Duggan & Bush on Evaluation in Settings Affected by Violent Conflict: What Difference Does Context Make?

Description

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â??We are Colleen Duggan, Senior Evaluation Specialist, International Development Research Centre (Canada) and Kenneth Bush, Director of Research, International Conflict Research (Northern Ireland). For the past three years, we have been collaborating on a joint exploratory research project called *Evaluation in Extremis: The Politics and Impact of Research in Violently Divided Societies*, bringing together researchers, evaluators, advocates and evaluation commissioners from the global North and South. We looked at the most vexing challenges and promising avenues for improving evaluation practice in conflict-affected environments.

CHALLENGES *Conflict Context Affects Evaluation â?? and vice versa.* Evaluation actors working in settings affected by militarized or non-militarized violence suffer from the typical challenges confronting development evaluation. But, conflict context shapes how, where and when evaluations can be undertaken â?? imposing methodological, political, logistical, and ethical challenges. Equally, evaluation (its conduct, findings, and utilization) may affect the conflict context â?? directly, indirectly, positively or negatively.

Lessons Learned:

Extreme conditions amplify the risks to evaluation actors. Contextual volatility and political hyper-sensitivity must be explicitly integrated into the planning, design, conduct, dissemination, and utilization of evaluation.

1. **Some challenges may be anticipated and prepared for, others may not**. By recognizing the most likely dangers/opportunities at each stage in the evaluation process we are better prepared to circumvent â??avoidable risks or harmâ?• and to prepare for unavoidable negative contingencies.
2. **Deal with politico-ethics dilemmas.** Being able to recognize when ethics dilemmas (questions of good, bad, right and wrong) collide with political dilemmas (questions of power and control) is an important analytical skill for both evaluators and their clients. Speaking openly about how politics and ethics â?? and not only methodological and technical considerations â?? influence all facets of evaluation in these settings reinforces local social capital and improves evaluation transparency.
3. **The space for advocacy and policymaking can open or close quickly, requiring readiness to use findings posthaste**. Evaluators need to be nimble, responsive, and innovative in their evaluation use strategies.

Rad Resources:

- **2013 INCORE Summer School Course on Evaluation in Conflict Prone Settings ,** University of Ulster, Derry/ Londonderry (Northern Ireland. A 5-day skills building course for early to mid-level professionals facing evaluation challenges in conflict prone settings or involved in commissioning, managing, or conducting evaluations in a programming or policy-making capacity.
- OECD (2012), ***Evaluating Peacebuilding Activities in Settings of Conflict and Fragility: Improving Learning for Results***, DAC Guidelines and References Series, OECD Publishing.
- The Learning Portal for Design, Monitoring and Evaluation for Peacebuilding
- Kenneth Bush and Colleen Duggan ((2013) *Evaluation in Extremis: the Politics and Impact of Research in Violently Divided Societies* (SAGE: Delhi, forthcoming)

Category

1. Uncategorized

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1. advocacy
2. conflict
3. evaluation
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