

DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION

CASE OVERVIEW: SUPPORTING COMMUNITY PEACEBUILDING IN SRI LANKA



Funder

US Department of State



Timeline

Phase I 2015-18;
Phase II 2018 - Present

Community Memorialization Project Sri Lanka



Purpose

Support peacebuilding and reconciliation in post-war Sri Lankan communities



Implementing Partners

Search for Common Ground
HerStories

What is Developmental Evaluation?

Developmental evaluation (DE) is an approach that supports continuous adaptation in complex environments, and differs from typical evaluations in a few ways: (1) DEs have a Developmental Evaluator embedded alongside the implementation team; (2) DEs emphasize iterative, real-time data collection and regular reflection to support adaptation; (3) DEs are methodologically agnostic and adjust analytical techniques and evaluation questions as the project changes. For more information on DEs, consider reading *Developmental Evaluation* from Better Evaluation.

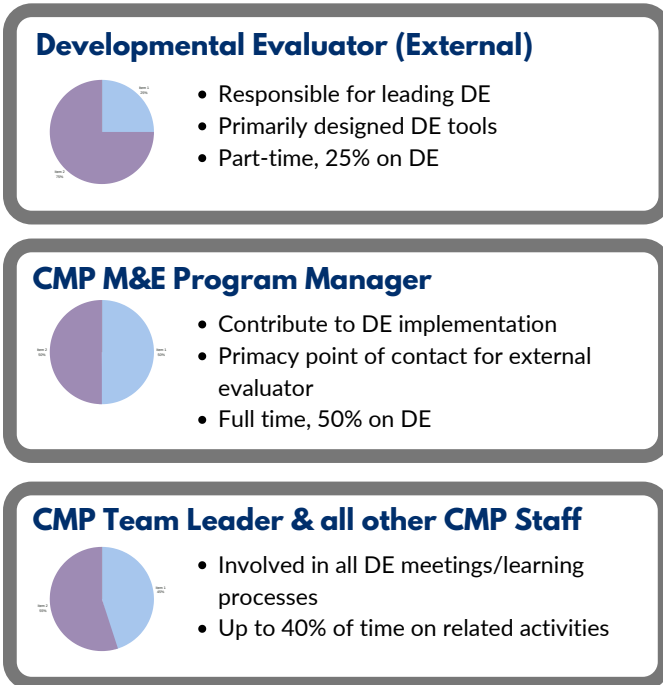
Why DE?

The Community Memorialization Project (CMP) uses memory as a tool for peacebuilding, making it a non-traditional intervention without established best practices and evidence. The project team wanted an evaluation embedded into CMP's design that enabled iterative adjustments and ongoing learning. To facilitate this, CMP included a DE to get real-time feedback on implementation approaches: what was effective, what was not, and differences between initial assumptions and actual events. The DE that CMP funded lasted the full length of the project from 2015-2018. It is also being used under CMP Phase II, which began in 2018.

“ We wanted evaluation support to understand... why the project was working, why there were unexpected problems and changes in context, and to help the project going forward. It started more as an idea than a full-fledged project with planned activities and time periods and target groups. The idea was that it would evolve into what was needed and we would adjust according to participants' feedback. We wanted evaluation support to formalize the process of reflection and adjust the project going forward. ”

-DE Stakeholder

Figure 1: DE Team Makeup



At the start of the DE, CMP drafted a Framework to understand how and when the Developmental Evaluator (Evaluator) should engage with the team. Over time and as trust grew, the CMP team engaged her more freely and fluidly. There was a steep learning curve for everyone - including the Evaluator - on what DE was, how it would be conducted, and how CMP would use it. After a formal introduction, the team required roughly three months of iterative meetings with the Evaluator to fully understand DE. Likewise, the Evaluator developed her own understanding of DE and how to effectively implement it through discussions with the project team, desk research, and the DEPA-MERL-sponsored DE Clinic.

“ The DE Clinic helped to validate our understanding of DE. At the beginning, we were afraid we weren’t doing it right. ”




- DE Team Member

Figure 2 illustrates select approaches the DE took and their main results for the project. Some of these tools were part of the original project design






and the DE effectively leveraged them to improve CMP’s final design and implementation. Others were introduced throughout implementation to provide added sources of data and learning points. While the Evaluator and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Program Manager were key designers and facilitators of these tools, CMP staff and partners were active in capturing data and learning as well. Many spent 40-50% of their time on DE-related activities (including “regular” work tasks that generated learning, such as debrief meetings, or data that fed into the DE).

Figure 2: Illustrative M&E Tools Used by CMP

Tools at Project Inception

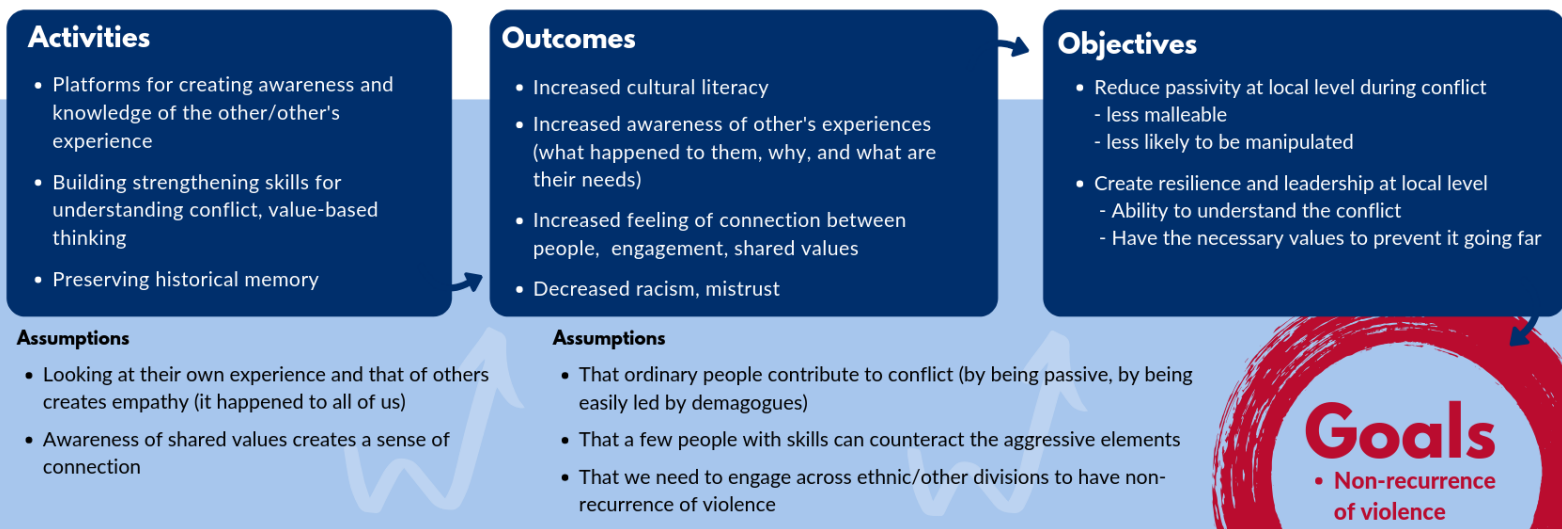
-  **Survey Tool:** Gauges importance of collecting stories, building memorials to reconciliation process
-  **Log Frame Tool:** Table documenting data for key indicators against targets
-  **Output Tracking:** Meeting, workshop, and activity reports

Tools Introduced by Developmental Evaluator


-  **Questionnaires (Process and Dialog Evaluation, Key Person Interview):** Surveys of project teams and partners to analyze main issues, possible outcomes, impacts, and lessons
-  **Structured Participant Observation Tool:** Form captures non-verbal observations and information from participant dialogues/workshops
-  **Diary Tool:** Continuous recording of project progress and pain points to create a culture of documentation
-  **Theory of Change Review:** Team exercise to discuss and visualize project logic, improve CMP understanding
-  **AAR:** CMP staff instantaneous feedback process for refining content and structure of workshops


The CMP team gradually took ownership of the DE as they saw the positive ways the DE data and discussions influenced CMP's approach. One of the first of these was a facilitated exercise to ensure CMP's assumptions and logic were aligned by creating a Theory of Change for it. One participant explained, "The dialogue process was not really fleshed out in the original proposal. The original proposal is quite vague, leaving space for things to happen. ... When [the Evaluator] first started with us, she came and asked us all these questions. We had not really...asked all the questions we should have. It was really helpful to think, what does this mean, and what does it look like. We were more solid about what we were trying to do, getting our assumptions right, getting the context." This gave the CMP team their first opportunity to engage closely with CMP's logical framework, and ensured both the team and implementing partners in various locations shared an understanding of CMP's goals, expected outcomes, and underlying assumptions.


Figure 3: CMP Final Theory of Change



Using these different approaches and the learning culture the DE helped create, CMP made a number of project adaptations that improved implementation. In particular, the CMP team:

 **Made iterative updates to its workshop design.** Workshops where individuals shared their memories from the civil war was a central activity to CMP, and getting these workshops right was vital to its effectiveness. Using DE results, CMP made adaptations including: videos to help low-literacy populations engage with abstract concepts; ethnically homogenous meetings at the beginning of the project to increase people's comfort in discussing the war, and outreach to include more diverse community members.

 **Discarded elements of the original design that no longer resonated.** For example, the team originally envisioned constructing physical memorials to represent people's memories in a tangible way. However, feedback from the DE uncovered possible tensions within communities on how physical memorials would be constructed, what they would represent, and how they would represent it. Some people questioned if a physical memorial was needed at all. Based on these learnings, the team decided not to pursue physical memorials during the project.

 **Designed the project's second phase,** which focuses on dialogue. While the first phase collected stories of violence, the second phase uses those stories to create inter-ethnic and inter-generational discourse on violence.

1 DE Effectiveness Takes Time and Early Buy-In

The Evaluator required approximately three months to build rapport and a shared understanding of the DE and its purpose with the CMP team. In the initial stages, the Evaluator focused on listening. This helped her understand what CMP was trying to accomplish and how best to support it, rather than forcing changes. In turn, the team began to view her as a resource.

The CMP team initially feared the DE would be time-consuming and intrusive, but started to buy-in when they saw how the DE could help their implementation.

“ [Our team] realizes [DE] is not to audit the process but to suggest some adaptations. For this kind of decision, we involve partners, the project team, and the evaluator. So the partners have ownership of the process. ”

-CMP Staff Member

“ If the end goal is that it’s so tightly woven that you can’t separate the DE from the rest of the project, it was a huge success. ”

-DE Stakeholder

“ Because of DE we were very less [occupied] with rejection. We never thought about success or failure, but we always thought about the process: how we are going to implement it per the contextual change and the changes taking place at the national level. ”

-CMP Staff Member

2 Collaborate and Mainstream DE Processes To Instigate a Learning Culture

The Evaluator took a collaborative approach to involve the CMP team in designing the DE approaches, developing the DE tools, collecting data, and making decisions based on results. This helped intertwine DE methods with CMP activities. Despite initial wariness, the team ultimately took strong ownership of the DE and saw it as an important tool for project evolution and effectiveness.

Eventually, DE processes became part of CMP’s normal project activities. The CMP team understood the DE in terms of learning and improving, and the continuous, multi-year nature of the DE instilled a new culture of learning and acceptance within the team.

The CMP DE is also an example of how DE can be, under the guidance of an external Developmental Evaluator, primarily implemented through the project team. Because the project team was so involved in implementing the DE, CMP was able to accomplish numerous intensive activities despite only one part-time external Developmental Evaluator.

3 The Flexibility in CMP's Design Enabled Its Effectiveness

CMP's initial proposal allowed room for the project to re-design activities throughout its life to improve effectiveness. In addition, though the Washington, D.C.-based donor was not heavily involved in day-to-day DE activities, their willingness to embrace adaptations based on its findings enabled CMP to make changes "on the spot" because of the DE.

DE Case Studies




This case study is part of a series on how developmental evaluation is being conducted within the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and other projects. The case studies were written by the Developmental Pilot Activity (DEPA-MERL) consortium— part of the USAID Global Development Lab's Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Learning Innovations Program. DEPA-MERL seeks to pilot the use of DE, assess its feasibility and effectiveness in the USAID context, and share learnings globally. These case studies and other resources on DE, including [A Practical Guide for Evaluators and Administrators](#), are available on the [DEPA-MERL website](#). The consortium is led by Social Impact, with partners Search for Common Ground and the William Davidson Institute at the University of Michigan.

Conclusions

CMP is now in its second phase, which focuses on **creating dialogues** on civil war violence, and explicitly focuses on youth. CMP Phase II uses lessons learned from the Phase I DE and continues to use a DE approach, overseen by an external Developmental Evaluator, to learn from and adjust programming.

Based on Phase I experiences, CMP II's DE de-emphasizes the use of written feedback forms in favor of simpler, more engaging tools. Though some staff were new under CMP Phase II, many of the CMP Phase I staff remained. This meant new staff were entering an environment that already understood and bought into the DE approach, making new staff's onboarding to the DE relatively simple.

CMP constitutes an example of how DE was successfully used as an internal evaluation method through:

-  Embedding the DE in the job responsibilities of the project team,
-  Collaboratively involving project members in the design and implementation, and
-  Flexibly and instantaneously implementing learnings from the DE.

CMP's continued use of DE during Phase II further demonstrates the value the DE has given the project, and the deep learning culture that the project team now embodies.