

# BACKGROUND NOTE

## Peacebuilding Fund's Community-Based Monitoring & Evaluation

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## Introduction

Since 2015, the UN Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) has invested in systems and capacities to improve learning about what works to sustain peace and boost accountability to an array of stakeholders. Most recently, the PBF's Strategic Plan 2020-2024 recommitted the Fund to guide better evaluation, consolidate knowledge, and harness data on peacebuilding effectiveness. To push this agenda, in addition to regularly recurring products such as portfolio evaluations and thematic and synthesis reviews, the Plan calls for the Fund to test innovative approaches to monitoring and evaluating at country level to drive context adaptation and amplify the voices of the conflict affected communities it serves.

In early 2020, with the support of PeaceNexus Foundation, the PBF issued a [Guidance note on Perception Surveys and Community-Based Monitoring](#). As described in more detail below, this Guidance Note was the Fund's first step at supporting teams on the ground to utilize largely perception-based monitoring to capture the views of stakeholders in conflict-affected communities. This current **Background Note on PBF's Community-Based Monitoring & Evaluation (CBM&E)** takes these initial steps further by suggesting an approach that is as much about generating data on outcomes for stakeholder communities as it is about supporting their leadership and voice in decision-making about peacebuilding priorities and approaches. This Background Note provides the theoretical and ethical motivations for the new CBM&E mechanisms and is a companion to an upcoming **Practice Note on CBM&E** that will provide step-by-step considerations for rolling out new mechanisms at country level.

Given these objectives, this Note is aimed at a diverse range of Program and Monitoring & Evaluation Officers. Specifically, it is intended to serve as a resource for PBSO staff, PBF Secretariats, Recipient UN Organizations (RUNOs) and Non-UN Organizations (NUNOs). While CBM&E will not replace the need for more traditional data collection and monitoring of project and portfolio initiatives, CBM&E **is expected to provide richer information about how conflict-affected populations view their contexts and express priorities and open space for their participation in decision-making discussions**. Because these mechanisms are supplementary to more traditional data collection and monitoring and may raise sensitivities in more fraught contexts, Fund recipients interested in these mechanisms should discuss with the PBF whether rollout of CBM&E is right for them.

## Community-Based Monitoring & Evaluation: Why the PBF?

1. **The Peacebuilding Fund is well-placed to implement processes that develop empowerment and social capital.** PBF's mandate is to respond nimbly to changes in the peacebuilding environment and to serve as a catalytic instrument of effective and sustainable peacebuilding. Local ownership is increasingly recognized as a necessary ingredient for achieving sustainable peace. It is for these very reasons that the PBF committed to developing practices and systems designed to promote more effective forms of local ownership and accountability loops in its Strategic Plan 2020-2024.

2. **The focus of the PBF and the larger Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) is on engaging governments with an eye towards facilitating national ownership of peacebuilding processes.** This is inherent in the Fund's country eligibility approach and general requirement for government approval of all PBF-funded projects. The flexibility and scalability of CBM&E dovetails nicely with this element of the PBF/PBSO mandate, since it affords conflict-affected actors, whether located in local villages or national agencies, an increased voice and agency with regards to the peacebuilding projects affecting them. When coupled with PBF's expansion of direct funding to civil society organizations, the implementation of CBM&E signals a redoubling of PBF's commitment to transparent and participatory mutual accountability systems that engage all manner of peacebuilding actors, from communities to local governments to national counterparts.

3. **The PBF is well-placed to encourage more agency and participation by beneficiary communities because of its central position in funding the peacebuilding initiatives of UN Agencies, Funds, and Programs (AFPs).** PBF's commitment to increased community agency through the use of CBM&E processes, when coupled with its unique role vis-a-vis AFPs, means that PBF is well-placed to usher in a new era of peacebuilding evaluation, one that has increasing benefits for all parties involved. Some of the benefits include:

- ▶ The continuous generation of data about PBF-funded interventions at all levels,
- ▶ The ability to more quickly and easily identify programmatic and funding gaps,
- ▶ Greater flexibility to respond to emergent needs,
- ▶ The availability of mechanisms that support sustainability of results through enhanced local ownership, and
- ▶ An evaluation method that contributes to sustainable peace by making empowerment and capacity-building a centerpiece of DM&E processes.

## Principles of CBM&E: Accountability, Local Ownership and Overall Ethos

### Accountability

Accountability is the process by which those providing services report back to others to demonstrate the quality of the work being done or the services being delivered. Accountability mechanisms are at the center of governance and the work done by non-profit groups. All evaluations, whether of peacebuilding projects or development initiatives, are exercises in accountability,<sup>1</sup> and should be designed to demonstrate the relevance of policies and processes, efficiency of the work being done, and the overall quality and effectiveness of the outcomes.

Accountability can be thought of as a relationship between two or more parties, those performing the work and those evaluating it and determining, to a greater or lesser degree, whether that work should continue as is, change in some way or be discontinued. Regardless of whether one's work is in the humanitarian, development, or peacebuilding sectors, there are typically three different forms of accountability. **Upward accountability** is when an organization providing some service or implementing some project reports to those above it, namely to national or international funding agencies or national governments. In upward accountability, communication of results tends to go from implementing agents to their funders and responds to benchmarks or targets set by actors outside of the affected communities. This is the typical form of accountability practiced by the international community, including within the peacebuilding sector, and has led to widespread complaints that it tends to distance purported beneficiaries from peacebuilding providers.<sup>2</sup>

**Downward accountability** on the other hand is when "local communities or constituents hold governmental or other institutional leaders accountable for the performance of their projects."<sup>3</sup> This form has been shown to be a partial antidote to the limitations inherent in upward accountability mechanisms by providing forums and processes for stakeholders to voice their ideas, goals and concerns.<sup>4</sup> Downward accountability contributes both to increased agency and, where service providers are responsive, to the perceived legitimacy

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1. PBSO recognizes and supports the importance of evaluations' learning function, but for the purposes of this Guidance Note is focusing on accountability as an equally important aspect of evaluation.
  2. See Timothy Donais, "Operationalising local ownership," in *Local ownership in international peacebuilding: key theoretical and practical issues*, ed. Sung Yong Lee and Alpaslan Özerdem (London: Routledge, 2015); Thania Paffenholz, ed., *Civil society and Peacebuilding: A critical assessment* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 2010); Oliver P. Richmond, "Resistance and the Post-liberal Peace," *Millennium* 38, no. 3 (2010).
  3. Landon E. Hancock, "Deliberative peacebuilding: agency and development in post-conflict practice," *Peacebuilding* 8, no. 2, p. 142.
  4. One of the more important elements of downward accountability mechanisms is how they provide opportunities for community voice. See Landon E. Hancock, "Legitimate Agents of Peacebuilding: Deliberative Governance in Zones of Peace," in *Local Peacebuilding and Legitimacy: Interactions between National and Local Levels*, ed. Landon E. Hancock and Christopher Mitchell, Routledge Studies in Peace and Conflict Resolution (London: Routledge, 2018). and Tom R. Tyler, "Social Justice: Outcome and Procedure.," *International Journal of Psychology* 35, no. 2 (2000).

of service providers and their organizations. In addition, downward accountability has the potential to empower local communities to root out and address corruption.<sup>5</sup> **However, just as upward accountability tends to disempower beneficiary communities, a strict adherence to downward accountability may tend to shift the burden of accountability away from powerful funding agencies and on to local organizations who may lack the capacity, protection, or leverage to meaningfully monitor peacebuilding delivery efforts. This ‘either-or’ approach has led to the development of a third form of accountability, known as horizontal or mutual accountability, which encourages parties across the development spectrum—from funders to providers to community members—to hold each other accountable.** It does this by creating structures and systems that allow beneficiary or recipient communities direct access to donors and decision-makers and is designed to increase oversight and transparency in aid delivery and peacebuilding projects.<sup>6</sup>

Within PBF processes, Community-Based Monitoring (CBM) represents a form of downward accountability, wherein the quality of the peacebuilding provider’s work is assessed by the stakeholder community, with that community communicating its satisfaction or disappointment upwards to the PBF via the community-based implementing group.<sup>7</sup> **By contrast, Community-Based Monitoring and Evaluation (CBM&E) is a mutual accountability mechanism wherein each stakeholder participates in accountability processes and contributes to evaluation and improvement of the overall peacebuilding objectives, processes and outcomes.** One goal of mutual accountability systems like CBM&E is to balance power between beneficiary communities and other stakeholders in the peacebuilding process by ensuring equal participation in peacebuilding accountability processes and, ideally, providing resources for capacity-building at all levels.

## Local Ownership

Local ownership is often seen as an essential aspect of effective and sustainable peacebuilding efforts. International agents generally want to ensure that peacebuilding efforts meet their intended goals, and that they are accepted and adopted by their intended beneficiaries or recipients. Peacebuilding programs that are designed to improve governance mechanisms, build infrastructure, and empower marginalized communities all rest upon some level of local cooperation. One of the main complaints about liberal peacebuilding, however, has been the high levels of local resistance to peacebuilding plans devised by outsiders.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, with respect to generating so-called local ownership, one of international peacebuilding’s nagging problems has been the lack of clarity and agreement about the very definition of local ownership. From the perspective of the international community, the term “local” might encompass everything from the smallest community to a national government.<sup>9</sup> This vast spectrum of “local” actors illustrates that how we define local depends largely on the context. **In order to be clear on what “local” means in a given context, it can be useful to consider the concept of subsidiarity, which argues that authority should be based at the level closest to those affected by decisions being made.**<sup>10</sup> This means that a program that was designed to assist government agencies with necessary reforms might have officials of the national government as its ultimate recipients, while a program that was designed to assist rural communities to reduce tensions resulting from the land reforms would have community members as recipients. In other words, the programming context determines the definition of the local and recipient populations should play a role in identifying whose ownership is being sought.

The second part of the definition, or “ownership,” also presents some challenges. For some, the term ownership means that recipients should take responsibility for implementing or overseeing peacebuilding plans that may have been drawn up elsewhere. For others, ownership implies some measure of authority over the whole process of decision-making, from the identification of a problem, to the design of proposed

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5. Fredrik Galtung and Martin Tisné, “A New Approach to Postwar Reconstruction,” *Journal of Democracy* 20, no. 4 (2009).
  6. Christian Arandel, Derick W. Brinkerhoff, and Marissa M. Bell, “Reducing fragility through strengthening local governance in Guinea,” *Third World Quarterly* 36, no. 5 (2015); Rosie Pinnington, *Local First in Practice: Unlocking the power to get things done*, Peace Direct (London, 2014), <http://actlocalfirst.org/in-practice/>.
  7. United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, *Short Strengthening PBF project monitoring and implementation through direct feedback from communities: perception surveys and communitybased monitoring*, p. 2.
  8. Liberal peacebuilding focuses on efforts to develop liberal democratic governance systems and market-oriented economies in post-conflict countries.
  9. Maxwell Adjei and Landon E. Hancock, “Local Peacebuilding,” in *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Peace and Conflict Studies*, ed. Oliver Richmond and Gëzim Visoka (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2020).
  10. Oxana Pimenova, “Subsidiarity as a ‘regulation principle’ in the EU,” *Theory & Practice of Legislation* 4, no. 3 (2016).



solutions, to their implementation.<sup>11</sup> **When peacebuilding recipients or local peacebuilding organizations believe that they do not have sufficient input into decision making about peacebuilding planning and implementation that directly affects them, they tend to resist those plans, either by refusing to fully implement them or by bending them to their own goals, an outcome known as hybrid peacebuilding.**<sup>12</sup> The emergence of hybrid peacebuilding has prompted movements to more maximally define ownership in order to address the propensity for programs to have outcomes that are different from their intended results. Some have gone so far as to suggest jettisoning the term ownership and substituting the term agency, which implies having “influence over the context and outcomes.”<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, the prevalence of hybrid peacebuilding as an outcome of internationally planned, and ostensibly locally owned, peacebuilding plans leads to questions about the very goals and outcomes of these projects. In order to begin to address this problem, it is useful to consider why we pursue local ownership at all. Is meaningful local ownership only of value to international peacebuilders who wish to ensure that their projects meet programmatic objectives? Or should it also be of value to local peacebuilding providers and, especially, to local stakeholders? If the latter, then one needs to think more deeply about the kinds of benefits that local ownership, sometimes characterized as local agency, can bring to these stakeholders.

## Peacebuilding Ethos & Social Capital

A fundamental rationale for supporting local ownership and agency, and for engaging in mutual accountability stems from the very nature of peacebuilding and conflict resolution work. Scholars have long noted the inevitable tension between the desire to prevent or resolve conflict and the need to address social injustices in order to rectify structural imbalances that often lead to future conflicts.<sup>14</sup> In peacebuilding this tension can be seen in the twin desires to deliver effective peacebuilding services that improve people’s lives, while at the same time empowering them to take ownership of peacebuilding projects, processes, and outcomes. It is not always easy to determine which element, effectiveness or empowerment, should be more important in each situation, but there is much to be said for an increased focus on empowerment, inasmuch as it can be as important, if not more so, as the delivery of effective services.

**“Empowerment is often a necessary component of advocacy on behalf of sustainable peace. Empowerment helps create conditions where people can develop critical perspectives, gain control over their lives, and become co-equal participants in their relationships, communities, and networks”**  
(Coy, et. al., 2019, p. 69).

The key to bridging the tension between programmatic effectiveness and the principle of empowerment is to focus on the ethos of peacebuilding. **By prioritizing empowerment, one is not rejecting the idea of best practices, but instead is interrogating those practices with respect to both effectiveness and empowerment, asking questions like: how do our practices engender empowerment of the parties involved? How does the peacebuilding work respect the needs and goals of stakeholders who are and are not at the table? And how do our peacebuilding projects and programs promote sustainable peace?**<sup>15</sup>

An important reason for addressing ethos in peacebuilding work is the need to get away from traditional forms of evaluation, which largely focus on the more narrow, direct benefits of an intervention without considering the ways in which that intervention may have amplified or hampered empowerment and social capital. Social capital, or social cohesion, is typically defined as the presence of information about and trust in one’s social networks.<sup>16</sup> Seminal works from scholars such as Robert Putnam and Theda Skocpol note

11. Timothy Donais, *Peacebuilding and local ownership: post-conflict and consensus-building*, (New York: Routledge, 2012); Landon E. Hancock, “Agency & peacebuilding: the promise of local zones of peace,” *Peacebuilding* 5, no. 3 (2017).
12. Roger Mac Ginty, *International peacebuilding and local resistance: hybrid forms of peace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
13. Hancock, “Agency & peacebuilding: the promise of local zones of peace,” p. 258.
14. Amanda D. Clark and Patrick G. Coy, “Civil rights and domestic policy,” in *Understanding nonviolence: contours and contexts*, ed. Maia Carter Hallward and Julie M. Norman (Malden, MA: Polity, 2015); James Laue and Gerald Cormick, “The ethics of intervention in community disputes,” in *The ethics of social intervention*, ed. Gordorn Bermant, Herbert C. Kelman, and Donald P. Warwick (Washington DC: Halsted Press, 1978).
15. Coy, Patrick G., Landon E. Hancock, and Anuj Gurung. “Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution.” Chap. 5 In *Routledge Companion to Peace and Conflict Studies*, edited by S. Byrne, T. Matyók, I.M. Scott, and J. Senehi, 68-78. London: Routledge, 2019, p. 75.
16. Michael Woolcock, “Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework,” *Theory and Society* 27, no. 2 (1998), p. 153

the importance of social capital and cohesion for the functioning of democratic societies.<sup>17</sup> Peacebuilding scholars note that developing social capital and social cohesion can help to address sources of violent conflict and to instill a democratic ethos among community members.<sup>18</sup> Arandel and her colleagues go further, noting how the use of mutual accountability mechanisms has empowered some local residents to not only hold peacebuilding providers accountable for their actions, but to develop social networks and skills that enabled them to build resilient communities and address other social problems.<sup>19</sup> Social capital is also noted as an important product, or byproduct, of local peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts in local zones of peace in places as far flung as Colombia, the Philippines, El Salvador, and Northern Ireland, where it can be seen as an outcome of deliberative processes and public participation that result in increased local agency.<sup>20</sup>

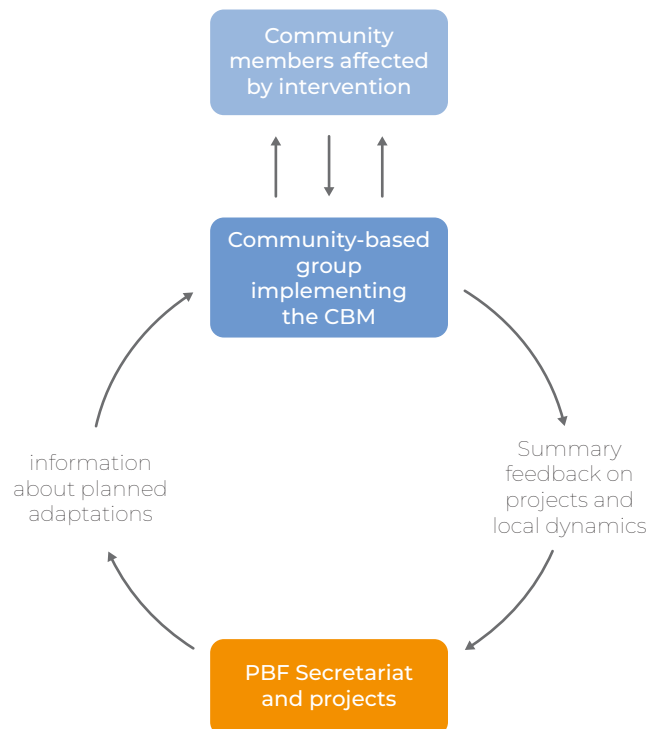
## Functions & Processes of CBM&E

CBM&E, as a form of mutual accountability rests upon a set of functions and processes that are founded on the aforementioned principles. Before detailing these, however, it is necessary to first understand the difference between the CBM&E model and other approaches to CBM and community-based perception surveys that the PBF has employed in the past.

### The CBM Model

As outlined in Figure 1, the 2020 PBF guidance document on perception surveys and community-based monitoring stresses the role of these tools in improving monitoring and implementation of projects through better access to data and maps out a process that relies on partnership with a community-based implementation group. The guidance anticipates that it is this group that is primarily responsible for data collection and analysis, passing this information up to the PBF and then disseminating information about planned adaptations from the PBF to the community members affected by the peacebuilding intervention.<sup>21</sup> The kinds of groups identified by the guidance note include peace clubs, women's groups, and traditional elders. The types of work they are expected to do include mobilizing community members' participation, administering brief surveys, and summarizing key findings for transmission back to the PBF.

Figure 1: Community-Based Monitoring



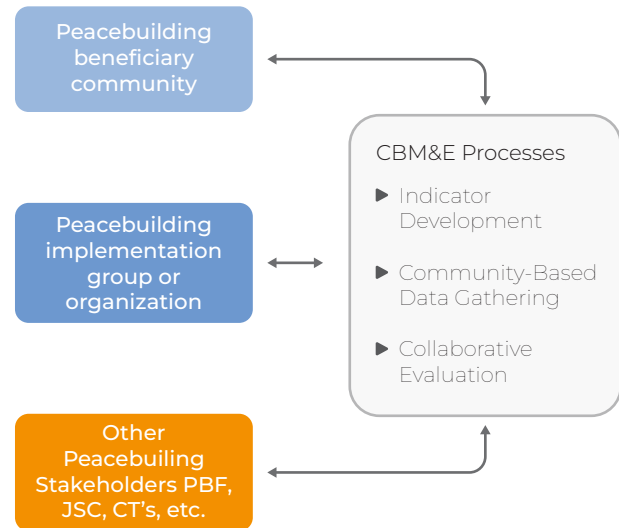
17. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Theda Skocpol, *Diminished democracy: from membership to management in American civic life*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).
18. Arandel, Brinkerhoff, and Bell, "Reducing fragility through strengthening local governance in Guinea."; Michael J. Brown and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, "Social Cohesion as Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic and Beyond," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 10, no. 1 (2015).
19. Arandel, Brinkerhoff, and Bell, "Reducing fragility through strengthening local governance in Guinea.", p. 998.
20. Landon E. Hancock, "El Salvador's post-conflict peace zone," in *Zones of peace*, ed. Landon E. Hancock and C. R. Mitchell (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2007); Hancock, "Legitimate Agents of Peacebuilding: Deliberative Governance in Zones of Peace."; Hancock, "Deliberative peacebuilding: agency and development in post-conflict practice."
21. United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, *Strengthening PBF project monitoring and implementation through direct feedback from communities: perception surveys and communitybased monitoring.*, p. 3,

A central element of this model is the fact that while information flows between the implementing group and the community, no direct information flows between affected members of the community—the beneficiary group—and other stakeholders, including peacebuilding service delivery organizations, International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), UN Resident Coordinators (RCs), UN Country Teams (UNCTs), Joint Steering Committees (JSCs), or the Peacebuilding Fund itself. This lack of direct connection between these groups limits opportunities for beneficiary empowerment and inhibits the exercise of mutual accountability mechanisms, making the original conception of CBM insufficient for the goal of increasing local ownership and promoting the development of social capital as a peacebuilding good.

## The CBM&E Model

The CBM&E model laid out in Figure 2 addresses some of the shortcomings of the original CBM model and seeks to incorporate emerging practices from the fields of indicator development, participatory action research, deliberative peacebuilding, and mutual accountability systems.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the CBM model, the CBM&E model includes more opportunities for dialogue and discussion. This means that opportunities for learning as well as suggestions for improvement can be generated at all levels of engagement and can be disseminated to all relevant stakeholders. This model envisions a more in-depth approach to community-based monitoring, one that uses a broader range of tools to engage with beneficiary communities and facilitates the development of both meaningful local ownership (and local agency) as well as the development of social capital.

Figure 2: Community-Based Monitoring & Evaluation



Notably, the model in Figure 2 is less determinative than the CBM model in Figure 1 in both scale and indicator development. **This is because CBM appears to focus only on individual projects and their results frameworks, while CBM&E is designed to be scalable, empowering stakeholders to engage on a wide variety of topics such as goals, obstacles, contextual trends, or other important issues affecting the success of peacebuilding efforts.** In order to achieve this, CBM&E provides for a range of tools that can be used, either singly or in combination, in a variety of settings. The key to their use is adherence to the peacebuilding ethos described above, interrogating the use of each method with the questions of community empowerment, respect for the community needs and goals, and creating space for sustainable peace. These tools are divided into broad categories of indicator development, data gathering, and collaborative evaluation processes.

## Indicator Development & Community-Based Data Gathering

We typically think of indicators in connection with project or program results frameworks that are identified by implementing agents when an intervention is being designed. While these types of indicators may help fund recipients track some aspects of implementation, they usually are not helpful in determining whether the intervention is meeting the needs or goals that conflict-affected populations would prioritize. This is a well-known problem identified by analysts who argue that such data reflects the priorities and experiences of international agencies or donors rather than those who live in conflict or post-conflict situations.<sup>23</sup>

To correct this problem, Pamina Firchow and Roger Mac Ginty argue for the inclusion of so-called **everyday peacebuilding indicators (EPI)**, which are datapoints developed by people in conflict-affected or

22. See Arandel, Brinkerhoff, and Bell, "Reducing fragility through strengthening local governance in Guinea.," Pamina Firchow, *Reclaiming everyday peace: local voices in measurement and evaluation after war* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Hancock, "Deliberative peacebuilding: agency and development in post-conflict practice.," Sylvia Kaye and Geoff Harris, "Participatory Action Research For Peacebuilding," *Peace Review* 30, no. 1 (2018).

23. Larissa Fast, "Diverging Data: Exploring the Epistemologies of Data Collection and Use among Those Working on and in Conflict," *International Peacekeeping* 24, no. 5 (2017).

post-agreement situations that measure agreed upon and uniform measurements of positive or negative social change.<sup>24</sup> The methodology seeks communities' input on the goals of peacebuilding projects as well as the development of indicators to use to evaluate them.<sup>25</sup> **Moreover, EPI extends community engagement beyond identification of indicators and invests communities with the primary responsibility for data collection.** In the EPI model, community-driven data collection has taken the form of mobile phone surveys, photovoice projects, and other data collection methods that enable observers to see changes in locally relevant indicators of development, coexistence, justice, and security, among other goals.<sup>26</sup>

## Collaborative Evaluation Processes

The idea of collaborative evaluation processes is rooted in participatory action research and draws from it in two ways. The first is in the participatory aspect, understanding that in order to identify peacebuilding needs as well as potential solutions, the community needs to be a part of the process from an intervention's inception.<sup>27</sup> The second is in reference to how research connects with action. In both Action Research and Participatory Action Research, a project's research goals derive from the kinds of social impacts and social changes that drive the work. Both research methods rely upon a range of collaborative processes between outsiders—typically a researcher of some sort—and those in the community. Collaboration begins at the outset by identifying the problems or needs of the community, drawing up the intervention program to address those needs, and finally analyzing and reporting the results of the intervention.

**Collaboration takes place in all aspects of the research process, from problem identification to project development, data gathering, and evaluation report writing.** The main rationale for this is the same as for the ethos of peacebuilding described above, to empower members of the beneficiary community by conducting research that is democratic in nature, equitable to the beneficiary community, liberating in the sense of freeing them from oppressive structures, and life enhancing in the sense of facilitating their full human potential.<sup>28</sup>

## CBM&E as a Participatory Mutual Accountability System

When CBM&E is designed as a bottom-up, participatory, and transparent process, it exemplifies and formalizes the best of what a mutual accountability system can achieve. In peacebuilding contexts, such systems can support effective governance through local participation and the promotion of transparency in program design, development, and service delivery. In some places these mechanisms have been used as a hedge against corruption, but in others they are designed to address issues of empowerment and the development of robust civil society structures.

The key for such accountability systems is to ensure that they are built upon local cultural forms and practices that are both appropriate to the task and are widely understood. **By incorporating principles of empowerment, participation, and transparency, CBM&E mechanisms and processes can meet local needs for agency and ownership while addressing requirements for mutual accountability and better use of precious resources.**

**Accountability Lab:** empowering stakeholders through monitoring

The civil society organization Accountability Lab has developed a unique approach to mutual accountability through its 'accountapreneurship' model to partner with individuals and civil society organizations. In this model, stakeholders are provided with training, mentoring, networking, seed funding, and management support to create low-cost, high-impact monitoring tools. In Nepal, accountapreneurs crowd have sourced information about opaque university processes to create a more transparent online information portal, while in Liberia, the Accountapreneurship Fund has supported community leaders to address grievances with the legal system.

24. Pamina Firchow and Roger Mac Ginty, "Measuring Peace: Comparability, Commensurability, and Complementarity Using Bottom-Up Indicators," *International Studies Review* 19, no. 1 (2017), p. 6.

25. One such EPI project, the Grounded Accountability Model (GAM) Project, is currently funded by Humanity United and the PBF. <https://www.everydaypeaceindicators.org/copy-of-sri-lanka-evaluation>.

26. Pamina Firchow and Roger Mac Ginty, "Including Hard-to-Access Populations Using Mobile Phone Surveys and Participatory Indicators," *Sociological Methods & Research*, (2017).

27. M. Brinton Lykes and Alison Crosby, "Feminist Practice of Action and Community Research," in *Feminist research practice: a primer*, ed. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2014).

28. Ernest T. Stringer, *Action research*, Fourth edition. ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE, 2014). p. 14-15.



## Using CBM&E

Because CBM&E offers a platform through which communities can better communicate with the PBF, implementing agents, and other decision makers, there are a number of ways in which CBM&E can enhance current or proposed initiatives designed by the PBF to improve its peacebuilding relevance and effectiveness and to drive better peacebuilding evaluation at country level.

### Country-level Strategic Results Frameworks

In 2020, the PBF commissioned a [Synthesis Review](#) of all final project and portfolio evaluations from 2017-2019. This Review found that although the Fund had contributed to important system-wide peacebuilding impacts, its decision to discontinue country-level Peacebuilding Priority Plans in 2017 led to challenges related to portfolio cohesion and measurement of collective results at the strategic level. In response, in 2020 the PBF began rolling out new country-level Strategic Results Frameworks (SRFs), which translate the strategic priorities articulated in a national government's request for PBF eligibility into measurable strategic outcomes that are valid for five years. SRFs consist of strategic outcomes, their underlying theories of change and assumptions, as well as high-level indicators to mark progress against the outcomes. SRFs should orient the design of individual projects that in a sense operationalize the achievement of the SRF's strategic outcomes. Given their role in shaping the PBF's five-year investment strategy in a given country, the design of SRFs should be participatory and inclusive.

CBM&E can contribute to the SRF process in important ways. **First, securing the participation of community members already engaged in CBM&E in SRF design processes can help cement partnerships with the PBF's ultimate stakeholders and support their agency and ownership over the achievement of the higher order change envisioned during the five-year eligibility period.** Community members' inclusion in SRF design can also help test assumptions about whether and how anticipated approaches may contribute to the desired change and help implementation team select approaches that are most appropriate to the context.

### SRF Monitoring and Evaluation

In countries with SRFs, the PBF's country portfolio monitoring and evaluation approach includes a mix of periodic data collection to obtain information about the highest-level changes envisioned by the SRF as well as iterative evaluation processes that compel project implementation teams to reflect on what has been achieved and revise or adapt their approaches to changing circumstances. To operationalize this iterative approach, PBF supports the implementation of well-known evaluation approaches such as Outcome Harvesting, Developmental Evaluation, and Most Significant Change.

CBM&E is a natural complement to data collection on higher-order change as well as a rich input into processes such as Outcome Harvesting in order to capture the view of projects' ultimate stakeholders – community members – about what has or has not changed with respect to their vision of sustainable peace. Specifically with regard to OH or other iterative evaluation processes, **CBM&E can act as a valuable counterbalance to project implementers' assumptions about what is and is not an important change and ground project results in community-level priorities and experiences.**

### CBM&E and Project Design and Oversight

As noted above, peacebuilding projects that are conceptualized and designed without the views of the people they plan to engage set themselves up for unnecessary difficulty, whether it be in rolling out implementation modalities or timelines that do not sync with local conditions, or in differences of opinion among the conflict-affected community about the very priorities that define the project. PBF's policy that encourages local stakeholder consultation at the design stage is derived from its recognition of the importance of this type of engagement. Despite its clear policy, many of PBF's fund recipients struggle to meaningfully engage local actors at the early stages of thematic prioritization and developing their approaches. In addition to differences over the basic goals and approaches of peacebuilding projects, the ways in which initiatives are assessed – the indicators that are selected to measure progress and the data collection that is launched to track that progress – also can be at odds with how local communities view the project's relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and coherence to name a few evaluative criteria.

**An established CBM&E mechanism may be a helpful resource through which project design teams can engage intended stakeholders from the outset of a project's conceptualization or validate an approach during a project's inception.** Already organized community members may be tapped to share views on what their main peacebuilding challenges or goals are or to test assumptions about whether a proposed project approach is appropriate and likely to work. In addition, indicators designed with communities through the CBM&E process may offer more relevant and innovative ways to measure project results than indicators selected by project teams working alone.

## Is CMB&E Appropriate to your context?

CBM&E represents a departure from traditional top-down approaches to monitoring and evaluation, which instead prioritizes the agency of local communities. Given the range of contexts in which PBF operates, there are a number of important considerations when deciding whether to develop or how to implement a CBM&E program. Some important areas to consider include whether CBM&E is tied to projects or whole country portfolios, whether a programming team's activities are geographically concentrated or widely dispersed, and taking into account Do No Harm considerations pertaining to the relative openness and security of the context.

### Project versus Portfolio Monitoring

CBM&E may be implemented to follow project implementation or to provide a broader engagement over the course of a whole portfolio's implementation. **The choice between project and portfolio will determine how widely subscribed the CBM&E process will need to be and what kinds of indicators are developed.** Individual projects, for example, with their typically more discrete stakeholder numbers, will likely include a larger proportion of project recipients in CBM&E mechanisms, whereas portfolio-based CBM&E may extend over a broader geographic space and would likely engage a correspondingly smaller proportion of total portfolio stakeholders and be composed of a network of associated but independent CBM&E teams arrayed across the territory.

The types of indicators set and monitored also will likely be different between a project and a portfolio. Indicators identified for CBM&E at project level frequently will be more closely aligned to the specific aims and processes of the project in which they are embedded. A challenge for CBM&E in these settings is remaining relevant to the project focus while affording communities the freedom to select indicators that are meaningful to them. Not doing so risks that the CBM&E mechanism will simply reproduce indicators from the project's formal results framework instead of adding a different view. At portfolio level, the challenge is to identify indicators that speak to overall contexts or thematic foci while recognizing that within the community a number of interventions with distinct approaches are at play. A tendency in this environment is to pitch indicators at a too high and abstract level, identifying indicators that measure fuzzy concepts such as "social cohesion" or "trust" instead of looking for the observable manifestations of those phenomena.

The types of actors or institutions with which CBM&E participants engage also will likely be different, with members of portfolio-anchored CBM&E mechanisms empowered to participate in PBF Joint Steering Committees composed of national government representatives, donor partners, civil society actors, UNCT members, and PBF Secretariat staff. Teams setting up CBM&E mechanisms to engage with JSCs may need to consider whether training or capacity building is needed for community members to fully participate in these formal and likely intimidating settings. Finally, PBF Secretariats and Resident Coordinators' Offices that manage JSC meetings will need to ensure that the meetings are facilitated in a deft and sensitive manner that makes space for CBM&E representatives to exercise agency – particularly at key moments of decision making over funding.

## Do No Harm (DNH) Considerations

There are number of DNH implications for the range of actors involved in projects or programs that use CBM&E as a vehicle for accountability and participation. For community actors, one implication involves the tax on one's time when committing to participating in CBM&E. Although participation may present a valuable opportunity to become more actively involved with the peacebuilding process, such commitment can exert a strain on individual capacities and could potentially draw people away from needed activities connected to home, family, and self-care, not to mention intruding on income-generation. Tapping the same community members, moreover, can lead to "involvement fatigue" or raise participants' expectations of better access to livelihoods or greater levels of investment in their communities as a result of their participation. In addition, monopolization of the CBM&E process by certain powerful or vocal stakeholders not only prohibits the inclusion of other voices, but tends to lead to dissatisfaction with the process and eventually to delegitimization and withdrawal of support. **To address this, the burdens of participation should be evenly spread across stakeholder communities at all levels, to not only ensure widespread opportunity for participation, but to reduce the burden upon those community members who routinely volunteer for such activities.**

A second implication for members of recipient communities is that participating in CBM&E processes and expressing their views may put them at odds with existing local, regional, or national authorities. Many local zones of peace throughout the world, for example, have run into opposition from higher levels of authority.<sup>29</sup> This type of opposition in some cases stems from structural incentives or cultural imperatives of traditional authority structures. Other sources of strain may come from those who benefit from existing power structures and who might be less willing to accede easily to change or to share the power to speak on behalf of a community. Alternatively, in areas characterized by more authoritarian regime types, CBM&E participants may be reluctant or unable to voice views they fear may run counter to those with power.<sup>30</sup> **Participants in CBM&E programs at all levels, then, need to reflect on whether an appropriate enabling environment is present prior to deciding to launch a mechanism.** Once a decision is taken to pursue CBM&E, implementation teams should also determine whether stakeholders need training or other support to enable their full participation.

A third implication has to do with accepting possible tradeoffs between programmatic efficiency on the one hand and peacebuilding effectiveness and social justice on the other. To the extent that CBM&E empowers local actors and supports their agency, CBM&E is at heart a social justice mechanism that should, ultimately, improve a project's relevance and effectiveness. UN and INGO teams designing peacebuilding projects, however, often face time pressure to submit a proposal and may see the effort needed to consult local communities as infeasible. **Commitment to fully embracing CBM&E requires peacebuilders to consciously balance the desire for time efficiencies with the need to ground their work in approaches that begin with local agency and participation.**

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29. See Landon E. Hancock and Susan Allen, "Local Peace Roles in Post-Agreement Nominal Peace and Continuing Conflict," in *Confronting Peace: Local Peace Communities and Post-Agreement Problems*, ed. Susan Allen et al. (London: Palgrave, 2022); Landon E. Hancock and Christopher R. Mitchell, "Between Local and National Peace: Complementarity or Conflict?," in *Local Peacebuilding and National Peace: Interaction Between Grassroots and Elite Processes*, ed. Christopher R. Mitchell and Landon E. Hancock (London: New York: Continuum, 2012).

30. In these settings, CBM&E is not recommended as it poses too great a risk for participants.



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## **BACKGROUND NOTE**

# Community-Based Monitoring & Evaluation

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