

5 MEASURING SUCCESS IN COMPLEX SETTINGS: GPPAC'S EXPERIENCES WITH PLANNING, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

By Goele Scheers*

Developing a planning, monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) system for a global network is a challenge across the world. Moreover, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC) is working in the field of conflict prevention, an area that in itself is still struggling with finding adequate monitoring and evaluation methods. This article outlines how the GPPAC PM&E system has been set up, the challenges faced while developing the system and the way these challenges were addressed. As the GPPAC PM&E system is still being developed further, this article is based on the experiences of GPPAC so far and literature on evaluation, networks and conflict prevention.

Towards a learning oriented, participatory approach

GPPAC is often asked to demonstrate that its programmes result in significant and lasting change in the wellbeing of grassroots communities affected by violent conflict. This is not an easy task. In its initial phase, GPPAC was using the logical framework approach (LFA), a management tool that is widely used for planning, monitoring and evaluating development projects. However, the paths and processes leading to peace are many, varied and often do not fit well within planned timeframes. The use of the logical framework turned out to be rather difficult, mainly for three reasons.

First, the LFA is an approach based on linear thinking. Within a network, linearity is problematic. Global networks like GPPAC are complex systems that “are constantly changing and adapting to their environment”.¹ Additionally, the possibility to predict and control outcomes of peace work is very low, because the causes of conflict can change suddenly. M&E procedures therefore need to be able to adapt to these changes and take unexpected results into account.

A second obstacle was that the input the network members could have in the development of the logical

framework was limited and not useful enough to stimulate a learning process within the network.

Finally, it was extremely difficult to show the achievements of GPPAC in the logical framework. The type of results of conflict prevention work are often intangible results such as changing behaviours, attitudes and actions of people. Quantitative indicators do not easily capture this kind of intangible changes. Furthermore, the results of conflict prevention work often take the form of something not occurring (such as conflict escalation). However, how do you measure something that did not happen? It also proved to be challenging to make the added value of the network visible in the log frame and it was therefore left unvalued.

Consequently, GPPAC used the logical framework for proposal writing and reporting only and the main focus in the log frames had to be on that which GPPAC controls, on the outputs (e.g. number of seminars organised) and the data collect through the M&E process was only used to feed to donors. On the other hand, donors increasingly required evidence of the outcomes and impact of GPPAC's work.

Understandably, but erroneously, donors treated the network as an organisation with projects, requiring proposal writing and reporting according to strict linear models. GPPAC was doing its best to adjust to the systems of the donors, but the more donors, the more difficult this became. It became clear that it was time to look for other ways to plan, monitor and evaluate that would be more suitable for GPPAC.

The following steps have been taken so far in establishing the GPPAC M&E system²:

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1 Networks and Capacity, Suzanne Taschereau and Joe Bolger, ECDPM, Discussion Paper No. 58C, February 2007, p.4. Available at www.ecdpm.org.

2 Based on IFAD, A Guide to Project M&E, available on www.ifad.org/evaluation/guide/index.htm

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- defining needs and purposes of monitoring and evaluation for GPPAC and selecting an M&E approach;
- developing a planning framework;
- developing a monitoring framework and identifying M&E questions;
- planning data collection, analysis and critical reflection processes.

Defining needs and purposes

As a first step, the M&E needs and purposes of the network members were explored and these were taken

as a starting point for the M&E system. During one of its meetings the GPPAC International Steering Group decided that M&E within the network should not only be done for accountability towards donors, but also should aim to:

- Improve learning within the network - M&E procedures encourage network members and the Global Secretariat to learn from each other. In addition, M&E procedures should help GPPAC members to document better their experiences so they can contribute more effectively to knowledge sharing.
- Increase transparency and accountability - Network

About Outcome Mapping

Outcome Mapping is a systemic, participatory approach for planning, monitoring and evaluation developed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada. Outcome Mapping is based on three main concepts:

1) Theory of change

Many M&E methods visualise change as linear, based on simple cause-effect relationships. Outcome Mapping recognises that change is:

- Complex (many actors and factors are involved)
- Continuous (not limited to the life of a project)
- Non-linear (unexpected results may occur)
- Cumulative
- Beyond the control of the programme (but subject to its influence)
- Two way: the programme is both 'agent of change' as well as 'subject to change'

2) Sphere of influence

Outcome mapping focuses on those individuals, groups and organisations with whom a programme interacts directly and with whom the programme anticipates opportunities for influence. Outcome mapping hence clearly defines the limits a programme has.

3) Outcomes as behavioural changes

Outcome mapping focuses on one particular type of results: outcomes as behavioural change. Outcomes are defined as changes in the behaviour, relationships, activities or actions of the people, groups and organisations with whom a programme works directly. Through outcome mapping, development programmes can claim contributions to the achievement of outcomes rather than claiming the achievement of impacts. Although these outcomes, in turn, enhance the possibility of impacts, the relationship is not necessarily one of direct cause and effect. Instead of attempting to measure the impact of the programme's partners on development, Outcome mapping concentrates on monitoring and evaluating its results in terms of the influence of the programme on the roles these partners play in development.

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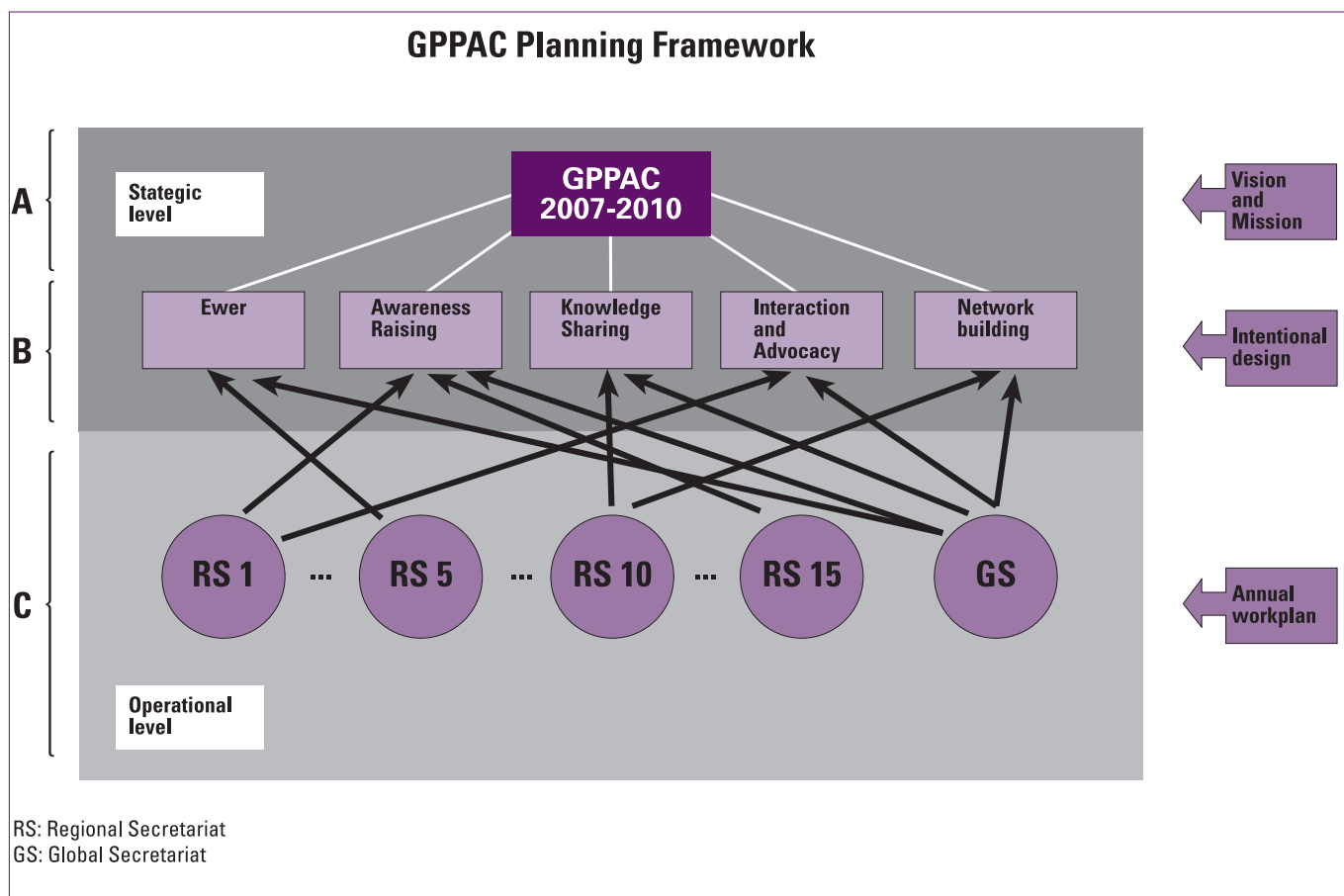
members get a better idea of everybody's involvement in the achievement of GPPAC's goals and the flow of money. Through M&E procedures, reliable information can be gathered that can be used for legitimisation of action towards all actors involved (target group, donor, etc.).

- Improve effectiveness and quality - The outcomes of the monitoring and evaluation process are used to improve the GPPAC programmes and track progress from activities to goals. Furthermore, it offers the possibility to integrate the experiences of the network members on the functioning of the network and track improvement over time.
- Enhance lobby and advocacy activities - Through making the achievements more visible it would add credibility and weight to GPPAC's lobbying and advocacy work.
- Contribute to conflict prevention theories and mechanisms - Through M&E procedures cases and experiences are collected through best practices,

which can work towards the development of conflict prevention theories and improve the mechanisms for conflict prevention.

Based on the M&E needs and purposes of the network, the GPPAC's Global Secretariat invested a considerable amount of time in searching for an M&E method that would respond to these needs, address the difficulties faced with the log frame and be applicable to a global network. After extensive research, it was decided to use outcome mapping as the basic approach for the M&E system. Outcome mapping³ is a participatory approach to planning, monitoring and evaluation developed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada. The Global Secretariat adapted the method to meet the needs for GPPAC. Outcome Mapping was

³ For more information on Outcome Mapping, see www.idrc.ca/evaluation and Sarah Earl, Fred Carden, and Terry Smutylo; *Outcome Mapping - Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs*; IDRC, 2001



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found useful because of its focus on learning, the use of outcomes as behavioural changes and because it is a flexible and systemic approach.

Developing a planning framework

The figure on page 40 shows the planning framework of GPPAC. On the strategic level, the GPPAC mission and vision were defined. To achieve its vision and mission GPPAC developed five programmes: Awareness Raising, Interaction and Advocacy, Network and Capacity Building, Knowledge Generation and Sharing, Early Warning and Early response (EWER). An *intentional design*⁴ for each of the five programmes was formulated. Defining the *boundary partners*, being those individuals, groups, and organisations with whom the programme interacts directly to effect change, was an important though not easy step in this process. In a network like GPPAC, those who implement the work and those who benefit from it are massively entangled; often the same organisation is both. Notwithstanding the fact that this step took a considerable amount of time, it was instrumental for specifying the actors that GPPAC is trying to influence and separating these from the partners GPPAC needs to work with, but not necessarily wants to change (*strategic partners*). The formulation of *progress markers*, a set of graduated indicators of changed behaviours for a boundary partner, helps GPPAC in making the progress in influencing the boundary partners visible.

On the operational level, each GPPAC regional secretariat defines which activities it will implement in order to contribute to the achievement of the outcome challenges set on the strategic level for the network as a whole. The Global Secretariat has a big task in preparing the long-term as well as annual planning process within the network. In a network such as GPPAC, discussing and negotiating objectives and priorities can take up a substantial amount of time. The GPPAC global planning process is highly participatory. Before a global network plan can be developed, consultations take place on the national and regional levels. The fifteen GPPAC regions develop regional work plans and based on these work plans, the International Steering Group develops a global work plan.

Developing a monitoring framework

GPPAC programmes aim to influence specific *boundary partners* at different levels (network, system and societal), so that they can contribute in the best way possible to achieve GPPAC's vision. The main aim of the M&E procedures is to identify the changes in behaviour of these boundary partners with respect to conflict prevention and in identifying the extent to which this process of change has been supported or influenced by GPPAC through a predefined set of strategies, outputs and activities for each programme that has been agreed in each GPPAC region.

The M&E procedures are expected to be implemented by the GPPAC governing bodies in collaboration with the network members. The organisations that are part of GPPAC, including those who participate in the governing bodies, have their own internal management and M&E procedures. The challenge in this regard was and still is to streamline the M&E procedures of the network members with the ones developed for the network as a whole, to avoid creating too much extra work for the network members, but at the same time generate the information needed to fulfil the agreed monitoring purposes.

The different levels of the M&E system are shown in the figures on page 42.

Figure 1 shows the different levels for monitoring and evaluation in GPPAC. GPPAC has *governing bodies* that coordinate and steer the activities of *the network members*. The network is aiming to change the *political and social system* and - in the end - create changes in *society*. Consequently, these levels are reflected in the monitoring and evaluation system of the network. Figure 2 shows these levels.

4 The planning stage of Outcome Mapping, where a programme reaches consensus on the macro level changes it would like to help bring about and plans strategies to provide appropriate support. GPPAC followed four steps of the intentional design: formulating the boundary partners, outcome challenges, progress markers, strategy maps⁵ Wilson-Grau, R., *Complexity and International Social Change Networks*, chapter 4 of this issue paper

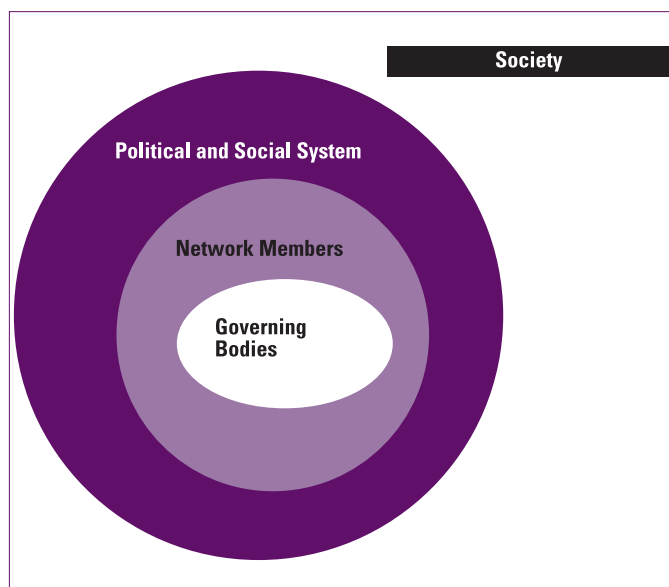


Figure 1: Monitoring and Evaluation levels in GPPAC

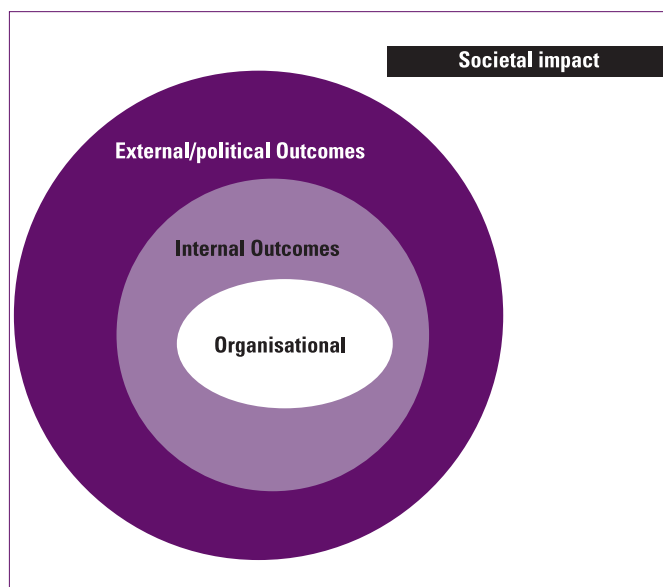


Figure 2: levels of change for GPPAC

Assessing organisational performance

It is vital for a network to assess the performance of its secretariat and other governing bodies, to be able to know if they are functioning efficiently and effectively. The main M&E question that GPPAC wants to answer at this level is: Are the governing bodies performing well enough to steer the network? The GPPAC Network and Capacity Building programme monitors the performance of the governing bodies: the International Steering Group, the Executive Committee, the Regional Secretariats and the Global Secretariat.

Assessing the influence on the network members

One of the functions of GPPAC is strengthening the capacity of its members. Results on this level will therefore focus on the network members themselves. In other words, this is the influence the network is having on its own members. Ricardo Wilson-Grau defines the outcomes on this level as internal outcomes, organic or developmental outcomes⁵. Through these outcomes, the capacity of the network members is being strengthened to be able to achieve the network's purpose. Within each of the five GPPAC global programmes, there is a focus on strengthening the capacity of the network members.

A network will first need to strengthen its own members, before it is able to reach out to actors outside of the network. Young networks like GPPAC, will therefore have a bigger focus on the network members before it is able to reach out to external actors. The M&E question to be answered at this level is: do the networks members have the capacity to contribute to achieving the network's purpose?

“All complex systems [...] share behaviours that cannot be explained by their parts.” Therefore, “[In] Complex systems, relationships are key.”⁶ The strength of GPPAC lies in the interactions among its members. The energy of these interactions flows through the network, holds it together and ensures its sustainability. Hence, network capacity and performance cannot be understood or fostered simply by making sure that each component does its part.” The capacity in networks is “greater than the sum of its parts”.⁷ Consequently monitoring and evaluation activities need first to include measuring the level and quality of the interaction between the network

5 Wilson-Grau, R., Complexity and International Social Change Networks, chapter 4 of this issue paper.

6 Frances Westley, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Patton, *Getting to Maybe: How the World Is Changed*, Random House Canada, 2007, p. 7

7 Trescherau, S. Ibid, p.4.

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members. In the GPPAC M&E procedures, there is a big focus on the interaction between the network members. Secondly, the results of the monitoring and evaluation of the network members need to be shared with each other, to make visible what the network as a whole is achieving.

The relationships on this level are complex. In GPPAC, the Global Secretariat might carry out capacity building activities for network members. However, network members can also conduct capacity building activities for other members. The different networks members may be receiving actor at one point in time and intervening actor at another point in time. Causality and accountability are fluent and multi-directional. The challenge here was to find out who is accountable to whom and where the lines of reporting were to be drawn. In addition, some actors might have a contractual relationship, but this is not necessarily the case. Hence, the network members need to participate voluntarily in the M&E process.

Apart from monitoring the capacity of the network members and their interaction, GPPAC is also monitoring outputs. The question to be answered on outputs is: are we delivering the outputs that we agreed upon?

Assessing the influence on the socio-political system

Aside from strengthening its own members, most networks (though not all) would like to influence actors outside of the network and change the socio-political system. Outcomes achieved on this level are referred to as external or “political” outcomes⁸. This level is where the added value and the achievements of the network as a whole become visible. M&E here goes further than assessing the activities of the individual members, but looks at the changes the network was able to make due to the combination of different efforts.

GPPAC aims for a fundamental change in dealing with violent conflict, a shift from reaction to prevention. To make this shift happen, GPPAC reaches out to the UN,

governments and the media to try to change their behaviour. At this level, the question that GPPAC is trying to answer through its monitoring and evaluation procedures is how the boundary partners are changing their behaviour and how the activities of the network contributed to changing the behaviour of these actors outside the network.

Assessing the societal impact

Finally, a network wants to bring about lasting changes in the lives of peoples. Within the field of conflict prevention, this level (peace writ large) is intensively debated, because the complexity of peace work makes it impossible to assess impact. To achieve peace, many different players work at many different levels in a variety of ways.⁹ The Utstein study states that: “So far as we know, there is no way to assess the impact of individual projects and we should therefore stop trying to do it.”¹⁰

GPPAC ultimately wants to bring change in the lives of people “by striving for a world in which people and governments elect non-violent means, rather than armed conflict, to achieve greater justice, sustainable development, and human security”¹¹. It is however an impossible task to prove that this ultimate change was brought about due to the work of GPPAC. In GPPAC, a diversity of individuals, organisations and actors interact to support a shift from reaction to prevention. “Impacts” therefore are usually the product of a confluence of factors for which no single agency or programme can realistically claim full credit. The attribution gap is huge. By selecting Outcome Mapping as the basis for GPPAC’s M&E system, the focus of GPPAC is on outcomes defined as behavioural changes. These outcomes are within the sphere of influence of the network. With regard to the M&E process, the focus is

8 Wilson-Grau, R., Ibid

9 See e.g. Anderson, Mary B., *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners*, CDA, 2003, p.9

10 Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004, *Towards a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding: Getting Their Act Together*. Overview Report of the Joint Utstein Study of Peacebuilding, p. 53

11 GPPAC Charter, approved by the ISG in Nairobi, March 2006

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rather on how GPPAC is *contributing* to this impact, than on *proving* that GPPAC activities led to this change.

Planning data collection, analysis and critical reflection processes

In October 2007, representatives from the Regional Secretariats participated in a GPPAC seminar on monitoring and evaluation. During this seminar, the regional secretariat staff intensively discussed the monitoring process. More specifically, the participants looked at the different users of the M&E information for GPPAC and discussed how and by whom the information would be collected, compiled and analysed. Furthermore they discussed how critical reflection processes on the results of the M&E process could take place. The table on page 45 en 46 provides an overview on output level for the users donors and regional liaison officers.

Based on the information gathered so far, two monitoring formats were developed. One to assess the changes in the behaviour of the boundary partners (outcomes) and the contribution of GPPAC to these changes (strategies, outputs and activities). The formats were developed by adapting the Outcome Mapping monitoring journals. The formats are designed to be completed in a participatory way by each region for each programme they are contributing to. Once the information is gathered, it should follow the information flows to reach the users in the spaces that were defined for reflection, analysis and decision making to improve programme performance and network functioning. Finally, based on the information gathered and analysed the ISG will identify specific programme issues or experiences that have the potential to influence policies, support advocacy work or serve the improvement of conflict prevention theories. The topics identified will be analysed in depth to be able to capture GPPAC's best

practices, cases or knowledge in key areas to fulfil its mission.

Conclusion and future challenges towards a system approach

GPPAC has gone a long way in developing an M&E system for the network, but more work needs to be done. Notwithstanding the difficulties with monitoring and evaluation for conflict prevention as well as for global networks, most organisations still use traditional M&E methods. In the light of the challenges faced as described above, I strongly believe that monitoring and evaluation for conflict prevention as well as for global networks needs to move away from linear methods. Useful new methods as e.g. Most Significant Change¹² and Outcome Mapping have been developed and attempts have been made to bring a network perspective into the logical framework¹³. I believe that monitoring and evaluation in these fields requires being creative and innovative. Combining and adapting methods can lead to an adequate approach responding to the needs of an organisation.

Nonetheless, this not only requires flexibility from the organisations or networks, but also from the donor side to recognise the specific needs for M&E within both these fields. Too many organisations rigidly use linear M&E tools simply because they are most commonly used or because they are required by donors. Continued work needs to be done in enhancing the learning opportunity of M&E, because M&E is too often reduced to a reporting tool.

Susan Trescheriau rightly concludes that working with networks requires:

- A shift in mindset - including adopting a system perspective, a willingness and ability to look for synergies, openness to shared responsibility, and accountability, and relinquishing a certain degree of control, and
- a shift in approach-avoiding blue print strategies, moving to long-term perspectives on change, and relying on more qualitative approaches, such as for assessment, monitoring and evaluation.”¹⁴

12 Davies, R. Dart, J. *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique. A Guide to Its Use*

13 Rick Davies, *Moving from Logical to Network Frameworks: A modular matrix approach to representing and evaluating complex programs*, available at <http://www.mande.co.uk/>

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Outputs	
Name of user: Donor	X Inside GPPAC network X Outside GPPAC network
What do they need the information for?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of funds they gave • Further funding • Accountability towards tax payers and parliament • Justify allocation of funds • Ensure carrying out of programs
What info do they need?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Narrative & financial report • Results of M&E • Progress reports and plans for adjustment • Obstacles in achieving the activity
When do they need this info?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After implementation of program but before they need to report on it • Ahead of donor deadlines • While activities are ongoing, regular reports
What are the characteristics of this information (sort of info): formal, informal, quantitative, qualitative, etc....	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal (report) • Informal (email) • Financial report • Qualitative and quantitative
How are we going to capture the information?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial & budget reporting • Evaluation forms (as part of the report) • Media press release • Feedback from the focus groups/beneficiaries • Feedback from local network • Observation & participation
Who will capture the information?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementing team (grassroot level) • Facilitators of meetings (e.g. trainers) • The Global and Regional Secretariats • Regional Liaison Officers and programme coordinator
How are we going to put the information together?	Activity reports from different regions/networks to be put into a uniform template (used globally)
Who will put it together?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional staff • People from target groups • Donors • Implementers collecting data • Coordinator of implementing team • RLO & Program Coordinator
How are we going to analyse this information?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare initial plans to results • Task force meetings

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Outputs (continued)	
Who will analyse it?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Global Secretariat • Regional Secretariat, RSG, Task forces, Program Coordinators • Regional Initiator
What do we do with this info once it is analysed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report presented to donor & to constituencies • Discuss report internally/with RSG focus group • Take into consideration for internal future planning • Annual report • Media highlights • Lobbying & advocacy • Global Secretariat passing analysis on to ISG, ExCom)
What are the spaces to discuss this (e.g. ISG, RSG)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Steering Groups • Task forces • Programme meetings • ISGs • Donor meetings

GPPAC's relationship with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign affairs (Dutch MFA) is a good example in this regard. With the start of the new co-financing system, the Dutch MFA required all applicants to fill out a cause and effect chain format. The ECCP as global secretariat of GPPAC entered into discussions with the Ministry on this issue. After approval of the funding proposal, the Ministry presented a new M&E approach to the Dutch NGOs, called 'tailor-made monitoring'. This approach takes the M&E systems of the Dutch NGOs as a starting point. In addition, the Ministry decided to look at networks as a separate category, recognising the specific needs of this group. The ECCP is now allowed to report to the Ministry by using Outcome mapping. In the period to come, there will be regular monitoring meetings between ECCP and the Ministry. However, The Dutch MFA is not GPPAC's only donor. Consequently, more work needs to be done in engaging in a dialogue with other donors. Furthermore, the lack of funding is a continued obstacle to further engage in high quality monitoring and evaluation.

The next step in further improving the M&E system for GPPAC will be the implementation of the M&E procedures on the regional levels of GPPAC.

As an international network working in the field of conflict prevention, the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict was confronted with many challenges for developing M&E procedures. Outcome mapping has provided a useful framework for addressing these challenges. An important conclusion of introducing this approach so far is that setting up an M&E system for a network as well as for conflict prevention work requires looking beyond conventional methods for measuring results or at least being creative with these methods. Monitoring and evaluation should in the end be a learning process for both individual organisations and networks as well as for donors.

14 Trescher, S., Ibid, p.17