesters, and Grbich 2008, 245)—and consider ways to neutralize personal bias, motivation, or interest as the findings from EPIs are reported. Finally, practicing evaluative rigor by ensuring ethical and political aspects are attended to is a key component of the EPI approach. Part of this is recognizing that evaluators do not pass neutral judgments from objective vantage points, and that regardless of our best efforts to improve rigor and transparency, these developments will never ensure "neutral" scientific positions for evaluating political interventions (Goodhand, Klem, and Sørbø 2013).

Constantly reflecting on and reexamining what constitutes rigor for peacebuilding research and evaluation, regardless of one's ontological paradigm, has implications for what research agendas are pursued, what policy decisions are enacted, and who controls the flow of material resources for the consolidation of peace; in other words, it is an inherently political activity (Patton 2008). If we take indicators to be the constituent parts of peace paradigms (top-down/bottom-up, etic/emic, international/local) and rigor to be the constructed criteria for evidential quality, then the concept of "rigor" can and has been deployed as a means for determining which forms of evidence and, by extension, which paradigms of peace are acceptable. Negotiating these paradigms through the hybridization of "top-down" and "bottom-up" monitoring and evaluation systems can help us work toward a more sustainable peace, emancipating both liberal and local actors from unhealthy path dependencies. However, no clear guidance has been provided on how to encourage and promote an emancipatory peace for fear of imposing technocratic solutions and subverting local agency (Millar 2014, 15). The EPI approach seeks to intentionally fill this gap by providing a practical solution for facilitating discussions about agency and power through focusing on uncovering "the needs, interests and expressions" of communities that are often obscured by technocratic approaches (Richmond and Mitchell 2011, 18). If defining what counts as credible evidence in peacebuilding is ultimately determined by both "those who ask the questions and those who answer them" (Burkhardt and Fields 2010, 223), mainstreaming everyday perspectives and conceptions of what peace means for local communities facilitates a more robust conversation of rigor by providing answers to questions that are rarely asked.

COMMUNITIES AT THE HEART OF MEASUREMENT

Much of what constitutes "peacebuilding effectiveness" is measured by frameworks determined by external peacebuilding experts and skewed in favor of what donors and the international community determines (Richmond 2005). The "politics of evidence" as it has come to be known refers to the role power plays in determining what is considered robust evidence, who gets to decide, and the interplay between actors in the evaluation context (Eyben et al. 2015, 5). When certain epistemological and methodological frameworks are privileged over others, these decisions can implicitly legitimize some voices and realities at the expense of others (Jayawickrama and Strecker 2015). Often behind the calls for rigor and robustness lie conflicting interests and contested worldviews of the different actors involved (Eyben et al. 2015, 3). Subsequently, the everyday lives of those affected by conflict fail to enter rigorous peacebuilding evaluations in meaningful ways because they are often the most marginalized actors (Richmond and Mitchell 2012; Richmond and Franks 2009). By neglecting to include these essential perspectives, peacebuilding research and evaluation reify existing dominant systems and agendas as opposed to challenging and improving them (Bush and Duggan 2015, 24).

The EPI approach helps facilitate a renegotiation of what constitutes rigorous, robust peacebuilding evidence by incorporating evidence that "account[s] for history, culture, and context; respects differences in perspective and values; and opens the potential for democratic inclusion and the legitimization of multiple voices" (Donaldson 2009, 15). Utilizing everyday indicators of social change in fragile and conflict-affected communities is an innovative alternative to existing measurement systems and addresses several of the criticisms, as well as unanswered and unarticulated questions about how international duty bearers can more fully support localities transitioning from violence to work toward sustainable peace and reconciliation.

NOTES

1. For more information on the EPIs, see everydaypeaceindicators.org.

2. A community here is defined by its locus or as a neighborhood in an urban setting, or a village, or consortium of households, such as a subcounty, in a rural setting.

3. For a detailed overview of the EPI methodology, please see Firchow and Mac Ginty (2017a).

4. Much of the later discussion is elaborated upon in much more detail in Firchow (2018).