Democratising Indicator Design and Measurement:

A Case Study of the Participatory Monitoring Approach

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INTRODUCTION:
THE CURRENT STATE OF PRACTICE

Evidence-informed policy, programming, and practice has become the cornerstone of recent efforts in development. There is strong agreement on the need for results to inform management and decision-making in development programmes.[1] The focus on Results-Based Management (RBM) has traditionally been instituted through a primarily quantitative and output-based approach to Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). The traditional M&E approach involves determining objectives and indicators in advance of a programme and reporting regularly on these indicators, as laid out in programme logical frameworks. These frameworks are often developed to meet the needs of donors and external partners rather than local communities.[2]

In parallel, a major conceptual shift in attitudes towards measuring social change in development projects has been taking place. The rise of participatory methods in research has led to the development of Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PM&E) as a meaningful alternative to traditional methods of measuring successes and challenges in development projects. Numerous studies suggest that using participatory approaches produces knowledge that is relevant to the actual situation on the ground, as well as increasing ownership, accountability, transparency and technical capacity amongst the local community.[3]

Within studies of conflict and peace, participatory methods are gaining recognition and validity. When this trend is located within a broader framework that encompasses "design, monitoring and evaluation," it appears that participatory approaches are applied to the "design" phase of peace-building programmes as well as the final "evaluation" phase;[4] however, these approaches are, as a rule, not applied to the "monitoring" phase. In practice, monitoring remains focused on traditional mechanisms of tracking progress: local actors continue to report to international funders against a set of pre-determined indicators, outputs, and activity checklists.[5]

Generations For Peace (GFP), a Jordanian non-profit organisation involved in peace-building programmes in 50 countries across Asia, Africa, and Europe, has instituted a participatory model of design, monitoring and evaluation across all its programmes since 2014. With three years of experience implementing a participatory approach to M&E, the Generations For Peace Institute (GFPI), as the

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[1] Vähämaki, Janet, Martin Schmidt, and Joakim Molander, "Review: Results Based Management in Development Cooperation," *Riksbankens Jubileumsford* (2011).

[2] Estrella, Marisol, and John Gaventa. "Who Counts Reality? Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: A Literature Review." Institute of Development Studies (1998), 4; Cousins, J. Bradley, and Lorna M. Earl. "The Case for Participatory Evaluation." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 14, no. 4 (21 December 1992): 397–418, 400; Lennie, June. "Increasing the Rigour and Trustworthiness of Participatory Evaluations: Learnings from the Field." *Evaluation Journal of Australasia* 6, no. 1 (2006): 27–35, 27.

[3] Estrella and Gaventa. "Who Counts Reality? Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: A Literature Review," 14; Lennie, "Increasing the Rigour and Trustworthiness of Participatory Evaluations: Learnings from the Field," 28; Beswick, Edward, Nabila Hussein and Sairah Yusuf, "Breaking Down and Building Up Participation: A Comparative Study of Fifteen Participatory Evaluations in Nine Countries," Generations For Peace Institute (2016), 19.

[4] Garred, Michelle et al, "Making Sense of Turbulent Contexts: Local Perspectives on Large-Scale Conflict," *World Vision International* (2015); Beswick, Hussein and Yusuf, "Breaking Down and Building Up Participation."

[5] Peace Direct, "Putting the Local First: Learning to Adapt When Measuring Change," *Peace Direct* (2016), 7.
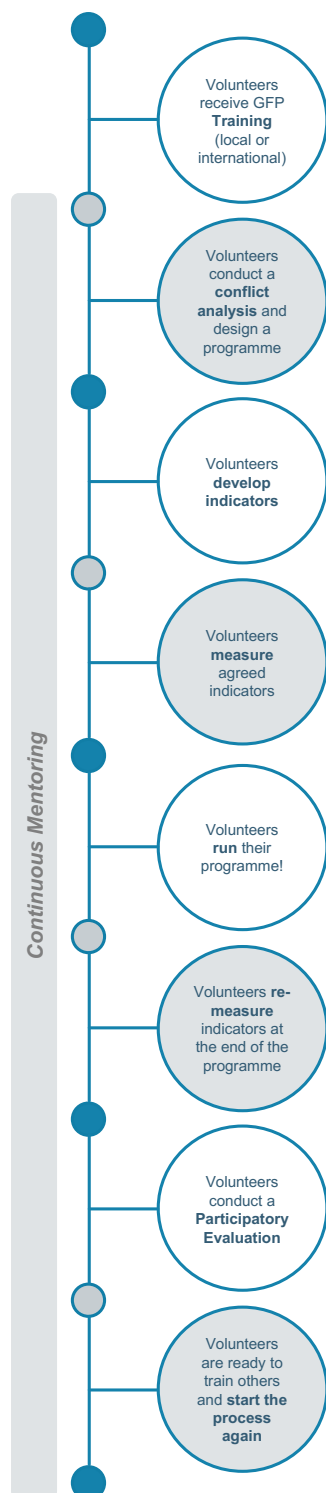
research and development arm of GFP, has taken the opportunity to reflect on the process of **participatory monitoring**, as practised by the organisation's volunteers. With very few organisations on record as using a participatory approach to monitoring in particular, an analysis of GFP's experience has the potential to expand the scope of knowledge on what works and what does not when considering practical approaches to participatory indicator development in the field.

In this respect, this report serves as a companion piece to a previous research paper published by GFPI, which used a case study approach – spanning 15 evaluations and nine countries – to analyse the effectiveness of the participatory approach to programme evaluation used by GFP.[6] Complementing that study of participatory evaluation, this report focuses on GFP's use of participatory monitoring.

Research Questions and Methods

Building on the insights of existing academic projects such as Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI), as well as learning papers developed by organisations like Peace Direct, this report analyses GFP's experience of participatory monitoring to assess the advantages and disadvantages of an M&E system that allows local community members to develop and measure their own indicators.

To support peace building, GFP trains local volunteers in each country to do the following:

1. **Decide on a conflict:** Volunteers pinpoint a conflict in their community and design a programme to address it, by developing contextualised theories of change.
2. **Develop and measure indicators:** Volunteers identify key measurements of success, creating their own indicators to measure the results of their programmes through a process of Participatory Monitoring (PM).
3. **Evaluate programming:** Volunteers are supported by the GFP Headquarters (HQ) team to evaluate their programmes themselves, completing a Participatory Evaluation (PE) at the end of each programme.

To run a peace-building programme, volunteers in each country follow the full range of steps illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: GFP's participatory monitoring process

The figure shows a vertical process flow with "Continuous Mentoring" alongside, including the following steps:
- Volunteers receive GFP **Training** (local or international)
- Volunteers conduct a **conflict analysis** and design a programme
- Volunteers **develop indicators**
- Volunteers **measure** agreed indicators
- Volunteers **run** their programme!
- Volunteers **re-measure** indicators at the end of the programme
- Volunteers conduct a **Participatory Evaluation**
- Volunteers are ready to train others and **start the process again**

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[6] Beswick, Hussein and Yusuf, "Breaking Down and Building Up Participation."

The existing literature suggests that allowing community members to identify their own indicators of peace – in line with the model GFP follows – has two important advantages:

- The method privileges **local understandings of peace over externally imposed indicators**, measuring only those elements of peace that locals consider relevant to the current situation in their community.
- The practice serves as a **process of community empowerment** by increasing ownership and building technical M&E capacity within the community.

Based on GFP's experience with participatory indicator development, this report analyses whether these advantages manifest in a practical setting. To do so, the report addresses two main questions:

1	What kind of community-based understandings of peace do locally sourced indicators express?

2	Does the process of creating and measuring indicators impact the community members who participate in it?

To answer these questions, first, the report presents an overview of the kinds of indicators developed and measured by GFP's volunteers across 27 active countries from 2014 to 2017. Collecting these indicators offers an opportunity to categorise the types of issues that local volunteers consistently measure across contexts. In consolidated form, a complete list of these indicators is also available in GFPI's Compendium of Participatory Indicators of Peace.[7]

Second, the report assesses whether involvement in participatory methods of monitoring programmes leads to community empowerment, either through increased ownership or greater M&E capacity. Information on this was collected from 13 countries in which GFP volunteers are active. These were all countries in which M&E processes were entirely volunteer-based from 2014-2017; in other countries, GFP had received external grants that necessitated the use of donor-based reporting frameworks.

27 countries tracked for indicators used
13 countries included for detailed exploration
44 surveys collected from local volunteers
06 interviews completed with GFP HQ staff

Figure 2: The research at a glance

Within these 13 countries, using a targeted sampling method, the author identified and surveyed all members of GFP's local implementation teams who had been involved in the process of developing and measuring indicators. A total of 44 semi-structured surveys were completed. A different perspective

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[7] GFPI's Compendium is a repository of indicators developed by community members across 27 countries, aimed at measuring the effectiveness of community-led peace-building programming. The Compendium is available on request from the GFP Institute.

on this process was gleaned through an additional six interviews with programme and M&E staff members at GFP HQ, who dealt with the information received from the field and used it to support programme adaptation and learning.

Understanding the Current State of Practice

The idea of developing context-sensitive indicators through a participatory process has its roots in a great deal of literature that stresses the benefits of participatory approaches to research and evaluation more broadly. To situate the insights of this report, this section provides a brief history of this idea, building up to the current state of practice in peace-building M&E.

Throughout this report, **monitoring** will be defined as the systematic and routine collection of information from projects and programmes.[8] While monitoring is an assessment of what is happening during the programme, **evaluation** takes place afterwards and is focused on understanding what happened and why.[9]

Participatory monitoring, in particular, is:

> *…the planned collection, analysis and dissemination of information by local stakeholders for the purposes of informing them on the progress of the project. To be truly participatory, the decisions on the type of information to collect, how to collect it, how to analyse it and the means of dissemination, lies with the local stakeholders.[10]*

The Rise of Participatory Methods

In response to the limited success of development programmes in the 1980s and 1990s, the suggested advantages of participatory methods are numerous:

> *Local participation [has been] proposed as a method to achieve a variety of goals, including sharpening poverty targeting, improving service delivery, expanding livelihood opportunities, and strengthening demand for good governance.[11]*

The underlying insight behind the turn to participatory approaches is the assumption that locals will be able to convey their needs and aspirations more accurately than external analysts. In the peace-building sector, "listening to these voices, the thinking goes, will result in better and more sustainable peace building and conflict transformation policy."[12] These local insights are expected to add just as much value to methods of M&E as they are to programme design.[13]

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[8] International Platform for Sport and Development, "What is monitoring and evaluation (M&E)?" *Toolkit for Sport and Development.* Accessed 9 February 2018: https://www.sportanddev.org/en/toolkit/monitoring-and-evaluation/what-monitoring-and-evaluation-me.
[9] Generations For Peace, "Generations For Peace Programming Framework," *Generations For Peace Internal Documentation* (April 2014), 2.
[10] Harvey, Erik, "Participatory Methodology Facilitation Guide," WaterAid Mozambique (2002), 10.
[11] Mansuri, Ghazala, and Vijayendra Rao, *Localizing Development: Does Participation Work?* World Bank Group (Washington, DC: 2013), 1.
[12] Mac Ginty, Roger and Pamina Firchow, "Everyday Peace Indicators: Capturing local voices through surveys," *Shared Space: A Research Journal on Peace, Conflict and Community Relations in Northern Ireland*, 18 (2014): 33-39, 33.
[13] For a more expansive review of the rise of PM&E approaches in the context of peace-building, see: Beswick, Hussein and Yusuf, "Breaking Down and Building Up Participation."

The Limitations of Top-Down Indicators

The widespread critiques of traditional methods of M&E focus on the limitations of using methods that require quantitative "objective" assessments by external actors.[14] Within the peace-building sector, criticism to monitoring mechanisms comes from two sources: academics and practitioners. For academics, there is an apparent dissatisfaction with currently available cross-national indices and metrics of peace – specifically, the fact that "major policy assumptions and decisions are based on indicator systems that give a partial, rather than full, picture of the reality on the ground."[15] For practitioners, the greatest source of frustration has been "pre-defined indicators and commitments to programme objectives that are unable to match the changing local context."[16]

Within academia, peace and conflict data is monitored through important databases such as the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) and the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED). Further collections of peace indicators are maintained by a variety of organisations and universities.[17] Recent comparisons of this aggregated data with local perceptions of experiences of conflict – for example in South Africa – demonstrate major mismatches.[18] In addition, the United Nations, through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), shapes current development and aid discourse; SDG 16, dealing with peace, justice, and effective institutions, has very few indicators that measure local perceptions of peace and justice.[19]

For practitioners, the challenges are different. A study of M&E practices in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) shows that the use of pre-determined indicators leads to the following problems:

> *Firstly, it ignores change in local dynamics over the life of a project, or changes within the wider social and political environment in which projects take place that may influence outcomes. Secondly, where organisations work through local partners, predetermined and fixed indicators can constrain and actively impede a partner's ability to deliver the project.[20]*

Other constraints include the focus on activity reporting, the static and linear nature of logframes, and the unhelpfulness of quantitative measures in encouraging learning and operational decision-making.[21] Saferworld's experience showed the following:

> *Lack of reliable data is common in many conflict contexts, so long-term changes or wider effects are often hard to understand without huge investment in expensive research. Teams were either collecting lots of data that were of questionable use, often because that data was easy*

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[14] Estrella and Gaventa. "Who Counts Reality? Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation: A Literature Review," 14.

[15] Mac Ginty, Roger and Pamina Firchow, "Measuring Peace: Comparability, Commensurability, and Complementarity Using Bottom-Up Indicators," *International Studies Review*, 19, (2017): 6-27, 6.

[16] Peace Direct, "Putting the Local First: Learning to Adapt When Measuring Change," *Peace Direct* (2016), 4.

[17] Hinds, R. and B. Carter, "Indicators for conflict, stability, security, justice and peacebuilding," *GSDRC6 Helpdesk Research Report 1230,* GSDRC, University of Birmingham (Birmingham, UK: 2015).

[18] Mac Ginty and Firchow, "Measuring Peace," 19.

[19] Milante, Gary, Suyoun Jang, Hyunjung Park, and Kyungnam Ryu, "Goal 16 – The Indicators We Want: Virtual Network Sourcebook on Measuring Peace, Justice and Effective Institutions," United Nations Development Program, (UNDP, New York: 2015).

[20] Peace Direct, "Putting the Local First," 6.

[21] Church, Madeline, "Doing Things Differently – Rethinking Monitoring and Evaluation to Understand Change," *Saferworld Learning Paper (2016);* Binnendijk, Annette, "Results Based Management in the Development Cooperation Agencies: A Review of Experience - Executive Summary," DAC Working Party on Aid Evaluation (2000), 19.

> *to collect, or not collecting any data at all. Few were asking themselves what constituted reliable evidence of change.[22]*

Broader overviews of aid effectiveness demonstrated similar challenges, particularly the drive towards easy measurability:

> *… imposed, top-down systems may lack relevance to actual project/programme results, may not sufficiently capture their diversity, and may even lead to programme distortions as managers try to do what is measurable rather than what is best.[23]*

The Advantages of Participatory Indicator Development

Faced with these documented limitations to top-down indicators for peace and conflict, participatory approaches to indicator development offer two major theoretical advantages. First, participation is presumed to lead to the "exercise of voice and choice" or "empowerment."[24] In this sense, participation is expected to have intrinsic value. Previous studies have shown the following:

> *Communities tend to express greater satisfaction with decisions in which they participate, even when participation does not change the outcome or when outcomes are not consistent with their expressed preferences.[25]*

Second, processes that allow communities to develop their own indicators of peace build on the informational and locational advantages that local groups possess. In the example of the EPI project, "by including bottom-up and crowd-sourced information and … locally-designed indicators, [the researchers] can access what peace actually means to people on the ground."[26] Based on Peace Direct's research in DRC, failing to capitalise on this knowledge has important consequences:

> *It is Peace Direct's view that the exclusion of local partners from the development and design of M&E frameworks, and denying partners opportunities to influence the course of M&E reporting during projects, ignores a valuable source of knowledge and expertise that could be used to enhance the reporting process – and ultimately, the success of development and peace-building work.[27]*

Based on the above, developing and measuring indicators in a participatory manner has significant benefits: it is expected to have a positive role in increasing the accuracy, relevance and empowerment potential of peace-building interventions. Ideally, it should allow people to shape their own narratives and adapt programmes as and when needed.

Potential Pitfalls

With that noted, participation is not easy for local communities. The opportunity cost of participation is often high, and GFP's own experience with PM&E has shown local resistance to monitoring processes, challenges in resource generation, and difficulties in ensuring sustained engagement from the local

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[22] Church, "Doing Things Differently," 3.
[23] Binnendijk, Annette, "Results Based Management in the Development Cooperation Agencies," 19.
[24] Mansuri and Rao, *Localizing Development,* 7.
[25] Mansuri and Rao, *Localizing Development,* 10.
[26] Mac Ginty and Firchow, "Everyday Peace Indicators," 37.
[27] Peace Direct, "Putting the Local First," 6.

community.[28] Mansuri and Rao, in their expansive study of whether participation works in development, identify four major challenges to participatory processes:

1. Project design can reflect and be shaped by power and gender relations in the community.
2. The "needs" of beneficiaries can be shaped by external facilitators, compounded by local perceptions of what the project will actually be able to deliver.
3. Participants may concur in the "process of problem definition and planning in order to manipulate the programme to serve their own interests."
4. Participatory processes can be used to "legitimise a project that has previously established priorities and little real support from the community."[29]

These challenges serve as an important warning to ensure that participatory methods are not simply used as window dressing for external priorities and pre-agreed systems of measurement. Any attempt to institutionalise participatory methods of indicator development must take into account issues of "capture"[30] – whether by privileged groups at the local level or by the interests of international organisations.

Pushing Forward: Suggestions and Guidance

The current state of practice suggests that there are important theoretical and practical reasons for using locally informed indicators of peace. With the exception of academic research projects such as EPI, Peace Direct's recent report recognises that "few methods for developing such indicators currently exist."[31] The report also acknowledges that "local implementing partners … are … usually responsible for realtime monitoring, yet this subject has received less attention in studies on participatory and inclusive M&E approaches."[32] In the context of a broader discussion of PM&E in the peace-building discussion, Peace Direct offers three important recommendations that apply specifically to participatory indicator development:

- "Capacity building of local actors in M&E should be increased but not because they need to deliver external M&E commitments, but so that they can develop their own M&E frameworks and processes.
- M&E should be controlled by local actors so that they can prioritise when, how and with whom they learn and reflect.
- Local actors should be encouraged to design their M&E in consultation with local communities so that indicators are more context specific and M&E is accountable to the communities – not the donors – from the outset."[33]

The GFP approach to participatory monitoring is in line with all three recommendations above; local volunteers are encouraged to develop their own standards of success, create data collection plans and data analysis procedures, and share findings with community members. Throughout this process, volunteers receive continuous mentoring and support from GFP HQ in building their technical capacity.

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[28] Yusuf, Sairah, "The Challenges of Participation: Reflections on Generations For Peace's Approach to Participatory Monitoring," *Generations For Peace Blog*, 17 February 2016. Available at: https://blog.generationsforpeace.org/2016/02/17/the-challenges-of-participation-reflections-on-generations-for-peaces-approach-to-participatory-monitoring/.
[29] Mansuri and Rao, *Localizing Development*, 5.
[30] Platteau, Jean-Phillippe and Frederic Gaspart, "The 'Elite Capture' Problem in Participatory Development," Centre for Research on the Economics of Development (Namur, Belgium: 2003).
[31] Peace Direct, "Putting the Local First," 30.
[32] Peace Direct, "Putting the Local First," 9.
[33] Peace Direct, "Putting the Local First," 41.

In this sense, this report offers an important opportunity to assess a practical example of developing context-dependent, locally-led indicators. First, using GFP's model as a case study, does this experience of participatory indicator development express "local" understandings of peace, as the literature suggests? If so, what kind of indicators do local volunteers generate? Second, is GFP's system of participatory monitoring empowering for community members?

By using a collection of data sources – a database of participatory indicators, semi-structured surveys with community volunteers, and staff interviews – this report sheds light on what works and what does not work in participatory monitoring. In addition, by focusing on the practical successes and challenges faced by community-based volunteers in creating and measuring indicators, the report generates a series of learning points and best practices for other organisations looking to institutionalise participatory monitoring processes in their own peace-building work.

TESTING THE SUGGESTIONS: GFP'S EXPERIENCE WITH PARTICIPATORY MONITORING

Based on GFP's experience using a participatory approach to monitoring in its programmes since 2014, this report focuses on a practical example of locally informed indicator development and measurement. GFP's experience suggests that participatory approaches to indicator development do indeed express local understandings of peace. As a consequence of the organisation's focus on community-based peace-building, the majority of these expressions of peace deal with attitudinal and behavioural changes at a personal or relational level. Participatory monitoring also feels empowering for the individuals implementing the process. However, local volunteers and GFP HQ staff consistently find that ensuring data quality in participatory indicators is a challenge for both practical and conceptual reasons.

The findings of this report show that the advantages suggested by the literature do manifest in practice, but lead to numerous other challenges in terms of resource constraints and methodological consistency. Any future attempts to institutionalise mechanisms of participatory indicator development in peace-building organisations must put in place measures to deal with challenges in technical capacity, cross-verification, and participant commitment. Strong processes to reward and recognise community participation in M&E are necessary to maintain the advantages of participatory indicator development without losing the validity of the information gained through the method.

The findings are divided into four sections: after providing a quick summary of the overall findings, the first section provides some background to the programmes and respondents from whom information was collected; the next section demonstrates how indicators generated from the field express local understandings of peace; the third section presents volunteer and staff views on participatory monitoring's potential for empowering communities; and finally, the fourth section describes the challenges to ensuring data quality experienced by local volunteers and HQ staff.

Findings: A Summary

The case study demonstrates that encouraging community members to develop their own indicators of change allows them to **express local understandings of peace**. By analysing 114 unique indicators collected across 27 countries from 2014 to 2017 (out of which **92 were fully developed indicators**), this study shows that **local understandings focus on "positive peace"[34] measures**, encompassing indicators that monitor behaviour and practices (18%), knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs (54%), individuals' conception of self (13%), and community structures (14%). In particular, an analysis of these indicators showed that local volunteers considered **people's attitudes towards themselves and others to be reliable and relevant measures of peace**; in addition, they felt that **community attitudes**

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[34] Galtung, Johan, *Theories of Peace: A Synthetic Approach to Peace Thinking,* International Peace Research Institute (Oslo, Norway: 1967).

(rather than behaviours) were most likely to change through community-based programming. In total, 25 out of 44 volunteers surveyed explicitly stated that the indicator design process allowed them to create indicators that were informed by and suited to their contexts.

Views on the participatory monitoring process were generated through a survey of **44 volunteers from 13 countries**, all of whom had a role in designing and measuring locally defined indicators. Volunteers in **Georgia, Ghana, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen**, **and Zimbabwe** created indicators to measure a variety of local conflicts, focusing most frequently on issues of discrimination (62%), violence (27%), and disempowerment (15%). To understand how the participatory monitoring process affected the organisation facilitating it, **six interviewees were completed with GFP staff**.

Volunteers and staff emphasised the following themes:
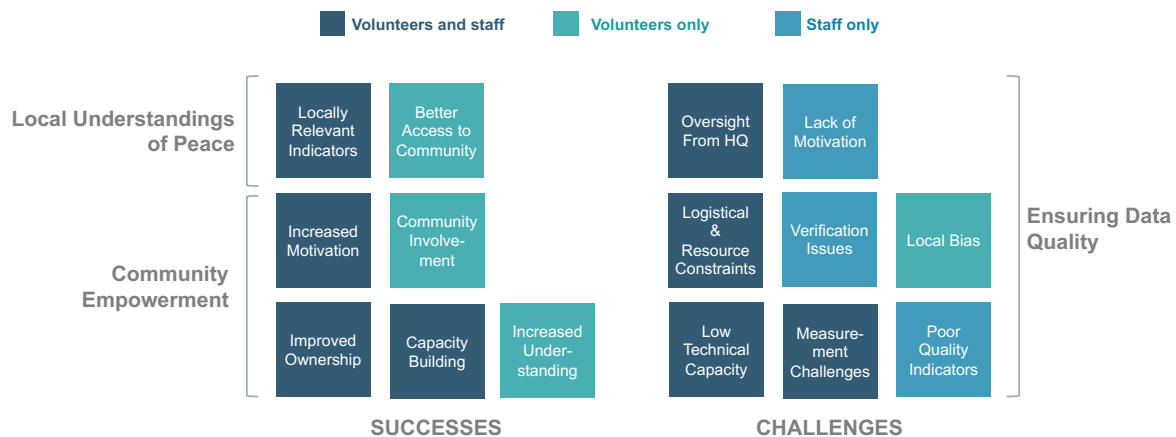
Figure 3: Successes and challenges of participatory monitoring emphasised by staff and volunteers.

Up to **70% of volunteers found that the participatory monitoring process was empowering**: they felt that it **increased understanding** of their own context and impact, **improved ownership** of their programmes, built their **technical M&E capacity**, ensured the **involvement of the wider community** in design and measurement, and – when results were positive – **increased their motivation** to continue implementing peace-building programmes. Staff members reinforced these findings, explaining how exchanges with community members during the process of indicator design and development **increased trust, collaboration, and team-building amongst staff and volunteers**. The process also forced staff to expand their own understanding of M&E concepts.

For all these advantages, GFP's experience shows that it remains **challenging to ensure the quality and usability of data** collected through a participatory monitoring process. GFP's local volunteers are community members who have been through trainings on conflict analysis and M&E; however, despite these trainings, **few have exposure to research methods and associated technical skills**. It takes a few rounds of practice to create high quality indicators. Volunteers also face **measurement challenges** typical of any data collection process: **access to respondents, overcoming bias,** and **addressing logistical and resource constraints**, amongst others. Collectively, these challenges can be demotivating for all involved. A **great deal of input from GFP HQ is required** to continuously motivate and guide volunteers through the process – and staff acknowledge that many opt out after the first few tries.

Data Sources: Programmes and Respondents

The results of this report are drawn from a few different sources: GFP's database of indicators from 27 countries, a set of 44 surveys from local volunteers in 13 countries, and six interviews with GFP HQ staff responsible for supporting programmes in these countries.

GFP's Database of Indicators

The first source of information is GFP's database of participatory indicators, compiled in GFPI's Compendium of Participatory Indicators of Peace. From 2014 to 2017, GFP had active programmes with indicators reported in 27 countries. These indicators were developed and measured according to the process outlined in Figure 1. A total of 114 indicators were generated in this way.

To understand what kind of community-based understandings of peace were expressed across these 27 countries, these indicators were sorted into four broad categories of issues that local volunteers consistently chose to explore across contexts. Each indicator was further tagged with different themes, to signify how volunteers chose to measure change within a larger category or area of interest.

Volunteer Surveys

The thematic analysis of the overall database of indicators demonstrated the kinds of issues that local volunteers measured to capture processes of change in their communities. However, analysing these themes did not shed light on whether community members considered these indicators to be contextually informed. A database of indicators alone can be misleading; volunteers may have selected these indicators because they were convenient – easy to measure or easy to understand – rather than thinking of them as the most accurate way of measuring issues of local relevance. To capture volunteers' views on working with participatory indicators, 44 volunteers from GFP's local implementation teams in 13 countries were surveyed. These countries were selected because they had only received funding from GFP HQ from 2014 to 2017, not from any third party donors; as such, their M&E systems were not affected by the data requirements of third party donors. Volunteers were selected based on their involvement with local M&E, and semi-structured surveys were administered in English and Arabic. Figure 4 below presents the demographic background of these 44 respondents.[35]
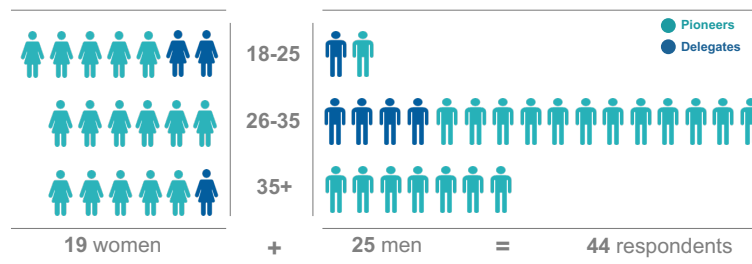
Figure 4: Demographic breakdown of survey respondents (n = 44)

[35] To run GFP's programmes, local volunteers from diverse communities are recruited through a rigorous selection process and trained as "Delegates" at International Camps or local trainings. After completing fixed requirements (including contributing to local programming), these Delegates are certified as "Pioneers." The predominance of Pioneers in the survey responses speaks to the fact that local implementation teams consist of more experienced volunteers.

Programme Background

Table 1, below, shows the distribution of these 44 survey respondents across country and programme locations. The survey captures the views of individuals across numerous cities and programme types within the 13 countries explored in detail in this report.[36]

Number	Country	Location	Start of Operations	Programme Type	Percentage of Respondents
1.	Georgia	Tbilisi	2015	Sport For Peace	5%
2.	Ghana	Kumasi	2013	Sport For Peace	9%
		Accra	2014	Sport For Peace	
3.	Indonesia	Jakarta	2013	Sport For Peace	2%
4.	Kyrgyzstan	Batken/Isfana	2014	Sport For Peace	11%
		Karakol	2014	Sport For Peace	
		Osh	2013	Sport For Peace	
5.	Macedonia	Skopje	2011	Sport For Peace Arts For Peace	2%
		Tetovo	2012	Sport For Peace Arts For Peace	
6.	Nigeria	Kaduna	2008	Sport For Peace Advocacy For Peace Empowerment For Peace	25%
7.	Pakistan	Muzaffarabad	2015	Sport For Peace	9%
		Nowshera	2013	Sport For Peace	
		Peshawar	2014	Sport For Peace	
8.	Palestine	Jenin	2014	Sport For Peace	5%
		Qalqilia	2012	Empowerment For Peace	
		Tulkarem	2014	Sport For Peace	
9.	Rwanda	Rubavu	2013	Sport For Peace	14%
		Ngoma & Kibungo	2013	Sport For Peace	
10.	Sierra Leone	Kabala	2016	Sport For Peace	2%
11.	Uganda	Soroti	2014	Sport For Peace	5%
12.	Yemen	Aden	2012	Sport For Peace	5%
13.	Zimbabwe	Harare	2013	Sport For Peace	7%
		Gweru	2013	Sport For Peace	

Table 1: Distribution of survey respondents across country and programme locations

In these locations, GFP volunteers used sport, arts, advocacy, and empowerment activities to work on conflicts in their communities. These conflicts were selected through a process of community-based conflict analysis, addressing the following issues:

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[36] In Table 1, a quarter of respondents hail from Kaduna, Nigeria. GFP's programmes in Nigeria have been in place since 2008, at least four years earlier than the start of operations in any of the other locations in this sample. The total number of volunteers in Nigeria is therefore greater than other locations that did not receive funding from sources other than GFP HQ. The geographic spread of respondents reflects the greater number of active volunteers in Nigeria.
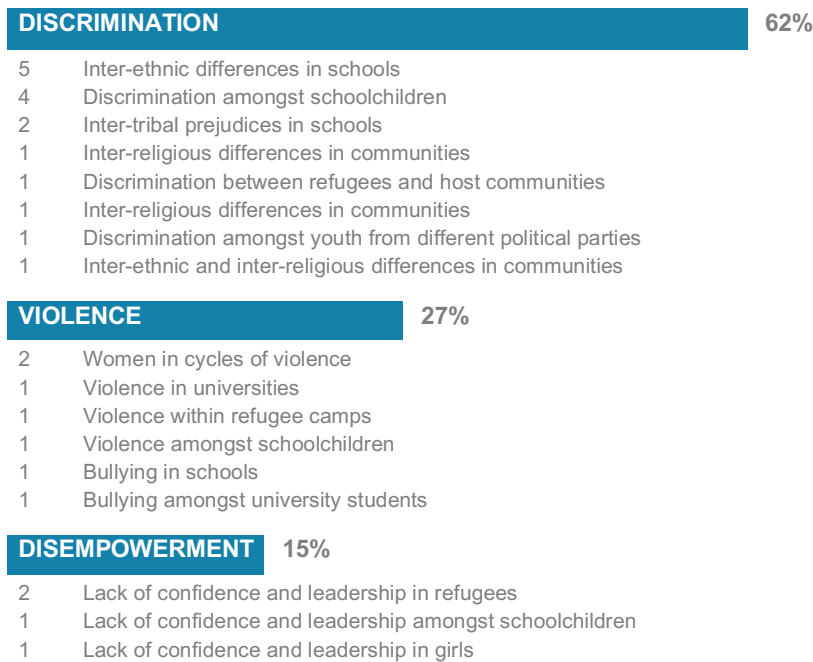
DISCRIMINATION	**62%**

5	Inter-ethnic differences in schools
4	Discrimination amongst schoolchildren
2	Inter-tribal prejudices in schools
1	Inter-religious differences in communities
1	Discrimination between refugees and host communities
1	Inter-religious differences in communities
1	Discrimination amongst youth from different political parties
1	Inter-ethnic and inter-religious differences in communities

VIOLENCE	**27%**

2	Women in cycles of violence
1	Violence in universities
1	Violence within refugee camps
1	Violence amongst schoolchildren
1	Bullying in schools
1	Bullying amongst university students

DISEMPOWERMENT	**15%**

2	Lack of confidence and leadership in refugees
1	Lack of confidence and leadership amongst schoolchildren
1	Lack of confidence and leadership in girls

Figure 5: Types of conflict issues addressed across 13 countries

Practical Considerations

As shown in Figure 5, volunteers address a range of conflicts through community-based peace-building programming. The indicators they create need to capture changes in these conflicts. This is where GFP's participatory monitoring approach differs from other, more academic approaches to developing systems of community-based peace indicators, such as the EPI project. In the EPI framework, researchers organise focus groups in which local people surface various issues that indicate – to them – peace, safety and security in their community. Researchers turn these issues into a survey format (maintaining local terminology and concerns), which is then administered to communities to see how they rated these issues of peace and conflict.[37] This approach has two key elements: the open-ended nature of the process and the role of researchers. First, community members are asked to suggest indicators of what peace means to them; they are not developing indicators to address a particular conflict issue that they have already designed a programme around. They are likely to select all kinds of indicators, not just the kind they feel they can effect change in. Second, the measurement of indicators is mediated, implemented, and analysed by researchers with a strong academic background. This means that while community members generate issues of interest, these issues are formulated into surveys, measured, and finally aggregated and presented by a team of academic researchers. This is a major investment of technical capacity that introduces methodological rigour into the process.

The GFP example, on the other hand, offers a practical application of the participatory monitoring approach, in that it uses community-driven indicators to measure and assess the success of locally led programming. GFP's local volunteers select a conflict they want to work with in their community, design a programme to address that conflict, and develop indicators that they feel are best suited to measure progress. They are then fully responsible for creating survey instruments, interview guides, and other

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[37] Mac Ginty and Firchow, "Everyday Peace Indicators," 35-36.

tools they need to measure chosen indicators. They are also responsible for aggregating the results of any surveys they carry out to measure these indicators. While GFP's HQ team provides significant support through international and local trainings in M&E, as well as ongoing mentoring and feedback on data collection tools, local volunteers remain the primary actors in creating and measuring indicators to assess changes in their community. This means that the process lacks a consistent investment of external technical capacity found in other research methods that unlock the potential of local voices in explaining peace and conflict. With that said, the GFP experience is likely to be extremely relevant for other organisations hoping to introduce participatory monitoring methods in their work; few organisations have the funding and in-house capacity to invest in expensive academic research.

Interviews with Staff

The data sources outlined above focus on the kinds of understandings of peace generated through locally informed indicators (as available in the database of indicators) and whether or not local community members found the process to be useful and empowering (as voiced in surveys with volunteers). However, a good M&E system should enable the organisation instituting it to not only access local knowledge but also apply it to improve programming and internal learning. The information gained through participatory monitoring needs to be useful for the staff managing programmes; if it is not, the approach is unlikely to find wide applicability in programmatic work.

For this reason, this report also includes the findings of semi-structured interviews with six members of GFP's staff, based at the head office in Amman, Jordan. Each staff member was responsible for supporting and reviewing indicator development and measurement in the 13 selected countries.

Community-Based Indicators of Peace

The first question this study seeks to answer is: *What kind of community-based understandings of peace do locally sourced indicators express?* An analysis of GFP's compilation of indicators shows that volunteers – when using participatory approaches to measure peace in their community – are most likely to measure knowledge, beliefs and attitudes. Survey results show that the process of developing and measuring these indicators offers community members the opportunity to reflect on and understand their own contexts better, which in turn helps them create indicators best suited to their community. Interviews with GFP staff show that the process allows staff to access community knowledge in a way they would not have been able to gain through a review of published research work or the use of pre-existing standardised indicator instruments.

Capturing Local Understandings of Peace

From 2014 to 2017, GFP volunteers in 27 countries across Asia, Africa and Europe generated a range of indicators to measure programme outcomes and impact in their communities. All these indicators were compiled in a database at GFP HQ, with information on the age range, gender profile, and population groups of interest that these indicators had been used with. In total, by December 2017, this database contained 114 unique indicators.[38] Of these, 92 (81%) were fully developed – that is, GFP HQ was in possession of the indicator, the research instrument used to measure the indicator, and the demographic breakdown of the respondents with whom the instrument was used.

A review of the 92 fully developed indicators demonstrated that community members in all locations were measuring changes in four broad categories. These are shown below.
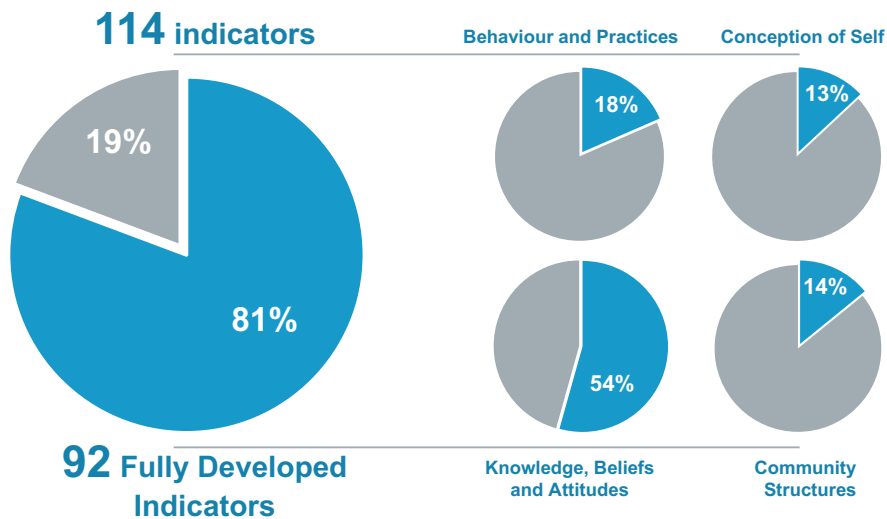

Figure 6: Categories of indicators generated by GFP volunteers from 2014 to 2017

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[38] While the total number of indicators was greater, duplicate indicators have been dropped from this analysis. This is because some programme groups used the same indicator over multiple years when they felt they had hit on an indicator that captured the local situation appropriately.

The examples of the kind of indicators included in each category (shown below) offer a snapshot of the way volunteers structured their final indicators and measurement tools.
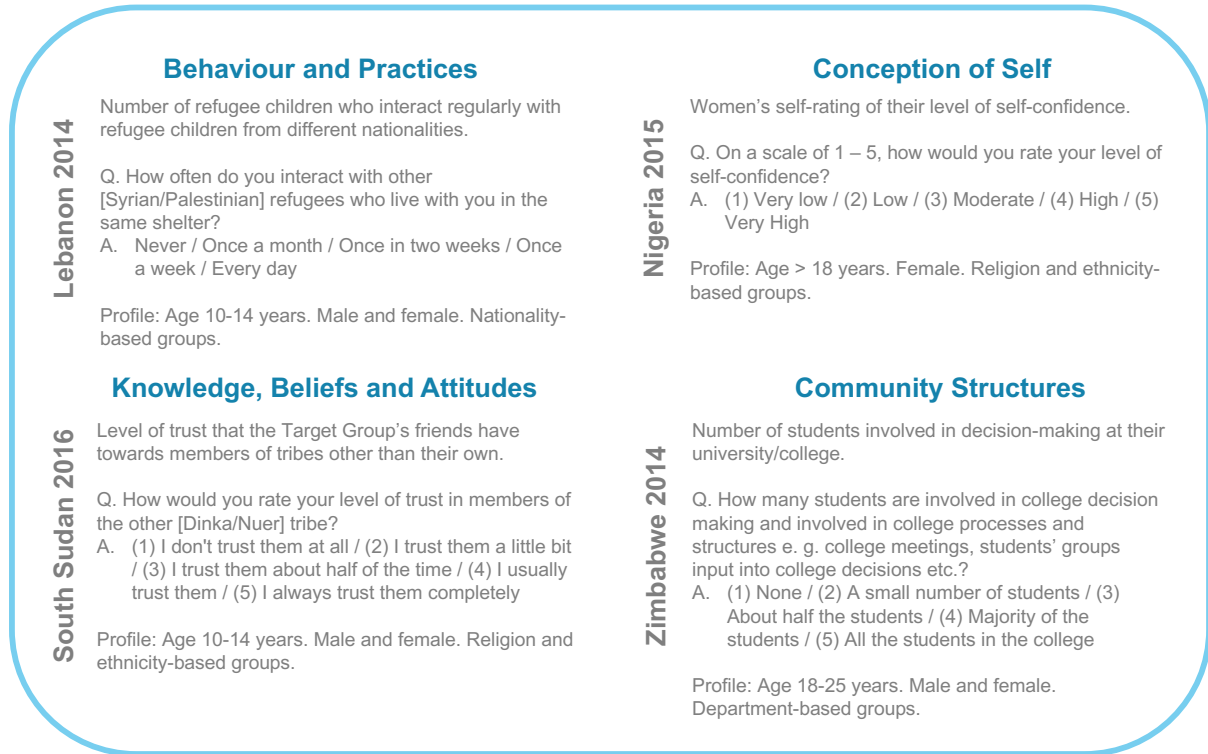
Behaviour and Practices

Lebanon 2014

Number of refugee children who interact regularly with refugee children from different nationalities.

Q. How often do you interact with other [Syrian/Palestinian] refugees who live with you in the same shelter?
A. Never / Once a month / Once in two weeks / Once a week / Every day

Profile: Age 10-14 years. Male and female. Nationality-based groups.

Conception of Self

Nigeria 2015

Women's self-rating of their level of self-confidence.

Q. On a scale of 1 – 5, how would you rate your level of self-confidence?
A. (1) Very low / (2) Low / (3) Moderate / (4) High / (5) Very High

Profile: Age > 18 years. Female. Religion and ethnicity-based groups.

Knowledge, Beliefs and Attitudes

South Sudan 2016

Level of trust that the Target Group's friends have towards members of tribes other than their own.

Q. How would you rate your level of trust in members of the other [Dinka/Nuer] tribe?
A. (1) I don't trust them at all / (2) I trust them a little bit / (3) I trust them about half of the time / (4) I usually trust them / (5) I always trust them completely

Profile: Age 10-14 years. Male and female. Religion and ethnicity-based groups.

Community Structures

Zimbabwe 2014

Number of students involved in decision-making at their university/college.

Q. How many students are involved in college decision making and involved in college processes and structures e. g. college meetings, students' groups input into college decisions etc.?
A. (1) None / (2) A small number of students / (3) About half the students / (4) Majority of the students / (5) All the students in the college

Profile: Age 18-25 years. Male and female. Department-based groups.

Figure 7: Examples of locally sourced indicators against each category

Measuring Attitudes Rather Than Practices

The majority of indicators (54%) fell into the category of Knowledge, Beliefs, and Attitudes. Conception of Self, a category closely related to people's beliefs and attitudes, contained 13% of indicators. In total, 67% of indicators dealt with attitudes – whether towards the self or others. This leads to two important conclusions:

a) Volunteers felt that people's attitudes towards themselves and others were reliable and locally relevant measures of peace.
b) Volunteers felt that community attitudes (rather than behaviours) were most susceptible to change through community-based programming.

In fact, only 18% of indicators directly measured a change in Behaviour and Practices, and an even smaller percentage, at 14%, measured changes in Community Structures. The desired outcome of peace-building programming is often behavioural and structural level change, and volunteers do include behavioural and structural measures as valid indicators of peace at the local level; however, they do not appear to consider these as the best way to measure the effectiveness of community-led peace-building programming. This is an indication of the difficulty of effecting change in the actual practice of people's lives, particularly with regard to changing entrenched community structures.

Within the four categories outlined above, each of the 92 complete indicators was assigned a theme. These themes helped understand if there were particular aspects of change in Behaviour and Practices,

for example, that volunteers measured consistently. Volunteers might measure change in Behaviour and Practices through asking about regular interaction between groups (as in Figure 7); however, they might also ask about differences in social communication practices, as shown below.
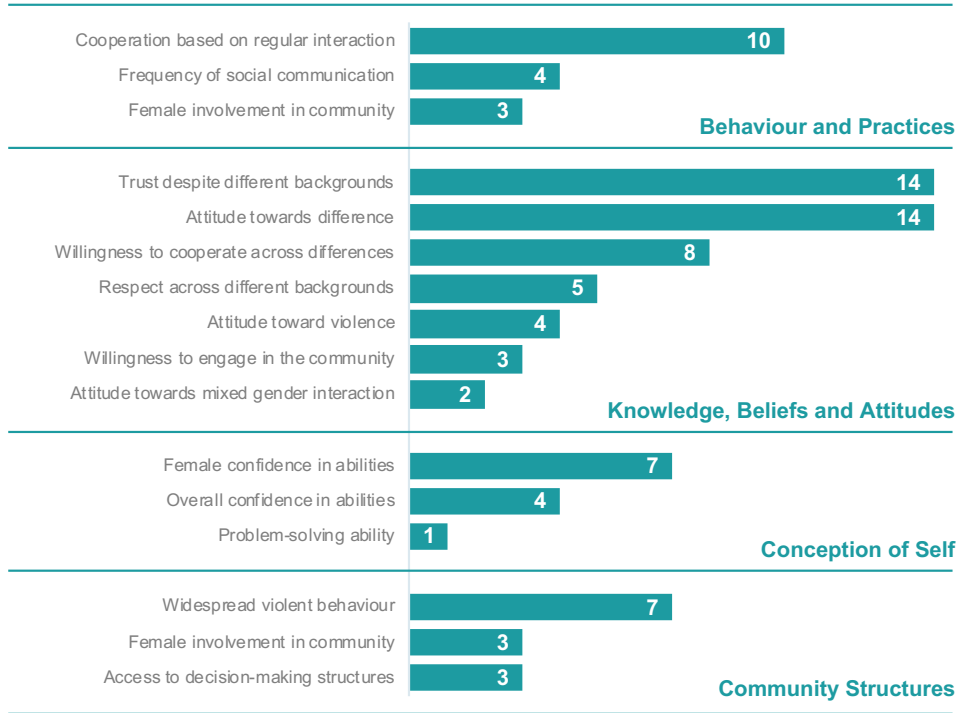
Cooperation based on regular interaction	10
Frequency of social communication	4
Female involvement in community	3
	Behaviour and Practices
Trust despite different backgrounds	14
Attitude towards difference	14
Willingness to cooperate across differences	8
Respect across different backgrounds	5
Attitude toward violence	4
Willingness to engage in the community	3
Attitude towards mixed gender interaction	2
	Knowledge, Beliefs and Attitudes
Female confidence in abilities	7
Overall confidence in abilities	4
Problem-solving ability	1
	Conception of Self
Widespread violent behaviour	7
Female involvement in community	3
Access to decision-making structures	3
	Community Structures

Figure 8: Main themes in locally sourced indicators, per category

Focusing on Positive Rather Than Negative Peace

Drawing from Lederach's dimensions of conflict, the themes in each category stress issues of personal and relational change, with very few focused on structural issues such as community-level decision-making.[39] Only one theme, grouped into the category that measures change in broader Community Structures, directly measures physical violence in the community. In this sense, the expressions of peace selected by community volunteers are more in line with the concept of "positive peace," rather than focusing on "negative peace" through measuring security or safety in the community.[40] By concentrating on personal and relational changes, volunteers measure certain elements of positive peace, but veer away from measuring formal or informal institutional changes.

When compared with more recent work, the indicators identified and used by GFP volunteers form a subset of the types of peace indicators uncovered by research such as the EPI project. In the case of EPI, "people primarily use security-related indicators to define peace," while "indicators relating to social cohesion or indicators that stress relationships and community cohesion, and social activities, such as

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[39] Lederach, John Paul, "Conflict Transformation," *Beyond Intractability*. Eds. Guy Burgess and Heidi Burgess. Conflict Information Consortium, University of Colorado, Boulder (2003). Accessed 16 March 2018: http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/transformation
[40] Galtung, Johan, *Theories of Peace.*

parties or community gatherings, closely follow these."[41] Out of the 16 categories that EPI's indicators were divided into, GFP's indicators fell into five: cohesion/interdependence, conflict resolution, discrimination, leadership, and social.[42] The fact that GFP volunteers tended to create indicators that focused on attitudes towards relationships and community interaction reflects both the focus of GFP programming (which does not combat active violence such as war) and the characteristics that volunteers consider valid measures of peace on the ground. This choice of indicators validates – across a wide variety of contexts and a range of local actors – the use of "positive peace" approaches to measuring peace in communities.

The localised nature of indicator development and creation meant that there was no clear trend in indicators preferred across geographic locations. It was only useful to examine categories and themes in aggregate, rather than per country, to show community preferences overall. This was because volunteers tailored their indicator selection to the type of conflict they wanted to address. For example, volunteers in an area that was suffering from war – for example, in Aden, Yemen – might not address issues of violent conflict in their programming, perhaps because they feel there is nothing they can do about the war in their community. They might focus on another aspect of local conflict, such as discrimination against women. In fact, unlike previous studies, GFP's repository of indicators did not show that there was a preference for a particular category of indicators in countries that had recently experienced violent conflict.

Exploring the Relevance of Locally Sourced Indicators

Analysing the 114 indicators collected across 27 countries gives a sense of the kind of changes community members found indicative of peace. But did local volunteers actually feel like these indicators reflected realities on the ground, or did they choose these indicators out of expediency? How many volunteers felt that the process of creating their own indicators actually allowed them to produce indicators that were appropriate to their contexts? The 13-country volunteer survey offered an opportunity to generate answers to these questions. Responses to the volunteer survey showed the following:

25 of 44 felt that the process of developing and measuring their own indicators helped make indicators locally relevant

12 reflected more deeply on **the right way to measure a change** in their own contexts

10 felt they could create better indicators because they had **more local information**

3 felt that they could create the most appropriate indicators because of **better access to communities**

Figure 9: Number of volunteers who felt that participatory indicators were locally relevant

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41 Mac Ginty and Firchow, "Measuring Peace," 7.
42 Mac Ginty and Firchow, "Measuring Peace," 13.

One survey respondent described a programme that she had been running with a team of other volunteers in Tbilisi, Georgia:

> *We had a programme on building acceptance and respect among young people from different religious groups. Without knowing the culture of our community and how these young people can express their respect and acceptance towards each other, it would be impossible to measure any changes we had achieved. We could not count number of agreements, or official statements as others might have suggested, because we were focused on behavioural changes among youth. For this, it is important to understand the meaning of behaviours in cultural context, which we knew well. – Georgia, Female Volunteer.*

In this context, local volunteers had a keen understanding of what particular behaviours meant for young Georgians; they knew what they should measure to indicate meaningful change in their context, and the participatory monitoring approach allowed them to devise ways to measure this change. Volunteers had a similar experience in Uganda and Kyrgyzstan:

> *The fact that the community members are the ones who help in identifying the conflict, help in the implementation of the GFP programmes, and understand their community more than any other person, gives them an edge over any other group to create and measure indicators of the programmes. – Uganda, Male Volunteer.*

> *We had to demonstrate our big desire to contribute to our community and have a great impact on it. There is no doubt that we should develop and measure our indicators, because no one knows better than we know our conflict situation, how our programme works, and what should be improved further. – Kyrgyzstan, Female Volunteer.*

A volunteer from Zimbabwe also listed out exactly what benefits the participatory monitoring approach afforded, in her view:

> *1. We are familiar with local culture and way of doing things*
>
> *2. We are familiar with the conflict in the area therefore can be good judges of change*
>
> *3. We are realistic when creating indicators that match our level of capability*
>
> *4. We can be flexible and adapt to our local reality. – Zimbabwe, Female Volunteer.*

This experience suggested that not only did locally informed indicators allow volunteers to adapt to the situation in their community, they also allowed them to be realistic in what they wanted to measure, based on their own capacity. Volunteers did not find themselves committed to measuring standardised indicators that required a data collection framework beyond their current resources.

Finally, local indicators benefited from volunteers' access to the communities in which they lived and worked. Volunteers could discuss ideas with community members before finalising measurement techniques. A Ghanaian volunteer shared potential indicators with the headmistress of the school in which he was planning to run a programme and received useful suggestions on framing questions on the conflict situation in the school.[43]

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[43] Ghana, Male Volunteer.

Interviews with GFP staff affirmed much of what volunteers stated in their survey responses; interviewees found the involvement of volunteers in M&E to be contributing to the development of context-sensitive indicators. Five out of six staff members stressed that involving volunteers allows staff to obtain first-hand knowledge as opposed to knowledge obtained through previous research – which is often missing or hard to find in remote, conflict-ridden communities. In the words of one staff member, "GFP has access to local expertise through volunteers in a way that is difficult to have otherwise."[44]

All of this is in keeping with the academic and practical literature that suggests that participatory approaches are flexible and grounded in the local context.[45] The experiences of volunteers and staff suggest that the indicators presented in GFP's database of participatory indicators reflect the situation on the ground; in addition, they allow an organisation with a remote head office to grasp the conflict situation in the field in a way that it might not be able to through other mechanisms.

This approach is, however, built on the assumption that volunteers, as members of their community, are local experts. One staff member cited an example of when a set of volunteers chose not to engage in indicator development at all, compiling instead an anecdotal report on the situation in their community:

> *Then when I was in touch with the volunteers they said this is what the community feels. But how did you know this is what the community feels? Because they lived there. So, they thought that they are in a position to represent and write whatever they think the community is like.[46]*

This example highlights an important tension that surfaces in various analyses of participatory methods: who speaks for the community?[47] In this report, GFP's volunteers are considered representatives of their communities because they are selected based on an even representation of cleavages in their localities (such as ethnicity, gender, religion, and so on). However, without going through the process of developing locally informed indicators and measuring them through surveys or interviews with other community members, they cannot be considered to speak for communities on their own. This is the basis of the participatory monitoring approach: people should be surveyed or interviewed by members of their own community, measuring issues that local individuals believe are relevant. Skipping key elements of the process might be "local," but it is not participatory.

Based on the types of situations cited above, staff felt that there was a risk that the idea of local expertise might be taken "too far," leading to situations where indicators were dispensed with entirely in favour of anecdotal evidence generated by the volunteers themselves. This example suggested that, in practice, there is a need to modulate and structure the presumption of local expertise to ensure that a range of voices are fairly and appropriately represented. In this sense, while GFP's model allows individuals to create local indicators in a participatory fashion, important questions remain around who should participate and how rigorously the process is followed. This theme reoccurs in the discussion of the shortcomings of the approach.

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[44] Staff Interview 20170425.
[45] Weaver, Linda and J. Bradley Cousins, "Unpacking the Participatory Process," *Journal of Multi-Disciplinary Evaluation*, 1:1 (2007): 19-40; Church, "Doing Things Differently"; Peace Direct, "Putting the Local First."
[46] Staff Interview 20170419 I.
[47] Chambers, Robert, *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*, Intermediate Technology Publications (1999); Estrella and Gaventa. "Who Counts Reality?"

Community Empowerment

Mansuri and Rao, in their review of participation in development, suggest that participatory approaches are empowering for the communities that participate in them.[48] To test this insight in the context of PM&E, one of the research questions this study seeks to answer is: *Does the process of creating and measuring indicators impact the community members who participate in it?*

GFP's experience affirms this in the context of localised M&E; volunteers and community members do indeed find the process of developing and measuring indicators empowering. This empowerment takes a variety of forms: volunteers feel they understand their own community better; they are able to involve community members more; they have a stronger sense of ownership and motivation for their programmes; and they feel that learning more about M&E has built their capacity and their transferable skills. But this sense of empowerment is not limited to the communities on the ground: GFP staff members also suggest that participatory monitoring has contributed to internal capacity building within the organisation.

Patterns of Learning and Participation

Community empowerment through participatory monitoring has two avenues: first, empowerment through *learning* (about both context and technical material), and second, empowerment through *participation* (by involvement in the creation and measurement of indicators).

Empowerment through learning functioned in the following ways:

Volunteers first learned about participatory monitoring through **trainings** or **discussions**.
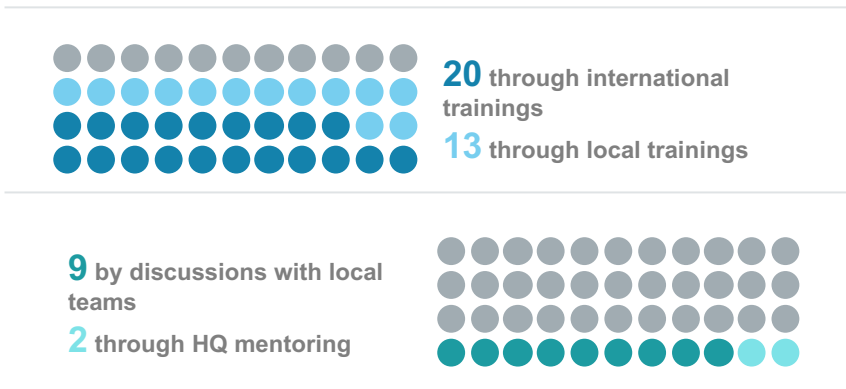
20 through international trainings

13 through local trainings

9 by discussions with local teams

2 through HQ mentoring

Figure 10: Processes by which volunteers were first introduced to participatory monitoring

Part of the reason that volunteers found the process empowering was the fact that it was tied to important learning opportunities: the majority of volunteers learned about participatory monitoring through GFP's trainings (whether local or international). Others were able to benefit from the knowledge that local team members had gained – presumably through trainings – as well as through mentoring from HQ. These trainings represented a significant investment in volunteers' technical capacity.

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[48] Mansuri and Rao, Localizing Development, 7.

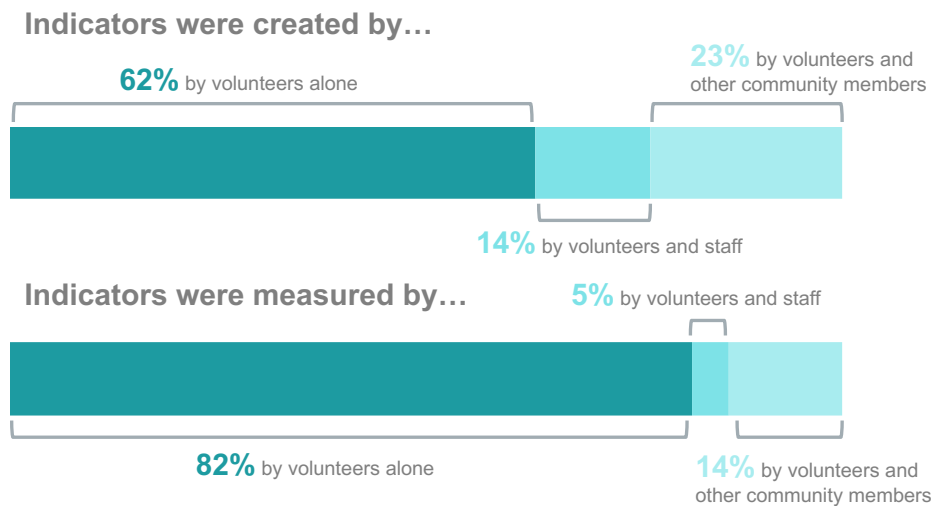Another avenue of empowerment was participation in the process of indicator creation and measurement:

Indicators were created by…

62% by volunteers alone

23% by volunteers and other community members

14% by volunteers and staff

Indicators were measured by…

5% by volunteers and staff

82% by volunteers alone

14% by volunteers and other community members

Figure 11: Community participation in the process of creating and measuring indicators

At 82%, volunteers were almost entirely responsible for *measuring* indicators (with a little support from GFP staff and other community members). However, they were less likely to *create* indicators alone: only 62% created indicators by working within volunteer groups. Instead, up to 23% of volunteers stated that they created indicators through collaboration and discussion with other community members. This distribution suggests that there were opportunities for a range of actors to benefit from participation in local indicator development: volunteers, staff, and other community members.

As noted in the previous section, it matters who is involved in creating knowledge about communities. The fact that 23% of volunteers involved other community members in creating indicators and 14% involved them in gathering data suggests that the wider community has been able to benefit significantly from the empowerment potential of participatory monitoring.

Breaking Down Community Empowerment

The patterns of learning and participation described above show *how* participatory monitoring can contribute to empowerment. This section illustrates *what* that empowerment consists of, explaining how the process of creating and measuring indicators impacts local communities.

As shown below, 70% of responses to the volunteer survey considered participatory monitoring to be empowering in one of the following ways:
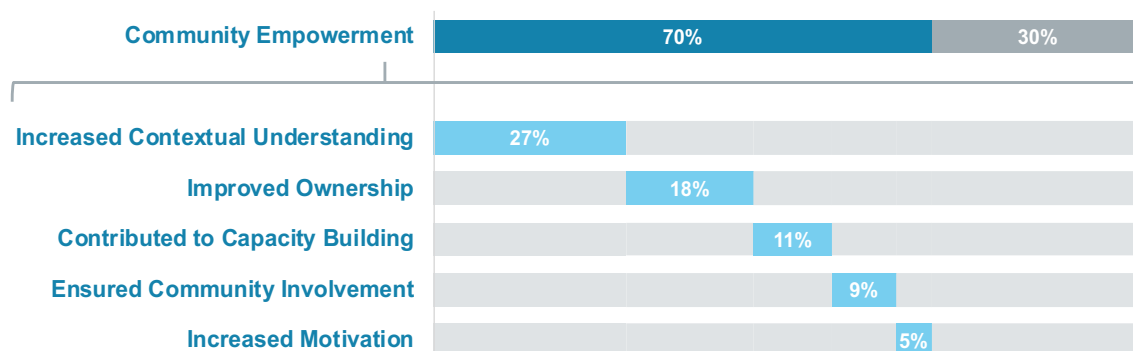
Community Empowerment	70%	30%
Increased Contextual Understanding	27%	
Improved Ownership	18%	
Contributed to Capacity Building	11%	
Ensured Community Involvement	9%	
Increased Motivation	5%	

Figure 12: The components of community empowerment through participatory monitoring

Contextual Understanding

Thinking about indicators allowed volunteers to develop a better understanding of their own context and impact. Up to 27% of all survey respondents suggested that creating and measuring their own indicators helped them improve their understanding of their community, as well as their impact in that community. As one respondent stated:

> *1. It gives us ownership of the programme*
> *2. It has made us understand that the indicators are there to measure success of programme*
> *3. It has helped us understand the community better. – Nigeria, Male Volunteer.*

This was the most common response; as reiterated by a volunteer in Pakistan, "through this process community members such as me take ownership and learn to understand the main issues of the community."[49]

Another respondent listed the following benefits of creating and measuring indicators:

> *It is much easier to use indicators to measure changes when you have been participating in the process of creating those indicators. In this case, you have deeper understanding why we use exactly this indicator in our community, what we want to measure and why we want to measure this in our context. – Georgia, Female Volunteer.*

Increased understanding of context and impact had other knock-on effects. With increased confidence and understanding of their own programmes, volunteers' credibility increased: it became easier for them to attract external support, as they were able to confidently engage in networking with other partners. As described by a GFP staff member:

> *For the volunteers to be able to own the thoughts that they put into the programme, it also enabled them to pitch the programme, that is – pitch the idea to try and find more support for the programme ... For example, in Libya, when the volunteers were able to pitch the programme properly using their understanding of their impact in the community, they were able to get more funding for the other programmes that they were doing. The other programmes had nothing to do with GFP, but it opened doors for them.[50]*

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[49] Pakistan, Male Volunteer.
[50] Staff Interview 20170419 I.

Overall, one of the foremost results of participatory monitoring was an increased understanding of the conflict situation of the community as well as the impact that local programmes had on this conflict.

Ownership

In keeping with the literature on the advantages of participatory methods, the GFP experience of participatory monitoring improved participants' sense of ownership of their programmes. Up to 18% of survey respondents stated that indicator development and measurement made them feel greater ownership of their work. A volunteer from Sierra Leone included ownership as part of his first reaction to the idea that his team would be responsible for creating and measuring indicators for their programmes: "I was happy! Because I believed, if I design and measure indicators, I will take more ownership of the process and the programme in general."[51]

In Zimbabwe, a volunteer linked this explicitly to an enhanced ownership of results:

> *It is a good idea considering you will be the person on the ground implementing the programme. It gives a sense of ownership to the implementer and therefore results in being totally responsible for programme outcomes. – Zimbabwe, Female Volunteer.*

This sense of ownership went beyond the volunteers themselves. In the example of a programme in Nigeria, one volunteer described her experience with other community members:

> *This process worked well with the community initiative I monitored in the Makera community, with persons living with disabilities. They were able to carry forward the learning because the process was initiated by them, thereby making them owners of the programme. – Nigeria, Female Volunteer.*

Five out of six staff members also confirmed that participatory monitoring increased community ownership, outlining three ways in which this happened. First, staff members felt that the process ensured that communities did not see M&E as a foreign endeavour, but as a community-level initiative, based on local concerns. Second, interviewees found that increased ownership was related to a stronger sense of responsibility amongst volunteers. This was because programme monitoring was based on volunteer interests, rather than simply reproducing instructions received from GFP HQ. Third, staff felt that increased ownership contributed to the sustainability of the programmes run by volunteers by rooting them more deeply in the community. One staff member found that building ownership had the effect of increasing acceptance for the programme locally, strengthening the continuation of GFP's activities in the region.[52]

As a useful counterpoint, one staff member raised an example of two countries where – to begin with – volunteers did not create their own indicators. This was because supervising staff felt that the volunteers would find the process a burden. The responsibility for indicator creation was instead taken up by supervising staff. In these cases, volunteers ended up refusing to measure proposed indicators, stating that they found them to have limited relevance to the community's problems.[53] The staff member in question disagreed that the indicators were completely irrelevant, as they had been informed by previous work in the region and international practices. Staff felt that while these indicators could have benefited from a few small alterations, the real problem was the lack of ownership surrounding their

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[51] Sierra Leone, Male Volunteer.
[52] Staff Interview 20170419 I.
[53] Staff Interview 20170428.

creation. Avoiding indicator design and measurement can reduce the burden on volunteers; however, this has important trade-offs for local ownership, responsibility, and sustainability.

Capacity Building

Previous work by GFP suggests that participatory approaches are fundamentally emancipatory, as they expand the power of local actors.[54] Participatory monitoring's contribution to capacity building is an important mechanism to increase the power of local actors to design, implement, and evaluate processes of change in their communities. While 11% of survey respondents spoke of capacity building in M&E as an explicit benefit of participatory monitoring, interviews with staff members offer a narrative of capacity building in other transferrable skills as well.

Capacity building occurred through the direct provision of technical knowledge – through trainings and mentoring – as well as through opportunities for practice. In Palestine, volunteers pointed to the fact that they had entered a cyclical process of experiential learning: "I have the knowledge and experience to apply this process again and of course learn from previous lessons in applying it."[55] In Pakistan, a volunteer described the impact that participatory monitoring had not only on her skills but her relationship with the community: "My abilities of evaluating the impact of the program have been improved, and similarly my communication skills with the community members have improved."[56]

A volunteer from Georgia linked opportunities for capacity building to volunteer retention:

> *[Another] reason is building skills and knowledge of local volunteers in M&E. I think this is particularly important for organisations like GFP to maintain volunteers, to keep them engaged in local activities, to improve quality and impact of local programmes. – Georgia, Female Volunteer.*

Other volunteers also drew a connection between greater M&E capacity and improved programme design and delivery:

> *Because each of the GFP volunteers, we learn that we need to know what we expect (what results, outputs, outcomes, impact or change) from the implementation of a programme in our communities. The indicator is the one that show do we know that a change is occurring? It is very important that we learn methods for measuring this or that change in our community. When we plan our programme, we must put clear indicators to ensure that after the implementation or during the implementation we were sure that our programme will change the situation for the better. – Kyrgyzstan, Male Volunteer.*

Staff interviews demonstrated that the real results of processes of capacity building are most obvious in programmes that have used participatory monitoring for a relatively long period of time. Four out of six interviewees agreed that the monitoring process becomes easier over time, as capacities developed and processes became routinised. In particular, volunteers became better at indicator development (or learned to build on previous indicators), which was often the greatest hurdle in early attempts at the process. For example, in Kaduna, Nigeria – with programmes ongoing since 2008 – local capacity has

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[54] Beswick, Hussein and Yusuf, "Building Up and Breaking Down Participation."
[55] Palestine, Male Volunteer.
[56] Pakistan, Female Volunteer.

been developing for a long time and support from HQ staff is strong. The process of designing and measuring indicators happens very smoothly.[57]

In addition, in all interviews but one, staff found that resistance to the idea of designing and measuring indicators declined over time, which they attributed to the increase in technical M&E capacity in the implementing team. However, there might be a self-selection bias here: resistance might only be declining amongst those volunteers who persist with the method. Others might choose not to continue. Staff members acknowledge this concern:

> *I think that more of the change was in terms of the capacity. So, once they've been able to do that once, twice, they get better, and so it becomes less work. I think for those who feel overburdened from the beginning they kind of often drop out.[58]*

For those who continue with the process, participatory monitoring appears to strengthen local capacities by offering important opportunities to develop technical M&E skills.

Community Involvement

As outlined in Figure 11, 23% of volunteers involved other community members (unconnected to GFP) in designing indicators, and 14% involved others in measuring these indicators. Collectively, volunteers felt that participatory monitoring ensured community involvement in two ways: first, because the process was led by volunteers, who were representatives of the community; second, because the process engaged members of the broader community in programme design, monitoring, and evaluation.

A volunteer from Palestine explained how the process of participatory monitoring allows volunteers, as community members, to validate existing local knowledge:

> *I am a member of the community and I have enough experience in my community and I can observe the problems and conflicts that exist and I have the ability to observe the change in case it occurs. The process of creating and measuring indicators helps connect and strengthen my observations. – Palestine, Male Volunteer.*

Involving locals in measuring indicators capitalised on relationships that existed between data collectors and respondents. Speaking to the challenges of eliciting truthful information from community members, a Nigerian volunteer stated, "The people in the community trust those who stay in their community, so they give real answers to baseline and endline questions."[59] In this sense, community involvement increased the validity of the M&E data acquired.

In Nigeria, another volunteer described how the participatory monitoring process ensures capacity development amongst the broader community, not just for GFP's volunteers:

> *1. It helps having a link to the community*
>
> *2. Members of communities learn to monitor progress and make adjustments*
>
> *3. Community members learn to create indicators*

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[57] Staff Interview 20170425.
[58] Staff Interview 20170419 II.
[59] Nigeria, Male Volunteer.

> *4. It enables community members to evaluate the extent to which they are achieving their objectives. – Nigeria, Female Volunteer.*

This example demonstrates that the capacity building that results from participatory monitoring is not limited to volunteers alone – it extends to other members of the community as well.

Finally, in some cases, the process changed volunteers' views of their own community. A volunteer from Zimbabwe learnt "not to take local communities for granted, they have a lot to share." Specifically, she found that, "The community is aware of what can work and what might not work, they are aware of key people who matter in the community."[60] In this sense, the active involvement and participation of community members allowed volunteers to reach the appropriate decision-makers and influencers in their localities.

Interestingly, none of these processes are mentioned in interviews with GFP staff, perhaps reflecting the fact that staff do not have the same visibility of processes in the community as local volunteers do.

Motivation

One final aspect of participatory monitoring's contributions to community empowerment is its impact on motivation. Previous literature suggests that if the participatory approach is successfully utilised, participants display increased commitment and accountability.[61] The interview findings support this argument, as it is raised repeatedly that volunteers felt more responsible for the PM&E process than they did for traditional M&E. While motivation was only raised by 5% of respondents in the volunteer survey, a majority of the interviewees point towards the highly motivating effect of successful participatory monitoring.

Interviewees suggest that when volunteers feel that GFP staff trust them to carry out monitoring, they have increased motivation to deliver good work.[62] This is borne out by the surveys. For example, in Georgia and Nigeria, volunteers discussed their initial reactions to the idea that they would design and measure their own indicators of peace:

> *I had very positive reaction that we should develop our own indicators to measure the change we made in our targeted community. For me it seemed like I would be able to see the real impact of our work, and that is always encouraging when you are a volunteer. – Georgia, Female Volunteer.*
>
> *It was very encouraging to know that I will develop and measure my own indicator, because the programme will be implemented and monitored by me. – Nigeria, Female Volunteer.*

A Rwandan volunteer linked this motivation to community involvement, stating that including community members includes more perspectives and "realities." When the programme is able to demonstrate achievements building on all these realities, it is a major motivation for the implementers.[63]

Motivation stems not just from a sense of trust, but also the increased visibility of programme results. Volunteers see results if they participate in a full cycle of monitoring – that is, they measure indicators both before and after their programmes. All six interviewees stated that being involved in the entire

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[60] Zimbabwe, Female Volunteer.
[61] Harvey, "Participatory Methodology Facilitation Guide."
[62] Staff Interview 20170420 I.
[63] Rwanda, Male Volunteer.

process increased volunteers' motivation to be even more engaged in the future. In addition, interviewees stressed the importance of communicating results appropriately: to sustain motivation, volunteers need to see the changes they have achieved, through the data they have collected. It is vital to help volunteers understand what changes they have created and how substantial they are.

Relying on results for motivation can cut both ways: where the results are good, volunteers may be motivated to continue. Where results are problematic, staff explained that a great deal of support and mentoring was required to incentivise volunteers to continue working. In this respect, staff found that the reliance on quantitative surveys – which volunteers find easy to develop and administer – can have a counterproductive effect. Representing results quantitatively can be demotivating for volunteers, as they often have the feeling that they have achieved more, but that this is not represented in the numbers. Staff felt that placing a strong emphasis on qualitative methods of displaying success was necessary to offer a more nuanced picture of change, as well as to sustain motivation amongst volunteers.

Unexpected Results: Staff Empowerment

The literature on participatory methods tends to focus on the advantages that accrue to the community in terms of empowerment and representation, and to the overseeing organisation in terms of better access to local knowledge.[64] However, the interviews with staff members responsible for overseeing participatory monitoring in programmes demonstrates that the process leads to internal capacity building in the organisation as well.

As one interviewee described, participatory monitoring did not only build understanding of the volunteers, it also improved the technical skills of the staff supporting volunteers. "Participatory monitoring increases the staff's own technical capabilities, as well as their understanding of who they are working with, and what issues are relevant."[65] In this sense, participatory monitoring also required staff to learn more about indicator development, research methods, and data analysis techniques, in order to support volunteers appropriately in the field.

Another interesting finding was the sense of trust: staff felt that volunteers were happy to be entrusted with handling the monitoring process, and in turn this made volunteers trust staff more. Two out of six interviewees described instances of volunteers approaching staff with problems or concerns in the monitoring process, which they might not have raised if they viewed the organisation as an external monitor of their programmes. Using a participatory monitoring approach meant that volunteers were more willing to communicate with staff and interested in pursuing collaborations to achieve better results for their collective work. When indicators were not designed by volunteers, interviewees gave examples of less ownership and lower levels of trust and team-building between GFP and volunteers.[66]

In this sense, the empowerment potential of PM&E is not limited to communities on the ground; the process can lead to internal capacity building and improved communication within organisations that are managing the participatory process as well.

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[64] Mansuri and Rao, Localizing Development.
[65] Staff Interview 20170419 II.
[66] Staff Interview 20170428.

Ensuring Data Quality

For all the benefits of participatory monitoring established in this case study – such as context-sensitive indicator development through a process that encourages community empowerment – volunteers and staff members identify an important drawback: the struggle to ensure data quality. Surveys and interviews show that volunteers experience conceptual and practical challenges in indicator creation and measurement, which have an impact on volunteers' ability to generate valid and reliable results from the field. These challenges require GFP HQ staff to take on a significant role in offering support and guidance, which can be both time-consuming and counter-productive, considering the community-led nature of the process.

In some ways, this finding is not unexpected. A major critique of participatory methods is the difficulty of ensuring methodological rigour.[67] Addressing these methodological challenges requires multiple steps: the use of diverse theories, methods and data sources; ongoing meta-evaluation and critical reflection; and rigorous data analysis techniques applied by research experts, to name a few.[68] All of these steps are both useful and achievable in a context where the users of a participatory approach have a research background. The GFP experience with participatory monitoring is a case study of a situation where the primary implementers of the participatory approach – volunteers from local communities – do not have training in research methods prior to their involvement with GFP.

At the same time, the challenge of ensuring data quality sheds light on the specific issues that hinder the application of participatory monitoring. The narrative that emerges through volunteer surveys and staff interviews presents a picture of interlocking challenges that result in poor data quality in many cases. Charting out these challenges – as shown below – is an important step towards practically improving data quality, when using a community-focused participatory approach to M&E.
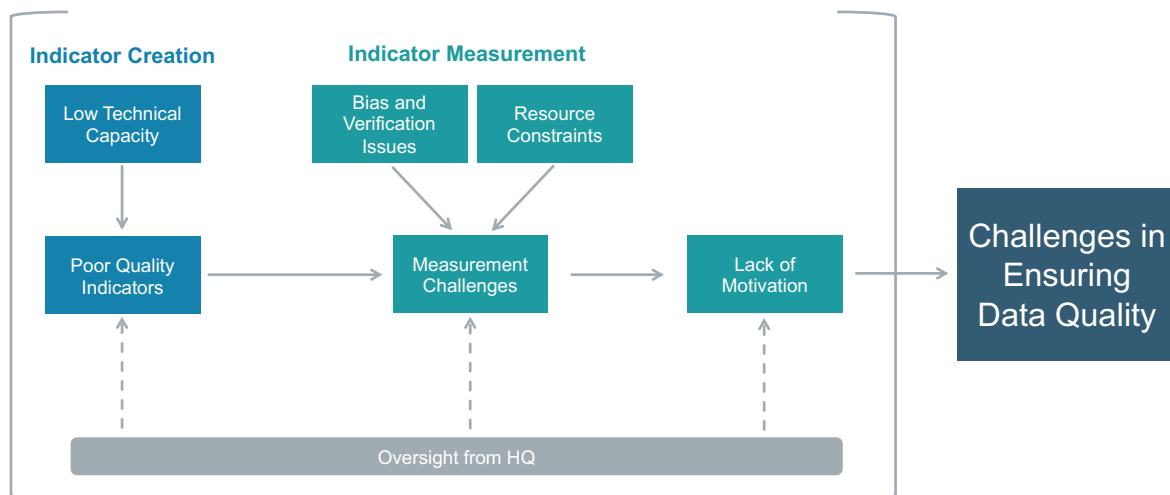

Figure 13: Interlocking challenges leading to poor data quality through participatory monitoring

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[67] Parks, W., *Who measures change: an introduction to participatory monitoring and evaluation of communication for social change*, Communication for Social Change Consortium (New Jersey, US: 2005), 13.
[68] Lennie, "Increasing the Rigour and Trustworthiness of Participatory Evaluations"; Mac Ginty and Firchow, "Everyday Peace Indicators."

Broadly, the challenges outlined in Figure 13 show how community members' low technical capacity (a product of limited opportunities for research training in the past) leads to the development of poor quality indicators. These indicators are challenging to measure for methodological reasons – for example, respondents in the field do not cope well with unclear questionnaires. Various resource constraints and local problems of bias within the community compound these measurement challenges. Once volunteers have invested time and effort in the process of indicator design, they have little tolerance for the practical challenges that follow in the measurement of these indicators (including a time-consuming process of data analysis that may eventually demonstrate limited impact). At this point, there is little motivation left to pursue any additional steps required to ensure data quality in the field. Throughout, the oversight needed from HQ makes the process even more costly.

In piecing together this story of interconnected challenges, it is important to note that volunteers and staff have different preoccupations. The results of the volunteer surveys do not talk about "organisation-side" costs such as the investment of time required from GFP HQ; similarly, staff interviews tend not to raise practical issues of community access, which constitute "community-side" costs. The main trends from both the surveys and the interviews are shown below:
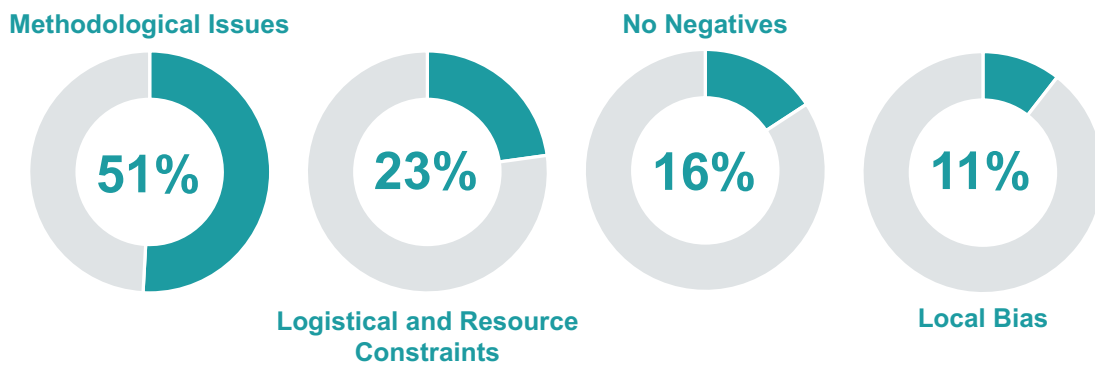

Figure 14: Breakdown of survey responses identifying challenges to participatory monitoring

PARTICIPATORY MONITORING: CHALLENGES		INTERVIEW NUMBER					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Methodological Issues	Low Technical Capacity	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Poor Quality Indicators	■	■	■	□	■	■
Measurement Challenges	Resource Constraints	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Verification Issues	■	■	□	□	□	□
HQ Support	Oversight Needed from HQ	■	■	■	■	■	■
	Lack of Volunteer Motivation	□	□	■	□	■	■

Figure 15: Number of interviews raising challenges to participatory monitoring

The challenges outlined in the surveys and interviews can be grouped into three main categories:

- **Methodological issues**. These include *low technical capacity* and *poor quality indicators*.
- **Measurement challenges**. These include *overall challenges*, *bias and verification issues*, and *logistical and resource constraints*.
- **Technical oversight**. This includes the challenges of *mentoring* and *initial resistance*.

Methodological Issues

Low Technical Capacity

Both staff and volunteers felt that the participatory monitoring process – if it was to reveal useful and methodologically sound results – required a high level of technical capacity on the part of volunteers. When asked which steps of the participatory monitoring process volunteers found easiest and most difficult, an overwhelming 58% felt the process of indicator design was the most challenging:
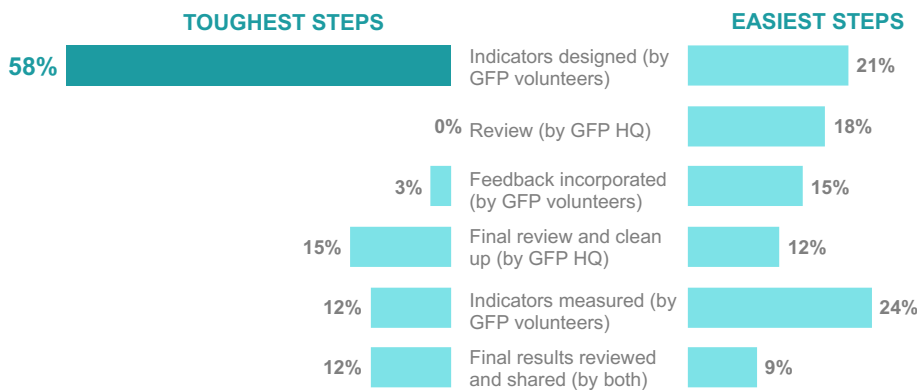
TOUGHEST STEPS		EASIEST STEPS
58%	Indicators designed (by GFP volunteers)	**21%**
0%	Review (by GFP HQ)	**18%**
3%	Feedback incorporated (by GFP volunteers)	**15%**
15%	Final review and clean up (by GFP HQ)	**12%**
12%	Indicators measured (by GFP volunteers)	**24%**
12%	Final results reviewed and shared (by both)	**9%**

Figure 16: Volunteers' assessment of the easiest and most difficult steps in participatory monitoring

The process of indicator design often required technical skills and knowledge that volunteers felt ill-equipped to handle. In the words of an Indonesian volunteer:

> *The good thing of developing our own indicators is to develop our idea and mind which encourage us to read and study some literature and research. At another point, sometimes, it required a lot of effort for us to really write a correct or at least compatible indicator that relates to the current condition and desired variable. – Indonesia, Female Volunteer.*

In Georgia, volunteers spoke of a similar experience:

> *Initially, lack of knowledge of M&E approaches made it a bit more difficult for me to develop indicators and to understand how we could measure them. … it is not easy to develop an indicator for peacebuilding programmes, but this is the challenge for any peacebuilding organisation. – Georgia, Female Volunteer.*

Staff members provide a few different reasons for the lack of technical capacity amongst community members. First, GFP has limited criteria for who should be involved in data collection. The criteria is that volunteers who have undergone trainings and completed programmatic elements are ready to participate in indicator design and measurement. However, data collection is a large and unwieldy process, and volunteers tend to ask others to join in to help. This means that there is no prior

requirement in terms of technical skills required for individuals to participate in all phases of M&E. Second, despite participation in trainings and consistent follow-ups, volunteers do not receive enough guidance and mentoring, at an individual level, to significantly improve their skills. Mentoring leads to capacity building only when volunteers persevere with the process; after a few cycles of programming, with months – and sometimes years – of guidance and experience, their technical skills improve.

The lack of technical capacity has important effects on the methodological choices volunteers make in the field. Volunteers might not prioritise consistency in indicator use. For example, in Zimbabwe, volunteers did not measure the same indicators before and after the programme. Instead, they asked their own questions for the baseline, and then a different set of questions for the endline.[69] In addition, without having engaged in a data collection process before, volunteers have high expectations of what they will be able to measure. For example, in Sanaa and Aden, in Yemen, volunteers thought that the indicators were "too simple" and decided to collect more information, making the entire process more complicated than it had been – and increasing the analysis burden for themselves.[70]

Staff members explained that this created the following challenge for the organisation:

> *On our end we want something that is strong enough or should I say technical enough that can be used to prove the change, but volunteers sometimes may not be able to articulate technically what those things are. So, in some cases, it is problematic.[71]*

As a consequence, a pattern that resurfaces in the interviews is that – at early stages of the process – staff might be approached by volunteers asking why the development of indicators had to be participatory, and whether staff could design indicators instead. When the participatory process becomes too burdensome, it can be difficult to convince community members to continue to take part.

Poor Quality Indicators

Low technical capacity leads to the creation of poor quality indicators. These take many forms: indicators might be incomplete, deal with complicated results, and prove difficult to translate across cultural contexts. Most crucially, poor quality indicators generate data that cannot be used.

GFP's database of participatory indicators (as shown in Figure 6) demonstrates that 114 unique indicators were created and submitted to GFP HQ between 2014 and 2017. Out of these, 92 were fully developed. The remaining 22 (19%) of indicators were incomplete. These incomplete indicators were not clearly phrased; they were missing the research instrument or set of questions used in the field; or they were unclear about the group of respondents that the indicator was to be used with.

Indicators proposed or used by volunteers could also be complicated or misdirected; these indicators did not always measure what they intended to measure. Volunteers talked about the difficulty of constructing indicators to measure attitudinal change – it was difficult to decide "how to actually measure feelings."[72] Volunteers also struggled to ensure that they created concise indicators to measure results, as described in Ghana: "The major problem we found during the developing of the indicators is that some of the questions … were not simple and specific."[73] In other cases, volunteers raised the fear that

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[69] Staff Interview 20170420 I.
[70] Staff Interview 20170419 I.
[71] Staff Interview 20170419 II.
[72] Nigeria, Male Volunteer.
[73] Ghana, Male Volunteer.

they might be privileging short-term outcomes over long-term impact: "I may not be able to create indicators and measure long term impact, because I may be interested in immediate result."[74] In addition, volunteers struggled to ensure agreement or consensus amongst the individuals responsible for designing indicators. As a volunteer from Pakistan noted, "Sometimes so many ideas can create problems to choose and adopt any idea to implement."[75] It was not only difficult to decide *what* to measure, but to decide *whose* idea of measurement to uphold in practice.

The debate over whose version of a contextually specific indicator should prevail served as a microcosm of a larger issue: the difficulty of creating indicators that were interpreted the same way by GFP staff (who needed to prove programmatic results for the organisation) and by community members (who were responding to local surveys). As one volunteer stated:

> *Sometimes there are indicators created and measured by the volunteers from the community which are culture based and are easy for the volunteers and community to understand and measure but there are terms or such things which may not be easy to analyse for the GFP HQ. – Pakistan, Female Volunteer.*

Locally specific indicators may not be understood the same way by all parties. As shown in the Everyday Peace Indicators project, community members tend to "describe their situation in the vernacular of the everyday."[76] Staff members may not be familiar with this vernacular, and may feel that it leads to indicators that are phrased in a fashion that makes the results inaccessible to external readers. If the results are inaccessible, they do not provide information that can allow for results-based management of a programme. Staff considered such indicators to be of limited usefulness.

Without the appropriate technical capacity to develop indicators that were context sensitive, measurable, and translatable to others, volunteers sometimes found themselves in the position of collecting data that could not be used. In the Balkan states, volunteers created a complicated set of indicators, supported by a long questionnaire, to measure inter-ethnic relationships. They implemented this without confirming with staff. After collecting information against 17 detailed questions, volunteers found that in practice some of the elements of measurement contradicted each other, rendering the data collected unusable.[77] Based on other experiences of this nature, staff felt that if local volunteers lacked technical knowledge and were not provided with enough assistance, data collected would always be of poor quality. Sometimes, this mistake was spotted immediately and the measurement process was repeated, with better guidance.[78] However, in other cases, faulty data made the monitoring of a programme impossible. Reflecting on this experience, one staff member said:

> *I think that it is really good and that it ensures the local anchoring of the programme furthermore by having the people actually living in the context and implementing it. They are the peacebuilding experts in this case. So, involving them in the creation of the indicators is a really good element. However, it is also complicated. I have been on the receiving end of many, shall we say, unclear indicators. So, I think it needs to be carefully supported from HQ's side and that can be a bit time consuming and it can be frustrating for both sides.[79]*

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[74] Nigeria, Female Volunteer.
[75] Pakistan, Female Volunteer.
[76] Mac Ginty, Roger, and Pamina Firchow, "Top-down and bottom-up narratives of peace and conflict," *Politics: Special Issue Article,* 36:3 (2016): 317.
[77] Staff Interview 20170419 II.
[78] Staff Interview 20170425.
[79] Staff Interview 20170425.

Measurement Challenges

Overall Challenges

Challenges in measurement formed an important component of the struggle to ensure data quality. First, poor quality indicators were difficult to measure because of the kind of methodological issues outlined above. Second, volunteers confronted challenges in the actual process of data collection: they found it difficult to engage respondents and to translate questions for people from different backgrounds in their community.

The fact that volunteers are a part of the community where data collection is taking place may ameliorate the challenges of access faced by external researchers; however, it does not entirely remove them. Volunteers talked about issues accessing respondents and stakeholders:

> *It mostly depends on personality of the humans. Some of them are happy to help and be part of it and some just ignore you. … Also, one of the problem is the stakeholders, it is hard for us to communicate as they usually change their position or they are lazy. – Kyrgyzstan, Female Volunteer.*

In Rwanda, volunteers faced the same problem of community engagement, as some respondents refused to speak with them. When respondents did answer, volunteers encountered a different problem: "Some individuals may discourage you, by responding with nonsense responses."[80] Other volunteers felt they were "too close" to the community to be able to speak frankly about issues: "Sometimes it's not easy to speak about some topics that are really familiar for you. Maybe it sounds strange, but this is real."[81] While this was not always the case – as shown in the section on Community Empowerment, volunteers also reported that having locals collect data increased the likelihood of truthful responses – it was an important challenge that volunteers experienced during the measurement process.

Volunteers also struggled to adapt their questions to different respondent groups. Working across conflict divides was a particular challenge in countries like Sri Lanka, where respondents from Tamil or Sinhala backgrounds spoke different languages.[82] In Pakistan, working with refugee populations on the border with Afghanistan, volunteers found "language and their custom was the barrier, and it took time from both sides to adjust."[83] In Ghana and Nigeria, programme participants came from very different educational backgrounds, and the baseline questions did not cater to this difference. As a result, "During the data collection most of the beneficiary communities left the many questions unanswered because they did not really understand the questions."[84]

Bias and Verification Issues

The discussion of bias and verification challenges in the surveys and interviews shows an important gap: volunteers were very conscious about local bias, but not worried about cross-verification of the results gained through the community-led data gathering process; staff, on the other hand, did not explicitly raise bias as a problem but focused on the absence of mechanisms to verify the data gained from the field.

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[80] Rwanda, Male Volunteer.
[81] Georgia, Female Volunteer.
[82] Staff Interview 20170428.
[83] Pakistan, Male Volunteer.
[84] Ghana, Male Volunteer.

"It may be that we show a level of bias in the process of developing the indicators," stated a volunteer from Nigeria, showcasing the fact that, for the most part, volunteers possessed a great deal of critical insight and self-awareness about their role in the participatory process. "Sometimes we are driven by stereotypes," acknowledged a Ugandan volunteer.[85] In Zimbabwe, one volunteer highlighted the danger of selecting self-fulfilling indicators: "There could be a bias towards setting indicators that you feel will bring about a desired result."[86]

The fear of local bias was not limited to the role of volunteers – it also extended to members of the wider community. Validating issues of elite capture outlined in the literature, volunteers highlighted the role of influential community members: "Sometimes the most influential community members can impact on the process. Sometimes we have to cope with their will."[87] Volunteers also drew attention to structural issues that influenced responses:

1. *Political manipulation*

2. *Lack of respect*

3. *Gender inequality. – Ghana, Male Volunteer.*

These responses demonstrate that community members do not unquestioningly accept an approach that gives the community's views primacy; they are cognizant of the local power politics that can influence respondents' answers. They are not, however, familiar with mechanisms to address these issues of bias.

Staff, on the other hand, were more concerned with such independent mechanisms of verification. Two out of six staff members suggested that it would be desirable to triangulate the data received from the field through the participatory monitoring process. Without triangulation, the only people who could vouch for the validity and reliability of the data submitted were the volunteers who collect it.[88] As a result, it is often not possible to verify whether their information was accurate, biased or otherwise methodologically problematic.[89]

Logistical and Resource Constraints

When discussing measurement challenges, volunteers spoke of organisational issues most frequently:

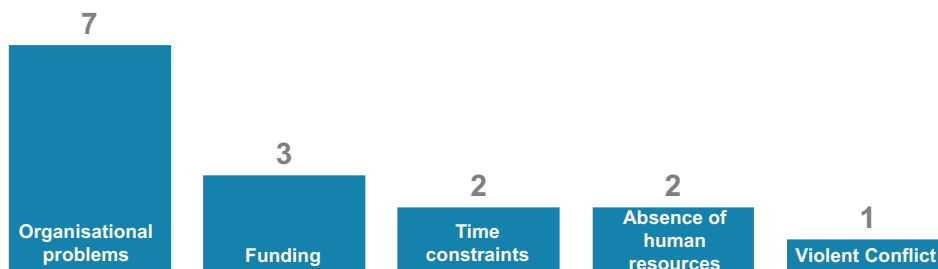*Figure 17: Logistical and resource challenges faced by volunteers during participatory monitoring*

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[85] Uganda, Male Volunteer.
[86] Zimbabwe, Female Volunteer.
[87] Pakistan, Male Volunteer.
[88] Staff Interview 20170419 I.
[89] Staff Interview 20170425.

These organisational problems ranged from the avoidable to the unexpected. An important issue was permission for data gathering: "We are all the time asked to have district government permission to serve as official document."[90] In other cases, with young respondents, volunteers reported that participants did not answer questions because they were "tired and hungry," suggesting that scheduling data collection at a different time would have fixed the problem.[91] More unexpectedly, a strike in a school or a mass lecture called by the principal led to clashes with data collection activities.[92]

While organisational challenges were commonly raised by volunteers, both staff and volunteers discussed challenges of funding and time constraints. Volunteers felt that an incentive for respondents, even something as simple as refreshments or transport reimbursements, would go a long way towards making the process more achievable.[93] Staff, on the other hand, felt that the process as a whole required an investment of funding; more funds would allow for independent measures of data verification and triangulation that would strengthen the findings of the participatory monitoring process. Staff recommended that PM&E should first and foremost be applied in bigger projects, as these were better funded.[94] As noted by Peace Direct as well, the financial costs of PM&E are often high for locals.[95]

Another major issue was time. Designing indicators, reviewing them with GFP staff, and collecting data took up a lot of time. All six interviews raised the time-consuming nature of PM for volunteers (and staff alike). Staff felt that it took time to develop skills locally, and it was a difficult process, especially for volunteers with limited prior exposure to M&E and no set criteria for involvement in data collection. "Even if we have criteria it will be really difficult to find people (…) who want to commit to such work," said one staff member.[96] "Perhaps it is something that's difficult for them to squeeze in alongside all their other priorities," said another.[97]

Time constraints touched on an issue raised by volunteers as well: the absence of human resources. "It is always difficult to find volunteers and teach them, as they always agree in the beginning and disappear," stated a volunteer from Kyrgyzstan.[98] Physical distance compounded these issues, as volunteers found it difficult to overcome the challenge of traversing long distances between volunteers who had attended M&E trainings and other members of the data collection team in the field.[99] The issue of geographical proximity between staff and volunteers is raised by Saferworld as an important factor facilitating successful PM&E, and is repeated in GFP's staff interviews: interviewees suggested that regional or country-level support would greatly increase the success of PM&E.[100]

A final challenge was the outbreak of violent conflict. In Yemen, GFP programmes have been on hold since the outbreak of the war in 2015, starting up for short periods when volunteers consider it feasible. This poses important challenges not just for data collection, but for the delivery of the programmes themselves. A Yemeni volunteer described the situation in the following words:

[90] Rwanda, Male Volunteer.
[91] Nigeria, Male Volunteer.
[92] Zimbabwe, Male Volunteer.
[93] Rwanda, Male Volunteer.
[94] Staff Interview 20170419 I.
[95] Peace Direct, "Putting the Local First."
[96] Staff Interview 20170419 I.
[97] Staff Interview 20170425.
[98] Kyrgyzstan, Female Volunteer.
[99] Uganda, Female Volunteer.
[100] Church, "Doing Things Differently," 3.

> *The harsh social conditions currently prevailing in the society and the deterioration of the basic services of the members of society negatively affect people's behaviour, so that they are not accepting any interventions we have, where they welcome humanitarian interventions such as foodstuffs and others. – Yemen, Female Volunteer.*

With basic material needs threatened, community members were not receptive to interventions that dealt with behavioural or attitudinal change on an interpersonal level. Under these circumstances, both programmatic delivery and M&E remained on hold.

Collectively, these measurement challenges speak to the fact that data collection through participatory monitoring is no different from data collection in other circumstances: just like external researchers, locals face challenges of access, non-responsiveness, translation, logistics, and resources. For locals, some aspects of these challenges may be softened by their familiarity with their community; however, for an effective monitoring process, individuals still require guidance and financial support to navigate these challenges.

Technical Oversight

Mentoring

Another challenge to ensuring data quality through participatory monitoring is the level of investment required by staff from GFP HQ. Volunteers were frank about their need for greater capacity building in M&E, and this need had important ramifications for the organisation overseeing the monitoring process.

Staff members described the following process: Generally, at the start of a programme, volunteers could follow prescribed steps to measure indicators, but required a lot of support for indicator development. This led to a great deal of back and forth communication between volunteers and staff. This continuous mentoring was necessary to ensure that the indicators put forward by the local volunteers were specific and measurable – that is, "SMART."[101] As described below, volunteers and staff collectively dedicated the longest period of time to the first three tasks, with repeated exchanges for feedback:

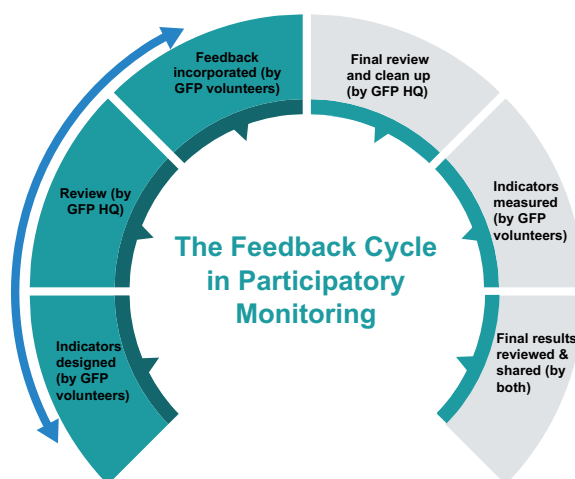*Figure 18: The feedback cycle of indicator design and measurement*

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[101] Lennie, June, Jo Tacchi, Bikash Koirala, Michael Wilmore and Andrew Skuse, "Equal Access Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit," *Equal Access International* (2011), 5.

Figure 18 explains why volunteers consider indicator design to be the most difficult step in participatory monitoring. When discussing the process outlined above, all six interviewees raised that the mentoring of volunteers was generally very time-consuming for both parties – and sometimes "frustrating for both sides."[102] Some staff members wondered if it was worthwhile, given the burden it placed on the volunteers:

> *We are working with volunteers, and because we don't want to give more burden to them, we want to make their life easy, we don't want to create something bigger that end of the day they couldn't measure… So, most of the time I feel like creating indicators for the particular programmes, the suggesting part is our responsibility.[103]*

With that noted, staff consistently recounted the positive effects of mentoring. In a Sport For Peace Programme in Uganda, the participatory monitoring process worked well, with mentoring offering the capacity-building that allowed volunteers to understand their own context better. The staff member supervising the programme remembered that she had previously had problems with the development of indicators, and could use that insight to guide volunteers through their challenges.[104] In Nigeria, Macedonia and Pakistan, mentoring had a similar effect. In the design phase, volunteers had very high expectations of what they would be able to measure. However, over time, with thorough mentoring and discussions on asking the right kinds of questions, the indicators proposed were far more realistic.[105] In the words of one interviewee:

> *[During the entire PM process] there needs to be a lot of consistency. It's difficult to get it right the first time, and that whole fine tuning and development of that chain is difficult. But once it works it's really, really good.[106]*

Initial Resistance

As shown in the section on Community Empowerment, participatory monitoring's capacity building effects are felt only when volunteers persist in the use of locally designed indicators. In this context, staff felt that assisting volunteers in overcoming their initial resistance to the indicator design and development process was an important part of the oversight provided by GFP HQ.

When sharing feedback with volunteers in the early stages, staff encountered significant challenges. They found that volunteers were not always receptive to feedback, and staff developed techniques to circumvent this problem:

> *It's key to communicate well with [the volunteers] when you are reviewing and sharing your feedback. It can be discouraging to them, you know when you are told that something is not so correct, it's how we as individuals receive feedback.[107]*

Numerous volunteers spoke of the usefulness of the input from GFP HQ in helping them overcome this resistance and move forward. In Uganda, for example:

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[102] Staff Interview 20170425.
[103] Staff Interview 20170428.
[104] Staff Interview 20170420 I.
[105] Staff Interview 20170419 II.
[106] Staff Interview 20170425.
[107] Staff Interview 20170420 I.

> *At first, I did not take it seriously as I had not got enough conviction of why it was important. However, after implementing the two programme cycles with help from HQ, I have realised the essence of measuring our own indicators. – Uganda, Female Volunteer.*

While the investment from GFP HQ may be successful in building capacity and guiding volunteers through a challenging indicator design and data collection process, this investment is only useful once programme staff have managed to overcome resistance to participatory monitoring. This is, in itself, a time-consuming process.

Reflecting on Challenges to Data Quality

Overall, this section has put forward a set of interlocking challenges within the participatory monitoring process. Low technical capacity leads to poor quality indicators, which are in turn subject to various measurement challenges in the field (reinforced by issues of local bias and resource scarcity). These challenges often result in data that is either incomplete or methodologically questionable – and hence unusable – despite volunteers' best efforts. In the face of high expectations of what volunteers thought they would be able to measure, such a situation is bound to be very disheartening. Three out of six interviewees explicitly reference the demotivating effect that weak results and extensive time commitments can have on volunteers.

The inability to ensure data quality lowers the likelihood that volunteers will continue with a process that makes continuous demands on their time and energy. As explained by one staff member:

> *… for volunteers it could also be sometimes tiresome. They wonder "why are you sending this back to me for me to think about," you know, some will give up in the course of it, that's the truth, but some don't.[108]*

While the advantages of the participatory approach are numerous and profound, as demonstrated both in this case study and in previous work, the challenges to data quality are just as real. For participatory monitoring to be a valid approach to measuring programme outcomes and impact in the peace-building field, strong steps are needed to institute sustainable mechanisms of capacity building and financial support for data gathering processes headed by local communities. Both staff and volunteers offered a series of recommendations for how this could be achieved, and these are presented in the final section.

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[108] Staff Interview 20170419 II.

CONCLUSION

At the start of this study, organisations using PM&E pointed towards the absence of participatory methods of indicator development in the peace-building field. Peace Direct, stressing the need for building local capacity and enhancing community control over M&E, recommended the following:

> *Local actors should be encouraged to design their M&E in consultation with local communities so that indicators are more context specific and M&E is accountable to the communities – not the donors – from the outset."[109]*

GFP's experience has offered a case study of an organisation that has done exactly that. GFP has trained local community members in conflict analysis, programme design, and M&E. To measure the impact of their programmes, these community members have been designing and measuring locally sourced indicators from 2014 to 2017. From 27 countries, GFP collected 114 unique indicators through the process of participatory monitoring, out of which 92 were fully developed. Building on this database of participatory indicators, this study asked 44 volunteers from 13 countries to reflect on their experience of indicator design and measurement, exploring whether or not these indicators reflected context specific understandings of peace and whether the process had an impact on the community members that participated in it. To add an organisational perspective, the study also included interviewees with six members of GFP staff. Based on this data, the study offers some conclusions on what participatory monitoring can and cannot achieve in practice.

What Does Participatory Monitoring Do?

Participatory monitoring does…

✅ express local understandings of peace.

✅ put forward community-based indicators that focus on "positive peace" measures.

✅ privilege measures of attitudes over measures of behaviour.

✅ function as a mechanism for community empowerment.

✅ increase individuals' understanding of context and impact in the community.

✅ improve individuals' ownership of programming.

✅ contribute to increased capacity building in the community.

✅ ensure the involvement of members of the wider community.

✅ prove motivating for individuals when results are positive.

Figure 19: Summary of what participatory monitoring can achieve.

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[109] Peace Direct, "Putting the Local First," 41.

What Does Participatory Monitoring Not Do?

Participatory monitoring does NOT…

❌ ensure that high quality data is produced through the process.

❌ overcome barriers of local capacity.

❌ automatically generate usable or high quality indicators.

❌ spare data collectors from standard measurement challenges.

❌ overcome problems of local bias or verification.

❌ function without addressing logistical or resource constraints.

❌ function smoothly or effectively without mentoring, guidance, and support.

Figure 20: Summary of what participatory monitoring does not guarantee.

Moving Forward: Recommendations

Participatory monitoring can – and has, in this case – achieved a great deal. The method also has plenty of limitations, which have surfaced in the surveys and interviews. Volunteers were asked what needed to change to make the process better for staff, volunteers, and the wider community. Their answers demonstrated that addressing these limitations would require a collaborative effort from all stakeholders:

What should GFP HQ, local volunteers, and the wider community do to make the process of developing and measuring indicators better?

GFP HQ

Provide more guidance, oversight, and motivation — 13

No changes — 6

Simplify the process — 3

Involve the local community more — 2

Use local languages — 1

Tailor the process to each group's expertise — 1

Introduce more qualitative methods — 1

Local Volunteers

Improve understanding of conflict analysis and M&E — 7

Improve preparation for data collection — 7

No changes — 7

Involve the local community more — 5

Ensure commitment of team members — 2

Wider Community

Improve communication with the community — 7

Increase involvement of the community — 4

Simplify the process — 4

Increase willingness to participate in the process — 3

No change — 3

Improve preparation for data collection — 1

Remain open-minded and objective — 1

Use local languages — 1

Figure 21: Volunteers' recommendations for improving the process of participatory monitoring.

By far, the most important recommendation was the need for GFP HQ to provide more guidance, oversight, and motivation. More volunteers supported this than any other recommendation across all three groups. The need for increased mentoring was recognised by staff as well. Other important recommendations focused on what volunteers themselves could do: improve their own understanding of technical processes, such as M&E, and improve preparations for data collection. A significant group of recommendations focused on improved communication and involvement of the community. For this, volunteers placed the onus both on themselves and on members of the wider community, suggesting that stronger communication mechanisms would positively impact the community's willingness to participate in monitoring processes.

Collectively, this report sheds light on where the process of participatory monitoring succeeds and where it falls short. Based on the analysis of the findings, along with the recommendations provided by volunteers and staff, there are six important areas for further development for any organisation choosing to use participatory monitoring in its work:

1. **Ensure dedicated capacity building at a local scale:**
   - For participatory monitoring to work, organisations must make a significant investment in building capacity for research and M&E at a local level, whether through trainings or other avenues.
   - Targeted trainings are a first and critical step towards establishing this capacity, but on their own they are insufficient. One staff member noted, "If only one person is responsible for and empowered to instruct other people on how to do M&E… all it takes is one person knowing how to do this."[110] This shows that the information gained from a training must be communicated to other members of the community through structured discussions and instruction.
   - In addition, no matter how well equipped one person may be with the required technical skills, they cannot succeed on their own. They require consistent and significant technical support, guidance, and oversight from staff members.
   - To assist staff in providing this support, organisations must also consider avenues to make guidance material accessible for community members from a wide variety of social and linguistic backgrounds, with varying levels of literacy.

2. **Commit to institutionalising the process:**
   - Participatory monitoring functions most smoothly where it has been in use the longest. Experimenting with the technique a few times allows community members to gain an understanding of the method's conceptual underpinnings and its practical application. Eventually, as outlined in previous literature, with commitment to the process, staff become facilitators rather than key players, as local actors assume increasing levels of responsibility, capacity and ownership.[111]
   - GFP's experience shows that there are examples of community members choosing to abandon the process if it is seen to be too burdensome or challenging. It is important to set in place mechanisms of close, ongoing mentoring to ensure that volunteers are encouraged to overcome hurdles and persevere with the process until it becomes routine. Other research by GFPI demonstrates that increasing HQ engagement with

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[110] Staff Interview 20170419 II.
[111] Harvey, "Participatory Methodology Facilitation Guide"; Adams, Jerry and Anne Garbutt, "Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation in Practice: Lessons Learnt From Central Asia," *INTRAC Praxis Paper*, 21 (2008).

volunteers has a significant impact on their likelihood to continue as GFP volunteers.[112] The same insight applies to PM&E as well.

3. **Ensure strong communication between community members and staff:**

   ▪ Organisations must communicate results, particularly successes, in a clear and accessible fashion, to all community members involved in the participatory monitoring process. Community members, after having invested so much time and energy in the process (as both data collectors and respondents) require details: they want to know what kind of social changes the programmes have caused and how substantial these changes are. Both the interviews and the surveys point towards the motivating effect of participatory monitoring when the process yields strong results.

   ▪ Communication is equally important in helping community members work through challenges in the field, understand and engage with weak points in the monitoring process, and address programming issues that surface through the results of their indicators.

   ▪ Communication is also an important mechanism of increasing trust and team-building between staff and community members, allowing both parties to feel like they are on the same "side" of the M&E process.

4. **Create structured mechanisms for wider community participation:**

   ▪ One of the tensions that has consistently emerged from this analysis of participatory monitoring is the question: *Who speaks for the community?* Staff consider local volunteers to be community representatives, but do not consider them to represent the community in full – that is, their representation of their community is upheld only when they make the effort to elicit the views of other community members through surveys and interviews. Volunteers, on the other hand, sometimes involve other community members in the process of indicator design and measurement, but often only consider them as respondents to their surveys. In reaching out to respondents, volunteers consistently raise concerns about letting their own prejudices or powerful local groups interfere with the data gathering process.

   ▪ Any organisation that utilises participatory monitoring must make sure that there are clear guidelines for who should be included in the monitoring process at each step. Community members should be clear on the level of representation required in the team that designs indicators and sets out to measure them, and should have guidelines for consultative processes with the wider community as M&E frameworks are designed.

   ▪ Community members should also be given clear guidelines on how to reach out to respondents once indicators and research tools have been designed. Involving the community as respondents is a critical part of participatory monitoring, but these respondents cannot be seen as an undifferentiated whole: community members need guidance on how to account for disparities in gender, age, education, and other identity-based divides.

5. **Account for logistical and resource constraints:**

   ▪ Organisations that ask community members to be at the forefront of a process of indicator design and measurement cannot assume that data collectors' position in the community will eradicate issues of access, funding, and logistical organisation. While

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[112] Yusuf, Sairah and Love Calissendorff, "Cascading Peace: An Analysis of Generations For Peace's Volunteer-Based Peace-Building Model." Generations For Peace Institute (2016).

being local is an advantage, data collectors cannot capitalise on this advantage without the appropriate resources and organisational capacity.

- For this kind of monitoring to work, organisations must set aside resources and funding as they would for any data collection process. Implementers of the process must have access to the necessary stationery, reimbursement for refreshments and transport for respondents (if appropriate), and incentives to ensure the correct amount of human resources in the field. As noted elsewhere, participation is expensive for all parties, and this must be recognised and accounted for.[113]
- Community members pursuing participatory monitoring must also be guided through the logistical arrangements required to gather data successfully, including walk-throughs of how to prepare for a data collection process. Individuals who have not had exposure to such a process in the past may struggle to organise appropriately.

6. **Expand the scope of data collected:**
   - Quantitative data analysis (as well as analysing qualitative data with quantitative methods) implies the narrowing down of information. Participatory monitoring tends to focus on quantifiable questions with fixed answer choices, as these are easy for community members to aggregate. However, the community can also find quantitative results to be limiting, as they do not fully represent the changes they observe in their communities.
   - Staff suggest that there are many inspiring stories to be found in the field, but that it needs time and effort to capture them in addition to the indicators designed. By allowing for the appropriate investment of resources in the participatory monitoring process, organisations will be able to place a strong emphasis on other – more qualitative – methods of displaying success. This will offer a more nuanced picture of the changes occurring in communities, as well as sustaining motivation amongst the data collection team.
   - In addition, organisations should endeavour to expand the M&E choices available to community members overall. Instead of focusing on quantitative or qualitative indicators per se, organisations should help community members develop the capacity to choose from a menu of M&E tools and approaches. As one volunteer stated, there is a need "to be trained specifically on M&E and its different methods, so that we will be able to choose other methods that better suit to our programmes."[114] If the purpose of using participatory approaches is to hand over M&E control to local actors, then community members should not be limited to developing and measuring indicators as the only possible manifestation of participatory monitoring.

Overall, this study has demonstrated that participatory monitoring leads to a number of the advantages laid out in previous work: facilitating communities to develop and measure their own indicators allows them to design locally relevant indicators of peace, which contributes to context-sensitive programming through a process that locals find empowering in many different ways. At the same time, due to methodological issues and measurement challenges, communities struggle to ensure data quality when analysing and communicating results.

Addressing some of the constraints that lead to these conceptual and practical challenges is essential; stronger mechanisms of technical support will help sustain the advantages of participatory monitoring

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[113] Yusuf, "The Challenges of Participation."
[114] Georgia, Female Volunteer.

by strengthening the ability of communities to generate and use data that is relevant, meaningful, and valid.

The recommendations provided here are built on GFP's experience as an organisation that has spent years implementing a variety of suggestions – sourced from both academics and practitioners – that encourage M&E in the peace-building field to become more local, accountable, and flexible. Collectively, these recommendations serve as important learning points for any organisation that chooses to hand control of indicator design and development to local communities. Most importantly, they show – in a practical setting – the ways in which participatory monitoring is possible, achievable, and desirable. In the words of one volunteer:

> *I have come to understand that you cannot run or monitor a successful programme without the assistance of the members of the community who are experiencing the conflict. – Ghana, Male Volunteer.*

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